

A Sunday Morning Exhortation (34)

"Take my brethren the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of . . . patience" (James v. 8).

Patience is not necessary in times of success; patience is not required in times of prosperity and peace. Patience is required to surmount obstacles; patience is necessary to endure suffering and affliction. Patience is necessary for the development until the manifestation of any hope to which we have set our hands; and in this chapter the Apostle draws a lesson from the husbandman. He says, "He hath much patience for the fruit until he receive the early and latter rain." There can be no hurry with nature. We may plant the seed, we may tend the plants, but nature in its development is unhurried; nevertheless, the end is always achieved.

Now in the prophecy of Joel ii. 23, we read of the time to come in which there should be a former rain. The prophet says, "Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month." Dr. Thomas shows us that the former rain or gentle was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is because of that former shower that many have been called, by reason of which the seed has been scattered and sown, and it is now developing, until the husbandman shall come and reap the crop. But there is a former rain and there is a latter rain, a plenteous rain, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the outpouring of the gifts of God without measure unto His servants; that day for which we long, that day for which we need to have patience, because now there is an intervening period, a dry period, which requires waiting until God's purpose shall pursue its unhurried course. We expect nothing else, generally speaking, but sorrow in this dry intervening period. If we do we have been deluded, or we are not carrying out our duty. Jesus Christ on taking leave of his disciples said, "And ye now therefore have sorrow. The world shall rejoice, but ye shall lament. But," he adds, "*I will see you again*—I will see you again—and your hearts shall rejoice, and that joy no man taketh from you."

But what type of patience is required of the saints? Is it the patience that is seen in men of the world? Is it the dogged persistence, the Spartan-like courage, the endurance of the explorer or the pioneer? Is it the almost uncanny endurance under physical pain or mental anguish, that uncomplaining attitude which some men and some women display? This quality of patience is often displayed, and there are many children of this world who possess that kind of patience in a greater degree than we do. But this is not the patience of which the Scriptures speak.

The Apostle James says that Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are. We are ordinary people, filled with weakness and doubts and fears and perplexities, and not particularly courageous or patient under stress or trial. The patience of the prophets is what James directs our attention to, and illustrates the quality of patience which we must possess if we desire to achieve our end. The apostle shows us that there is abundant instruction in considering the examples of the prophets before us, who have spoken in the Name of the Lord, and to acquire this patience he invites us to study them.

We all know the worth and value of a good example. We have seen in our short experience more than one ecclesia revitalized and energized by the influence, perhaps, of a live recording brother, or one outstanding example of enthusiasm and zeal. It is infectious, it is contagious. But those to whom our attention has been directed lie still in the grave, and we gain that great instruction and comfort by studying their lives, by discerning the influences at work in their lives, by considering why they endured, how they were patient, and it will help us to imitate their patience and to obtain the great reward which is promised.

What does the record show? It shows that they were men who were natural people, men who were naturally speaking impatient. The apostle says, "Take, my brethren, the prophets who have

spoken in the Name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience." So it would seem, then, that our attention is directed particularly to those prophets who by reason of speaking in the Name of the Lord have earned a record of patience, and thus they grace the divine record.

Time does not avail us to tell of all the great men whose record we have before us. We think of Moses. It was said by the Apostle Paul to the Hebrews that he chose rather to suffer affliction than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. So Moses could have escaped, he could have avoided the affliction. He *chose* to suffer affliction. It was direct choice. He made it of his own accord. And what kind of man was Moses? Eager for the purpose of God, he slays the Egyptian, anxious that all the children of Israel should realize that it was he who should emancipate them from Egypt. The time was too soon, and Moses spent forty years of difficulty sojourning as an exile in the Land of Midian. And then God says, "And now I will send thee unto Pharaoh," and when God was ready for Moses, Moses was not ready for God. He realized his limitations, and he was not ready for the work. It was not his stubbornness, not his Spartan-like courage, not his own endurance, but the endurance and patience which was energized by the purpose in hand, the purpose of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt under the guidance of God. And so it says, "He endured as seeing Him who is invisible." And that is the key and the motive of the patience of all the worthies of old. They were patient, not because they had these qualities inherently, but because they endured as seeing Him who is invisible, as epitomized by the Apostle Paul, "I know him whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." *Against that day*. Faith, a deep-rooted belief, a love of God's purpose, that is the driving force, that is the motive and the mainspring of the patience of these men.

How do we patiently endure? Do we fall on our hands and say, "I know Christ is coming, and nothing will move me. I am going to have patience and wait for him"? Oh no, nothing of the sort. We refer to another of the prophets of the Lord, Noah. He waited 120 years for the coming of the promised judgments of God. Some of us have waited 20 years, 25, 30, 40, but none of us have waited 120 years. How did he spend his time? How was he patient? By cutting down trees and shaping timber and building a boat such as had never been seen. He needed some strong motive to cut down trees and build a ship on dry land amid the revilings of the world, proclaiming the impending judgments. The motive, the reason for his patience, was shown by his activity; not patiently waiting, but by being actively engaged in furthering the purpose of God, and thus showing unto those around him his belief in the things promised.

We refer to another of the prophets—Elijah. The apostle says he was of like passions with you and me, in another connection we know, but he says it. Elijah was the man who ran away when Jezebel said, "I will have that man's life." He was scared, he was afraid, and he hid himself. He was the man who pronounced those judgments against Ahab and Jezebel. The same man who had slain the prophets of Baal. What was the reason for his patience? He says, "I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Israel, for they have slain thy prophets, broken thy covenants and cast down thine altars." Because of his conviction and assurance and fervent love of the things of the Name of Jehovah. He was called upon to risk his life and he patiently endured—yet physically he was a man like ourselves, full of weakness, doubts, difficulties, perplexities.

These are some of the examples of patience in the prophets. It is this patience we have to emulate. Let us learn to be like them.

Now the Apostle Paul says in the Hebrews, "Seeing, then, that we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us run with patience the race which is set before us." It is as if these witnesses are regarding the runner in the Roman arena. They have experienced the same obstacles and the same stress and strain, and they are urging on those who are now engaged in the race to continue patiently unto the end. So the Apostle Paul says, "I reckon that the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," and we reckon that our sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the suffering of the apostles and prophets.

The Apostle Paul says, "Ye have need of patience," and in the times that are ahead we shall have great need of patience if we are to speak faithfully in the Name of the Lord. Are we going to choose affliction, or are we going to choose ease by contrast? There was a time some years ago when many in this hall suffered bonds and imprisonment, many suffered shame and mockery and derision and poverty because they chose to speak in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ and