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COMFORT FOR THE AFFLICTED

#147

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THE GREAT GIVER

A.W. Pink

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"—Romans 8:32

The above verse supplies us with an instance of Divine logic. It contains a conclusion drawn from a premise; the premise is that God delivered up Christ for all His people, therefore everything else that is needed by them is sure to be given. There are many examples in Holy Writ of such Divine logic. "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you?" (Matt 6:30). "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom 5:10). "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt 7:11). So here in our text the reasoning is irresistible and goes straight to the understanding and heart.

Our text tells of the gracious character of our loving God as interpreted by the gift of His Son. And this, not merely for the instruction of our minds, but for the comfort and assurance of our hearts. The gift of His own Son is God's guarantee to His people of all needed blessings. The greater includes the less; His unspeakable spiritual gift is the pledge of all needed temporal mercies. Note in our text four things:-

1. The Father's Costly Sacrifice.

This brings before us a side of the truth upon which I fear we rarely meditate. We delight to think of the wondrous love of Christ, whose love was stronger than death, and who deemed no suffering too great for His people. But what must it

have meant to the heart of the Father when His Beloved left His Heavenly Home! God is love, and nothing is so sensitive as love. I do not believe that Deity is emotionless, the Stoic as represented by the Schoolmen of the middle ages. I believe the sending forth of the Son was something which the heart of the Father felt, that it was a real sacrifice on His part.

Weigh well then the solemn fact which premises the sure promise that follows: God "spared not His own Son"! Expressive, profound, melting words! Knowing full well, as He only could, all that redemption involved-the Law rigid and unbending, insisting upon perfect obedience and demanding death for its transgressors. Justice, stern and inexorable, requiring full satisfaction, refusing to "clear the guilty." Yet God withheld not the only Sacrifice which could meet the case.

God "spared not His own Son," though knowing full well the humiliation and ignominy of Bethlehem's manger, the ingratitude of men, the not having where to lay His head, the hatred and opposition of the ungodly, the enmity and bruising of Satan-yet He did not hesitate. God did not relax ought of the holy requirements of His throne, nor abate one whit of the awful curse. No, He "spared not his own Son." The utmost farthing was exacted; the last dregs in the cup of wrath must be drained. Even when His Beloved cried from the Garden, "if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," God "spared" Him not. Even when vile hands had nailed Him to the tree, God cried "Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, and against the man that is My Fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts; smite the Shepherd" (Zech 13:7).

2. The Father's Gracious Design.

"But delivered him up for *us* all." Here we are told why the Father made such a costly sacrifice; He spared not Christ, that He might spare us! It was not want of love to the Saviour, but wondrous, matchless, fathomless love for us! O marvel at the wondrous design of the Most High. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." Verily, such love passeth knowledge. Moreover, He made this costly sacrifice not grudgingly or reluctantly, but freely-out of love.

Once God had said to rebellious Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?" (Hosea 11:8). Infinitely more cause had He to say this of the Holy One, His well-beloved, the One in whom His soul daily delighted. Yet, He "delivered Him up"-to shame and spitting, to hatred and persecution, to suffering and death itself. And He delivered Him up for us-descendants of rebellious Adam, depraved and defiled, corrupt and sinful, vile and worthless! For us who had gone into the "far country" of alienation from Him, and there spent our substance in riotous living. Yes, "for us" who had gone astray like sheep, each one turning to "his own way." For us "who were by nature the children of wrath, even as others," in whom there dwelt no good thing. For us who had rebelled against our Creator, hated His holiness, despised His Word, broken His commandments, resisted His Spirit. For us who richly deserved to be cast into the everlasting burnings and receive those wages which our sins so fully earned.

Yes, for thee fellow Christian, who art sometimes tempted to interpret your afflictions as tokens of God's hardness; who regard your poverty as a mark of His neglect, and your seasons of darkness as evidences of His desertion. O, confess to Him now the wickedness of such dishonouring doubtings, and never again question the love of Him who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

Faithfulness demands that I should point out the qualifying pronoun in our text. It is not God "delivered him up for all," but "for *us* all." This is definitely defined in the verses which immediately precede. In verse 31 the question is asked, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" The "us" are the high favorites of heaven, the objects of sovereign grace. God's elect. And yet in themselves they are, by nature and practice, deserving of nothing but wrath. But yet, thank God, it is "us all"-the worst as well as the best, the five-hundred-pounds debtor equally as much as the fifty-pence debtor.

3. The Spirit's Blessed Inference.

Ponder well the glorious "conclusion" which the Spirit of God here draws from the wondrous fact stated in the first part of our text, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." How conclusive and how comforting is the inspired reasoning of the apostle. Arguing from the greater to the less, He proceeds to assure the believer of God's readiness to also freely bestow all needed blessings. The gift of His own Son, so ungrudgingly and unreservedly bestowed, is the pledge of every other needed mercy.

Here is the unfailing guaranty and talisman of perpetual reassurance to the drooping spirit of the tried believer. If God has done the greater, will He leave the less undone? Infinite love can never change. The love that spared not Christ cannot fail its objects nor begrudge any needed blessings. The sad thing is that our hearts dwell upon what we have not, instead of upon what we do have. Therefore the Spirit of God would here still our restless self-communings and quiet the

repinings of ignorance with a soul-satisfying knowledge of the truth, by reminding us not only of the reality of our interest in the love of God, but also of the extent of that blessing which flows therefrom.

Weigh well what is involved in the logic of this verse. First, the great Gift was given unasked; will He not bestow others for the asking? None of us supplicated God to send forth His Beloved; yet He sent Him! Now, we may come to the throne of grace and there present our requests in the virtuous and all-efficacious name of Christ.

Second, the one great Gift cost Him much; will He not then bestow the lesser gifts which cost Him nothing save the delight of giving! If a friend were to give me a valuable picture, would he begrudge the necessary paper and string to wrap it in? Or if a loved one made me a present of a precious jewel, would he refuse a little box to carry it in? How much less will He who spared not His own Son, withhold any good thing from them that walk uprightly.

Third, the one Gift was bestowed when we were enemies; will not then God be gracious to us now that we have been reconciled and are His friends? If He had designs of mercy for us while we were yet in our sins, how much more will He regard us favourably now that we have been cleansed from all sin by the precious blood of His Son!

4. The Comforting Promise.

Observe the tense that is used here. It is not "how has he not with him also freely given us all things," though this is also true, for even now are we "heirs of God" (Rom 8:17). But our text goes further than this: "How shall he not with Him also freely give us all things?" The second half of this wondrous verse contains something more than a record of the past; it supplies reassuring confidence both for the present and for the future. No time-limits are to be set upon this "shall." Both now in the present and forever and ever in the future God shall manifest Himself as the great Giver. Nothing for His glory and for our good will he withhold. The same God who delivered up Christ for us all is "without variableness or shadow of turning."

Mark the manner in which God gives: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" God does not have to be coaxed; there is no reluctance in Him for us to overcome. He is ever more willing to give than we are to receive. Again; He is under no obligations to any; if He were, He would bestow of necessity, instead of giving "freely." Ever remember that he has a perfect right to do with His own as He pleases. He is free to give to whom He wills.

The word "freely" not only signifies that God is under no constraint, but also means that He makes no charge for His gifts, He places no price on His blessings. God is no retailer of mercies or barterer of good things; if He were, justice would require Him to charge exactly what each blessing was worth, and then who among the children of Adam could find the wherewithal? No, blessed be His name, God's gifts are "without money and without price"-unmerited and unearned.

Finally, rejoice over the comprehensiveness of this promise: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" The Holy Spirit would here regale us with the extent of God's wondrous grant. What is it you need, fellow Christian? Is it pardon? Then has He not said, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)? Is it grace? Then has He not said, "God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor 9:8)? Is it a "thorn in the flesh"? this too will be given-"there was given to me a thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7). Is it rest? Then heed the Saviour's invitation, "Come unto Me...and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Is it comfort? Is He not the God of all comfort (2 Cor 1:3)?

"How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Is it temporal mercies that the reader is in need of? Are your circumstances adverse so that you are filled with dismal forebodings? Does your cruse of oil and barrel of meal look as though they will soon be quite empty? Then spread your need before God, and do it in simple childlike faith. Think you that He will bestow the greater blessings of grace and deny the lesser ones of Providence? No, "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil 4:19). True, He has not promised to give all you ask, for we often ask "amiss." Mark the qualifying clause: "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" We often desire things which would come in between us and Christ if they were granted, therefore does God in His faithfulness withhold them.

Here then are four things which should bring comfort to every renewed heart. The Father's costly sacrifice. Our God is a giving God and no good thing does He withhold from them that walk uprightly. The Father's gracious design. It was for us that Christ was delivered up; it was our highest and eternal interests that He had at heart. The Spirit's infallible inference. The greater includes the less; the unspeakable Gift guarantees the bestowment of all other needed favours. The comforting promise. Its sure foundation, its present and future scope, its blessed extent, are for the assuring of our hearts and the peace of our minds. May the Lord add His blessing to this little meditation.

CHEER UP MY COMRADES!

C.H. Spurgeon

*“And Josiah set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the Lord”—2
Chronicles 35:2*

Josiah, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face against the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the temple. After that it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts, and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work; and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get every man into his proper place; the next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily. I will suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and that by the direction of God's Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. To-night it shall not be my business to arrange you; but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us, and encourage them to keep rank.

I. And, first, I would speak a little to THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING.

They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them: if I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted; you must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it were a matter of fact; for sometimes there is a want of way because there is a want of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that "cannot" often does mean "will not," and not to have triumphed may mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has grown into indolence. If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason but because he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folk, if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted it will be very difficult afterwards to make you take to it. Aptitude, I have often noticed, comes with employment, and through negligence and sloth people become enervated and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it; take heed, for by-and-by your pretence will become the parent of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill; the vigour you felt in the bright days of health fails you now; you have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion; you are often detained at home; and home seems now to you a gloomy hospital all the day long, rather than a genial hostelry when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do; so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run; how ready your hands would be to labour; how glad would your tongue be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would fain emulate and excel them; not indeed that you harbour ill-will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the law of the Son of David is the same as the law of David himself; and you know the law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame, and some that were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the baggage. "There," he said, "you are very weary and ill: stop in the camp: take care of the tents, and the ammunition, while we go and fight." Now, it happened once on a time that the men that went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, "These people have done nothing: they have been lying in the

trenches: they shall not carry off a share of the booty." But King David there and then made a law that they should share and share equally-those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray. "As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel." Nor is the law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home,-if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service, yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could, and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

And, brethren, you have no reason to envy, though you may admire to your heart's content, all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a law of the kingdom of heaven with which you are all familiar-"He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the commencement of his psalms-"A prayer of David, the servant of God," though you never read, "A prayer of David, the king of Israel," for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel. Health and strength, ability and opportunity to fulfil a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably, and he may work marvels in the church, and yet himself not be a partaker of saving grace. Hence, when the disciples came back from preaching, and said, "Lord, even the devils are subject to us through thy name," the Lord said, "Never the less, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven." Judas was amongst them; Judas cast out devils; Judas preached the gospel; and yet Judas was a son of perdition, and is lost for ever. Because you cannot do much you must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God. Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from the cheerful activities in which others share; for, as long as your name is written in heaven, and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the last great day, even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? Not so, methinks. "The rich relics of a well-spent hour" do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers our eyes, though it may escape your notice. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring, and to foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal. I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful. I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years, and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor pious women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your case in that light, and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed, and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, do you not think we frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary, and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, "I cannot serve God," when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform: as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry discharging the duties of domestic life are serving God? If you think rightly you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room, the mistress preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, the merchant casting up his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God. Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow our common handicraft, and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for heaven. Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion. That is how it ought to be. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him." So, then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on, obscure, unobserved, be holy and courageous; you will find that while "they also serve who only stand and wait," you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his words when you can do no more. This is service done for him which he can appreciate; complain who may.

Know, too, my dear sister, that by thy sorrows the Lord has drawn out thy sympathies. Thou, my dear brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened thee, thou hast learned to be a comforter. Say you, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbour the other day by telling of the Lord's goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? How started from your eye that tear most sacred shed for a fellow-creature's pain? Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in a like condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Why, dear hearts, the refreshing of God's saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied. God will send prophets to his servants at times when they need to be rebuked; if he wants to comfort them he generally sends an angel to them, for that is angel's work. Jesus Christ himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to him. When? Was it not in the garden of Gethsemane, when he was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work: it is a kind of angelic work. "There appeared unto him an angel strengthening him." A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when a Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel's work.

You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to condole or to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sore dismayed, you are fulfilling a most blessed office, and doing work which many ministers find it difficult to perform. I have known some who have never known suffering or ill-health, and when they try to comfort God's weary people they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins: they can do it, but it is with a wonderful effort. God's tried people comfort each other con amore; they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking a word in season to him that is weary, and when this is the case they may not complain that they are doing nothing.

And yet, beloved, you who thought that you did nothing, and now perceive that you are really useful, will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe to-night the prayer of Jabez, who was more honourable than his brethren, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow; and this was the prayer-"Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast"! Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and he will do it.

II. Now let me address a few words to another class of workers WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE.

"Dear sir," says one, "I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful once; at least, I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily, but since I have changed my residence I am unknown in the neighborhood where I am living, and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work." My dear brother, I hope you will; but do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, "How shall I do work for Christ"? I am accustomed to say, "Go and do it." "But what is the way to do it"? Start at once. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to desist awhile, do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline. Some of the best of God's workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses was forty years in the desert, doing nothing. A greater than he, our blessed Saviour himself, was thirty years, -I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when he comes to use you again you may be fully fitted for the work which he has in hand for you.

While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this, -pray for others that are at work. Help them; encourage them. Do not get into that peevish, miserable frame of mind which grudges and undervalues other men's works. Be not like the dog in the manger. Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my brethren."

Spend your time in prayer that you may be fit for the Master's use, and, meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You remember that, at the siege of Gibraltar, when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the old rock, the governor fired red-hot shot down upon the men of war. The enemy did not at all admire the governor's warm reception. Think how it was done. Here were gunners on the ramparts firing away, and every man in the garrison would have liked to do the same. What did those do who could not serve a gun? Why, they heated the shot; and that is what you must do. I am master gunner here generally: heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red-hot, through your earnest prayers. When you see your friends sitting in the Sunday-school, or standing out in

the street working for God, if you cannot join them yet say, "Never mind: I will heat the shot for them. My prayers shall not be wanting, if I can contribute nothing else." That is counsel for you who are for awhile laid on the shelf.

III. Others there are who are much discouraged because THEY HAVE BUT SMALL TALENT.

"Oh," they say, "I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield-that I could range the country through proclaiming his dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I am slow of speech and dull of thought, and what I attempt produces little or no effect." Well, brother, mind that you do what you can. Do you not recollect the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them? I do not want to lay undue stress upon the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the one talent people. They say, "What can I do? What is the use of me? I may be excused." That is the temptation. Brother, do not be entangled in that snare. If your Lord has only given you one talent he does not expect you to make the same interest upon it as the man does with five; but still he does expect his interest, and therefore do not wrap your talent in a napkin. It is but with strength imparted that any of us can serve him. We have nothing to consecrate to him but the gift we have first received from him. You are weak. You feel it; but what says your God to you? "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." He can make you useful though you have no extraordinary endowments. Grape-shot may do great execution, though it cannot compare with grenade or bomb-shell.

A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a peasant or an artisan, without calling in the aid of a professor's learning or a preacher's eloquence. God can bless you far above what you think to be your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability but of his aid. You have no self-reliance, you tell me. Then take refuge in God, I entreat you, for you evidently want more of the divine succor. Go and get it; it is to be had. He girds the weak with strength. "The young men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." Why, I think you are more likely to do good than if you had five talents, for now you will pray more and you will depend more upon God than you would have done if you had possessed strength of your own.

One other word. As you are not enriched with many talents, mind you economize those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have larger means? They try to turn their money over every day. The costermonger cannot afford to deal out his goods to gentlemen who will pay him in three months. Not he. He must get his ready money at the door, and then go and buy another stock to-morrow morning, and turn it over, or else he could not pick up his living with so small a capital. If you have only ninepence, make it "nimble," and you will get as much profit out of a nimble ninepence as another out of a lazy crown. Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get force by the weight of the ball, get it by the velocity with which it travels. A little man with one talent all ablaze may become a perfect nuisance to the devil, and a champion for Christ. As for that great divine with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always overmatch him and win the day. If you can but turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders. So I would encourage you in the work of the Lord.

IV. With workers WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES I would now have a word.

I have known the day when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas afforded me delight, and instead of declining a difficult task I rather like it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem, and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be effected without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones which sluggards cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty the man of ardent, persevering spirit braces up his nerves, sharpens his wits, and brings all his powers into play to achieve an object that will reward his efforts. Have you great difficulties dear friend? You are not the first worker for God who has had difficulties to encounter. Let us go back to Moses again. He was to bring Israel out of Egypt; but his path did not appear very plain. He must go before Pharaoh and issue God's command. Pharaoh looked him through when he said, "Let my people go." The haughty monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that; and so he bade him begone. But Moses returns with, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go"; and his courage was not even then crowned with immediate success. There must be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, till at last proud Pharaoh's heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of him that hated them; and Egypt was glad when they departed. This, however, was but the beginning of the mission of Moses. His was a life of difficulty-the meekest man, but the most provoked; and until he got to the top of Pisgah, and his gracious Master kissed away his soul, the prophet of Horeb had never done with difficulties.

Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, must be surrounded with difficulties, and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah, and Ezra, and Zerubbabel, and those that built Jerusalem, the second time. These good men wrought zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and jesting, and trying to throw down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that. As soon as ever you begin working for God you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign. When our young men go to a provincial town to preach, and I want to know how they are getting on, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as a fool"? If they say "No," I conclude that they are not getting on much.

If Christ's cause is prospering the world will reproach the soul-winner; if you do damage to the devil's kingdom he will roar at you. Should your course be smooth, it is because he says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I need not let fly the fiery dart of calumny at him: he is a chip in the porridge, I will let him alone." Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not want such soldiers in the service of Christ. "What a disagreeable person"! said a king once of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. "That sword of his is most offensive." "Sire," said the officer, "that is exactly what your majesty's enemies think." When ungodly persons say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good looks. If the king's enemies think us troublesome, we reckon it to be high praise. When you, my dear brother, meet with opposition, encounter it with prayer. Exercise more faith. Antagonists ought never to hinder your going forward in the cause of Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world but you can cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point, and to make your resolution like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through an alp of diamond in the service of your Lord and Master.

Let me inspirit you in the face of assailants. The forces ranged against you might be stumbling-blocks to fools, but they shall only prove a stimulus to men. One day your honour shall be the greater and your reward shall be the higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore, be brave and fear not, but advance in the strength of God.

V. Fain would I now speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers THOSE THAT ARE NOT APPRECIATED.

I am not going to say much, because I have not much sympathy with them. Yet I know that the smallest slight chafes those who are over sensitive. They murmur, "I do my best, and nobody thanks me." You think yourself a martyr, and complain that you are mis-represented. Be it so, dear friend; that was your Master's lot, and it is the lot of all his servants. This is a cross we must all carry, or we shall never wear the crown. Do you fancy that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brethren could not bear him, and yet it was he that saved the family and fed them in time of famine. Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the charge of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the standards. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young David. Take a lesson from the ruddy hero; take no notice of what your brethren say about you. Go and bring back the giant's head.

A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations. If you are serving the Master let their scandal stir you up to more self-consecration. If they cry out against you as too forward, serve the Lord with more vigour, and you will antidote the venom of their tongues. Did you enter into Christ's work in order to be honoured among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a bad motive. But if you enlisted purely to bring honour to Him, and to win his smile, what more do you want? What more do you want? Be not therefore disheartened because you are not applauded. Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front, and pat him on the back and say, "What a great man he is"! he will make a false step before long, and there will be an end of your hero; but when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with, and declaims as an impostor, but the banter he is exposed to serves as ballast for his mind. When he comes off with success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for the grace of God will make him bow with gratitude. The sword that is meant for a princely hand, to split through skull and backbone in the day of battle, must be annealed in the furnace again and again; it cannot be fit for such desperate work until it has passed through the fire full many a time. Do not ask to be appreciated. Never be so mean as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience, and leave your honour with your God.

VI. I must speak now, in the last place, a little more at length to THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS.

It was my great delight a few evenings ago to meet a splendid band of men and women who are the Sunday-school teachers of this church. You will think it strange that I did not till then thoroughly estimate the extent of their work, as I had never added up the total of the various schools; but when I did so, and found that they mounted up to six thousand children, I felt full of joy. I shall run over with delight if they increase to twelve thousand in another twelve months. For so large a district this would not be too many, but still our present number is most encouraging. Now, I know that some of our teachers are working away in back streets, in rooms not connected with any place but this, and we hardly knew of them, because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labours so quietly.

Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nought? I would entreat you, dear friends, not to be satisfied with casting in the seed unless you reap some good results; yet do not be so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you cannot be satisfied without fruit, yet do not cease to sow because one season proves a failure. I would not have our friends the farmers abandon agriculture because this year they have a bad crop: if they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity. If you have preached or taught, or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful. Regret the lack of prosperity but do not relinquish the labour of seeking it. You may reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair.

Non-success is a trial of faith which has been endured by many a trusty servant who has been triumphant in the issue. Did not the disciples toil all night, and catch nothing? Did we not read just now of some who cast the net, and yet took no fish? Did not our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground, and some among the thorns, and that from these there would be no harvest? What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he laboured, and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, "The bellows are burned in the fire." He had blown up the fire till he had burnt the bellows, but no man's heart was melted. "Woe is me"! said he. "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears"! I do not know what was the result of Noah's ministry, but I do know that he was a preacher of righteousness for a hundred and twenty years, and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. Poor preaching we may count it judging by the influence it exerted: and yet we know that it was grand preaching, such as God commended. Do not, then, grudge the time, or the strength, you lay out in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure.

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, he will accept you and acknowledge your service, even though no good should come of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters: if you do not find it after many days, that is not your business. It is your business to scatter the seed; but no farmer says to his servant, "John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest." The man would say, "Could I make a harvest, sir? I have ploughed, and I have sowed. What more could I do"? Even so our good Lord is not austere, nor does he demand of us more than we can do. If you have ploughed and if you have sowed, although there should be no harvest, you are clear and accepted.

Did it never strike you that you may be now employed in breaking up ground and preparing the soil from which other labourers who come after you will reap very plentifully. Perhaps your Master knows what a capital ploughman you are. He has a large farm, and he never means to let you become a reaper because you do the ploughing so well. Your Master does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing; and as he has crops that need sowing all the year round he keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself. Perchance if he were once to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own sheaves, you would turn dizzy and make a fall of it; so he says, "You keep to your ploughing and your sowing, and somebody else shall do the reaping."

Peradventure when your course is run you will see from heaven, where it will be safe for you to see it, that you did not labour in vain nor spend your strength for nought. "One soweth and another reapeth." This is the divine economy. I think that every man that loves his Master will say, "So long as there does but come a harvest, I will not stipulate about who reaps it. Give me faith enough to be assured that the reaping will come, and I will be content." Look at William Carey going to India, his prayer being "India for Christ." What did Carey live to see? Well, he saw good-speed enough to rejoice his heart: but certainly he did not see the fulfillment of all his prayer. Successive missionaries have since gone and spent their life on that vast field of enterprise. With what result? A result amply sufficient to justify all their toil, but, as compared with the millions that sit in heathendom, utterly inadequate to the craving of the church, much less to the crown of Christ. It does not much matter how any one man fares. The mighty empire will revert to the world's Redeemer, and I can almost trace in the records of the future the writing of "These be the names of the mighty men whom David had," as the valiant deeds of his heroes are chronicled by our Lord.

When old St. Paul's cathedral had to be taken down in order to make room for the present noble edifice, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to throw them down by the old Roman battering-ram. The battering-ram began to work, and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow came on the wall; tremendous thuds that made the bystanders tremble. The wall continued to stand till they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew. He continued working his battering-ram till every particle of the wall felt the motion, and at last over it went in one tremendous ruin. Did anybody commend those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not a bit of it. It was the whole of them together. Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before, had as much honour in the matter as those who struck the last blow.

And it is so in the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering, and at last-though it may not be for another thousand years-the Lord will triumph. Though Christ cometh quickly he may not come for another ten thousand years, but in any case idolatry must die, and truth must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages shall do the deed, and God shall be glorified. Only let us persevere in holy effort, and the end is sure. When a certain American general was fighting they said, "What are you doing"? He said, "I am not doing much, but I keep pegging away." That is what we must do. We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on pegging away at the enemy, and something will come of it by-and-by.

Possibly, dear friends, some of you who think you have had slender success may have had a great deal more than you know of. Others there may be whose want of success should suggest to them to try somewhere else, or else to try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry mightily to him, for he will help you yet to do it, and his shall be the glory. When he has laid you low, when he has taught you how inefficient you are, when he has driven you in despair to rely implicitly upon himself, then it may be that he will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of. Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavour, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self, and give myself up wholly to him, and if I do that I shall be accepted whatever else may happen.

I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence was to be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage, and with a merry heart, he sat the last thing at night talking with his friends-faggots and fire to face in the morning, recollect-and he said to one of them, "I am an old tree in my Master's orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit by his grace. It was unripe and sour, but he bore with it: and I have grown mellow in my older days and brought forth some fruit for him by his grace. Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log. Well, it will warm the hearts of some of his family while I am burning"; and he even smiled for joy to think that he might be put to so good a purpose.

I want you to have that spirit, and to say, "I will live for Christ while I am young: I will die for him, and warm the hearts of my brethren. You know that the persecutions of those martyr days begat such heroism and gallantry among disciples as prudent people in peaceful times can scarcely credit. It is said of the old Baptist church over in the City that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burnt, and when some one asked the young people what they went there for, they said that they went to learn the way. That is splendid! They went to learn the way.

Oh, go to the Master's cross to learn the way to live and die! See how he spent himself for you, and then sally forth and spend yourselves for him. "Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall ye be glorious in the sight of the Lord." Though you may think that you do not succeed, your whole-hearted consecration shall be your honour in the day of the Lord. By your hallowed life, and your humble service, you shall bring glory to his name. O Lord, set us in our charges, and encourage us in the service of thy house! "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; establish thou the work of our hands: yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my brethren, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

TRIED BY FIRE

A.W. Pink

“But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” –Job 23:10

Job here *corrects himself*. In the beginning of the chapter we find him saying: “Even today is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning” (vv. 1,2). Poor Job felt that his lot was unbearable. But he recovers himself. He checks his hasty outburst and revises his impetuous decision. How often we all have to correct ourselves! Only One has ever walked this earth who never had occasion to do so.

Job here *comforts himself*. He could not fathom the mysteries of Providence but God knew the way he took. Job had diligently sought the calming presence of God, but, for a time, in vain. “Behold I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him. On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him” (vv. 8,9). But he consoled himself with this blessed fact-though I cannot see God, what is a thousand times better, He can see me-”He knoweth.” One above is neither unmindful nor indifferent to our lot. If He notices the fall of a sparrow, if He counts the hairs of our heads, of course “He knows” the way that I take.

Job here enunciates *a noble view of life*. How splendidly optimistic he was! He did not allow his afflictions to turn him into a skeptic. He did not permit the sore trials and troubles through which he was passing to overwhelm him. He looked at the bright side of the dark cloud-God’s side, hidden from sense and reason. He took a long view of life. He looked beyond the immediate “fiery trials” and said that the outcome would be gold refined. “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.” Three great truths are expressed here: let us briefly consider each separately.

1. Divine Knowledge of My Life. “He knoweth the way that I take.”

The omniscience of God is one of the wondrous attributes of Deity. “For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings” (Job 34:21). “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3). Spurgeon said, “One of the greatest tests of experimental religion is, What is my relationship to God’s omniscience?” What is your relationship to it, dear reader? How does it affect you? Does it distress or comfort you? Do you shrink from the thought of God knowing all about your way?-perhaps, a lying, selfish, hypocritical way! To the sinner this is a terrible thought. He denies it, or if not, he seeks to forget it. But to the Christian, here is real comfort. How cheering to remember that my Father knows all about my trials, my difficulties, my sorrows, my efforts to glorify Him. Precious truth for those in Christ, harrowing thought for all out of Christ, that the way I am taking is fully known to and observed by God.

“He knoweth the way that I take.” Men did not know the way that Job took. He was grievously misunderstood, and for one with a sensitive temperament to be misunderstood, is a sore trial. His very friends thought he was a hypocrite. They believed he was a great sinner and being punished by God. Job knew that he was an unworthy saint, but not a hypocrite. He appealed against their censorious verdict. “*He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold.*” Here is instruction for us when like circumstanced. Fellow-believer, your fellow-men, yes, and your fellow-christians, may misunderstand you, and misinterpret God’s dealing with you: but console yourself with the blessed fact that the omniscient One knoweth.

“He knoweth the way that I take.” In the fullest sense of the word Job himself did not know the way that he took, nor do any of us. Life is profoundly mysterious, and the passing of the years offers no solution. Nor does philosophizing help us. Human volition is a strange enigma. Consciousness bears witness that we are more than automatons. The power of choice is exercised by us in every move we make. And yet it is plain that our freedom is not absolute. There are forces brought to bear upon us, both good and evil, which are beyond our power to resist. Both heredity and environment exercise powerful influences upon us. Our surroundings and circumstances are factors which cannot be ignored. And what of providence which “shapes our destinies”? Ah, how little do we know the way which we “take.” Said the prophet, “O Lord I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” (Jer 10:23). Here we enter the realm of mystery, and it is idle to deny it. Better far to acknowledge with the wise man, “Man’s goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov 20:24).

In the narrower sense of the term Job *did know* the way which he took. What that “way” was he tells us in the next two verses. “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the

commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:11,12). The way Job chose was the best way, the scriptural way, God’s way-”His way.” What do you think of that way, dear reader? Was it not a grand selection? Ah, not only “patient,” but wise Job! Have you made a similar choice? Can you say, “My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined”? (v. 11). If you can, praise Him for His enabling grace. If you cannot, confess with shame your failure to appropriate His all-sufficient grace. Get down on your knees at once, and unbosom yourself to God. Hide and keep back nothing. Remember it is written “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Does not v. 12 explain your failure, my failure, dear reader? Is it not because we have not trembled before God’s commandments, and because we have so lightly esteemed His Word, that we have “declined” from His way! Then let us, even now, and daily, seek grace from on high to heed His commandments and hide His Word in our hearts.

“He knoweth that way that I take.” Which way are you taking?-the Narrow Way which leadeth unto life, or the Broad Road that leadeth to destruction? Make certain on this point, dear friend. Scripture declares, “So every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). But you need not be deceived or uncertain. The Lord declared, “I am The Way” (John 14:6).

2. Divine Testing. “When he hath tried me.”

“The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts” (Prov 17:3). This was God’s way with Israel of old, and it is His way with Christians now. Just before Israel entered Canaan, as Moses reviewed their history since leaving Egypt, he said, “And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no” (Deut 8:2). In the same way God tries, tests, proves, humbles us.

“When he hath tried me.” If we realized this more, we should bear up better in the hour of affliction and be more patient under suffering. The daily irritations of life, the things which annoy so much-what is their meaning? why are they permitted? Here is the answer: God is “trying” you! That is the explanation (in part, at least) of that disappointment, that crushing of your earthly hopes, that great loss,-God was, is, *testing you*. God is trying your temper, your courage, your faith, your patience, your love, your fidelity.

“When he hath tried me.” How frequently God’s saints see only Satan as the cause of their troubles. They regard the great enemy as responsible for much of their sufferings. But there is no comfort for the heart in this. We do not deny that the Devil does bring about much that harasses us. But above Satan is the Lord Almighty! The Devil cannot touch a hair of our heads without God’s permission, and when he is allowed to disturb and distract us, even then it is only God using him to “try” us. Let us learn then, to look beyond all secondary causes and instruments to that One who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). This is what Job did.

In the opening chapter of the book which bears his name we find Satan obtaining permission to afflict God’s servant. He used the Sabeans to destroy Job’s herds (v. 15): he sent the Chaldeans to slay his servants (v. 17): he caused a great wind to kill his children (v. 19). And what was Job’s response? This: he exclaimed “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord” (1:21). Job looked beyond the human agents, beyond Satan who employed them, to the Lord who controlleth all. He realized that it was the Lord trying him. We get the same thing in the New Testament. To the suffering saints at Smyrna John wrote, “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer; behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried” (Rev 2:10). Their being cast into prison was simply God “trying” them.

How much we lose by forgetting this! What a stay for the trouble-tossed heart to know that no matter what form the testing may take, no matter what the agent which annoys, it is God who is “trying” His children. What a perfect example the Saviour sets us. When He was approached in the garden and Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of Malchus, the Saviour said, “The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11). Men were about to vent their awful rage upon Him, the Serpent would bruise His heel, but He looks above and beyond them. Dear reader, no matter how bitter its contents, (infinitely less than that which the Saviour drained) let us accept the cup as from the Father’s hand.

In some moods we are apt to question the wisdom and right of God to try us. So often we murmur at His dispensations. Why should God lay such an intolerable burden upon me? Why should others be spared their loved ones, and mine taken? Why should health and strength, perhaps the gift of sight, be denied me? The first answer to all such questions is, “O man, who art thou that repliest against God?”! It is wicked insubordination for any creature to call into question the dealings of the great Creator. “Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20). How

earnestly each of us need to cry unto God, that His grace may silence our rebellious lips and still the tempest within our desperately wicked hearts!

Again, in 1 Peter 4:12,13 we are told: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings: that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” The same thoughts are expressed here as in the previous passage. There is a needs-be for our “trials” and therefore we are to think them not strange—we should expect them. And, too, there is again the blessed outlook of being richly recompensed at Christ’s return. Then there is the added word that not only should we meet these trials with faith’s fortitude, but we should rejoice in them, inasmuch as we are permitted to have fellowship in “the sufferings of Christ.” He, too, suffered: sufficient then, for the disciple to be as his Master.

“When he hath tried me.” Dear Christian reader, there are no exceptions. God had only one Son without sin, but never one without sorrow. Sooner or later, in one form or another, trial-sore and heavy-will be our lot. “And sent Timotheus our brother—to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith. That no man should be moved by these afflictions; for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:2,3). And again it is written, “We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). It has been so in every age. Abram was “tried,” tried severely. So, too, were Joseph, Jacob, Moses, David, Daniel, the Apostles, etc.

3. The Ultimate Issue. “I shall come forth as gold.”

Observe the tense here. Job did not imagine that he was pure gold already. “I shall come forth as gold,” he declared. He knew full well that there was yet much dross in him. He did not boast that he was already perfect. Far from it. In the final chapter of his book we find him saying, “I abhor myself” (42:6). And well he might: and well may we. As we discover that in our flesh there dwelleth “no good thing,” as we examine ourselves and our ways in the light of God’s Word and behold our innumerable failures, as we think of our countless sins, both of omission and commission, good reason have we for abhorring ourselves. Ah, Christian reader, there is much dross about us. But it will not ever be thus.

“I shall come forth as gold.” Job did not say, “When he hath tried me I may come forth as gold,” or “I hope to come forth as gold,” but with full confidence and positive assurance he declared, “I shall come forth as gold.” But how did he know this? How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine purpose cannot fail. He which hath begun a good work in us “will finish it” (Phil 1:6). How can we be sure of the happy issue? Because the Divine promise is sure: “The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me” (Psa 138:8). Then be of good cheer, tried and troubled one. The process may be unpleasant and painful, but the issue is charming and sure.

“I shall come forth as gold.” This was said by one who knew affliction and sorrow as few among the sons of men have known them. Yet despite his fiery trials he was optimistic. Let then this triumphant language be ours. “I shall come forth as gold” is not the language of carnal boasting, but the confidence of one whose mind was stayed upon God. There will be no credit to our account—the glory will all belong to the Divine Refiner. James 1:12.

For the present there remain two things: first, Love is the Divine thermometer while we are in the crucible of testing—”And he shall sit (the patience of Divine grace) as a Refiner and Purifier of silver,” etc. (Mal 3:3). Second, the Lord Himself is with us in the fiery furnace, as He was with the three young Hebrews (Dan 3:25). For the future this is sure: the most wonderful thing in heaven will not be the golden street or the golden harps, but golden souls on which is stamped the image of God—”predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son”! Praise God for such a glorious prospect, such a victorious issue, such a marvelous goal.

BELOVED, AND YET AFFLICTED

C.H. Spurgeon

“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.”—John 11:3

That disciple whom Jesus loved is not at all backward to record that Jesus loved Lazarus too: there are no jealousies among those who are chosen by the Well-beloved. Jesus loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus: it is a happy thing where a whole family live in the love of Jesus. They were a favoured trio, and yet, as the serpent came into Paradise, so did sorrow enter their quiet household at Bethany. Lazarus was sick. They all felt that if Jesus were there disease would flee at his presence; what then should they do but let him know of their trial? Lazarus was near to death's door, and so his tender sisters at once reported the fact to Jesus, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." Many a time since then has that same message been sent to our Lord, for in full many a case he has chosen his people in the furnace of affliction. Of the Master it is said, "himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses," and it is, therefore, no extraordinary thing for the members to be in this matter conformed to their Head.

I. Notice, first, A FACT mentioned in the text: "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." The sisters were somewhat astonished that it should be so, for the word "behold" implies a measure of surprise. " *We* love him, and would make him well directly: *thou* lovest him, and yet he remains sick. Thou canst heal him with a word, why then is thy loved one sick"? Have not you, dear sick friend, often wondered how your painful or lingering disease could be consistent with your being chosen, and called, and made one with Christ? I dare say this has greatly perplexed you, and yet in very truth it is by no means strange, but a thing to be expected.

We need not be astonished that the man whom the Lord loves is sick, for *he is only a man*. The love of Jesus does not separate us from the common necessities and infirmities of human life. Men of God are still men. The covenant of grace is not a charter of exemption from consumption, or rheumatism, or asthma. The bodily ills, which come upon us because of our flesh, will attend us to the tomb, for Paul saith, "we that are in this body do groan."

Those whom the Lord loves are the more likely to be sick, since they are *under a peculiar discipline*. It is written, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Affliction of some sort is one of the marks of the true-born child of God, and it frequently happens that the trial takes the form of illness. Shall we therefore wonder that we have to take our turn in the sick chamber? If Job, and David, and Hezekiah must each one smart, who are we that we should be amazed because we are in ill-health?

Nor is it remarkable that we are sick if we reflect upon the great *benefit which often flows from it to ourselves*. I do not know what peculiar improvement may have been wrought in Lazarus, but many a disciple of Jesus would have been of small use if he had not been afflicted. Strong men are apt to be harsh, imperious, and unsympathetic, and therefore they need to be put into the furnace, and melted down. I have known Christian women who would never have been so gentle, tender, wise, experienced, and holy if they had not been mellowed by physical pain. There are fruits in God's garden as well as in man's which never ripen till they are bruised. Young women who are apt to be volatile, conceited, or talkative, are often trained to be full of sweetness and light by sickness after sickness, by which they are taught to sit at Jesus' feet. Many have been able to say with the psalmist, "It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes." For this reason even such as are highly favoured and blessed among women may feel a sword piercing through their hearts.

Oftentimes this sickness of the Lord's loved ones is *for the good of others*. Lazarus was permitted to be sick and to die, that by his death and resurrection the apostles might be benefitted. His sickness was "for the glory of God." Throughout these nineteen hundred years which have succeeded Lazarus' sickness all believers have been getting good out of it, and this afternoon we are all the better because he languished and died. The church and the world may derive immense advantage through the sorrows of good men: the careless may be awakened, the doubting may be convinced, the ungodly may be converted, the mourner may be comforted through our testimony in sickness; and if so, would we wish to avoid pain and weakness? Are we not quite willing that our friends should say of us also "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick"?

II. Our text, however, not only records a fact, but mentions A REPORT of that fact: the sisters sent and told Jesus. Let us keep up a constant correspondence with our Lord about everything.

"Sing a hymn to Jesus, when thy heart is faint; Tell it all to Jesus, comfort or complaint."

Jesus knows all about us, but *it is a great relief to pour out our hearts before him*. When John the Baptist's broken-hearted disciples saw their leader beheaded, "they took up the body, and went and told Jesus." They could not have done better. In all trouble send a message to Jesus, and do not keep your misery to yourself. In his case there is no need of reserve, there is no fear of his treating you with cold pride, or heartless indifference, or cruel treachery. He is a confident who never can betray us, a friend who never will refuse us.

There is this fair hope about telling Jesus, that *he is sure to support us under it*. If you go to Jesus, and ask, "Most gracious Lord, why am I sick? I thought I was useful while in health, and now I can do nothing; why is this"? He may be pleased to show you why, or, if not, he will make you willing to bear his will with patience without knowing why. He can bring his truth to your mind to cheer you, or strengthen your heart by his presence, or send you unexpected comforts, and give you to glory in your afflictions. "Ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us." Not in vain did Mary and Martha send to tell Jesus, and not in vain do any seek his face.

Remember, too, that *Jesus may give healing*. It would not be wise to live by a supposed faith, and cast off the physician and his medicines, any more than to discharge the butcher, and the tailor, and expect to be fed and clothed by faith; but this would be far better than forgetting the Lord altogether, and trusting to man only. Healing for both body and soul must be sought from God. We make use of medicines, but these can do nothing apart from the Lord, "who healeth all our diseases." We may tell Jesus about our aches and pains, and gradual declining, and hacking coughs. Some persons are afraid to go to God about their health: they pray for the pardon of sin, but dare not ask the Lord to remove a headache: and, yet, surely, if the hairs outside our head are all numbered by God it is not much more of a condescension for him to relieve throbs and pressures inside the head. Our big things must be very little to the great God, and our little things cannot be much less. It is a proof of the greatness of the mind of God that while ruling the heavens and the earth, he is not so absorbed by these great concerns as to be forgetful of the least pain or want of any one of his poor children. We may go to him about our failing breath, for he first gave us lungs and life. We may tell him about the eye which grows dim, and the ear which loses hearing, for he made them both. We may mention the swollen knee, and the gathering finger, the stiff neck, and the sprained foot, for he made all these our members, redeemed them all, and will raise them all from the grave. Go at once, and say, "Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick."

III. Thirdly, let us notice in the case of Lazarus A RESULT which we should not have expected. No doubt when Mary and Martha sent to tell Jesus they looked to see Lazarus recover as soon as the messenger reached the Master; but they were not gratified. For two days the Lord remained in the same place, and not till he knew that Lazarus was dead did he speak of going to Judea. This teaches us that Jesus may be informed of our trouble, and yet may act as if he were indifferent to it. We must not expect in every case that prayer for recovery will be answered, for if so, nobody would die who had chick or child, friend or acquaintance to pray for him. In our prayers for the lives of beloved children of God we must not forget that there is one prayer which may be crossing ours, for Jesus prays, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." We pray that they may remain with us, but when we recognize that Jesus wants them above, what can we do but admit his larger claim and say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt"? In our own case, we may pray the Lord to raise us up, and yet though he loves us he may permit us to grow worse and worse, and at last to die. Hezekiah had fifteen years added to his life, but we may not gain the reprieve of a single day. Never set such store by the life of any one dear to you, or even by your own life, as to be rebellious against the Lord. If you hold the life of any dear one with too tight a hand, you are making a rod for your own back; and if you love your own earthly life too well, you are making a thorny pillow for your dying bed. Children are often idols, and in such cases their too ardent lovers are idolaters. We might as well make a god of clay, and worship it, as the Hindus are said to do, as worship our fellow-creatures, for what are they but clay? Shall dust be so dear to us that we quarrel with our God about it? If our Lord leaves us to suffer, let us not repine. He must do that for us which is kindest and best, for he loves us better than we love ourselves.

Did I hear you say, "Yes, Jesus allowed Lazarus to die, *but he raised him up again*"? I answer, he is the resurrection and the life to us also. Be comforted concerning the departed, "Thy brother shall rise again," and all of us whose hope is in Jesus shall partake in our Lord's resurrection. Not only shall our souls live, but our bodies, too, shall be raised incorruptible. The grave will serve as a refining pot, and this vile body shall come forth vile no longer. Some Christians are greatly cheered by the thought of living till the Lord comes, and so escaping death. I confess that I think this no great gain, for so far from having any preference over them that are asleep, those who are alive and remain at his coming will miss one point of fellowship, in not dying and rising like their Lord. Beloved, all things are yours, and death is expressly mentioned in the list, therefore do not dread it, but rather "long for evening to undress, that you may rest with God."

IV. I will close with A QUESTION-"Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus"-does Jesus in a special sense love you? Alas, many sick ones have no evidence of any special love of Jesus towards them, for they have never sought his face, nor trusted in him. Jesus might say to them "I never knew you," for they have turned their backs upon his blood and his cross. Answer, dear friend, to your own heart this question, "Do you love Jesus"? If so, you love him because he first loved you. Are you trusting him? If so, that faith of yours is the proof that he has loved you from before the foundation of the world, for faith is the token by which he plights his troth to his beloved.

If Jesus loves you, and you are sick, let all the world see how you glorify God in your sickness. Let friends and nurses see how the beloved of the Lord are cheered and comforted by him. Let your holy resignation astonish them, and set them admiring your Beloved, who is so gracious to you that he makes you happy in pain, and joyful at the gates of the grave. If your religion is worth anything it ought to support you now, and it will compel unbelievers to see that he whom the Lord loveth is in better case when he is sick than the ungodly when full of health and vigour.

If you do not know that Jesus loves you, you lack the brightest star that can cheer the night of sickness. I hope you will not die as you now are, and pass into another world without enjoying the love of Jesus: that would be a terrible calamity indeed. Seek his face at once, and it may be that your present sickness is a part of the way of love by which Jesus would bring you to himself. Lord, heal all these sick ones in soul and in body. Amen.

THE BIBLE AS THE BOOK OF CONSOLATION FOR THE AFFLICTED

James Buchanan

Mourners in Zion, be comforted! if yours be a life of sorrow, yours also is a religion of hope. If the book of Providence seem to you to be “written within and without,” like Ezekiel’s roll, in characters of “lamentation, and mourning, and woe,” the Bible is filled with consolation and peace; and the more stormy your passage through this world, the more awful GOD’S judgments, the more severe and confounding your trials and bereavements may be, the more should that blessed book be endeared to your hearts of which every true disciple will say with the afflicted Psalmist, “This is my comfort in mine affliction.”

It is not one of the least benefits of severe affliction, that it shatters our confidence in every other stay, and breaks up our hopes from every other quarter, and leads us, in simplicity, to search the word of GOD for comfort.

The grand peculiarity of the Bible, as a book of consolation, is, that while it seeks not to cast our sufferings into the shade, but rather sets them before us in all their variety and magnitude, it teaches us to find consolation in the midst of acknowledged sorrow, and causes light to arise out of the deepest darkness-“That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we were appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:3). In many respects, it gives a more gloomy view of human life than we are oftentimes willing to entertain. It represents affliction as “ordained” for us, and “appointed” so that it cannot be escaped. It tells us that our future life will be chequered with trials, even as the past has been. It gives no assurance of respite from suffering, so long as we are in this world-“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). And, when it traces these afflictive events to their causes, when it represents suffering as the fruit and the wages of sin,-when it charges us with guilt, and affirms that we have provoked the Lord to anger,-when it leads us to regard our sorrows as connected with our characters, and inflicted by a righteous governor and judge,-and when, carrying our eye beyond this world altogether, it points to an eternal state of retribution, where sorrows infinitely more severe, and judgments infinitely more confounding, await impenitent and unforgiven guilt,-it does present such a view of our present condition and future prospects, as may well fill us with awe and alarm: and yet still it is the “book of consolation” ; still it contains the elements of peace, the seed of hope, the well-spring of eternal joy.

It is out of the very darkness of our present state and our eternal prospects, that the brightness of that dawn appears which shall issue in everlasting day; the golden rays of divine light and love appear in the midst, of that thick cloud; the cup of bitterness is sweetened by an infusion of mercy, so that the Christian can be “joyful in the midst of tribulation,” and “greatly rejoice, though now, for a season if need be, he is in heaviness, through manifold temptations.” “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:12,13).

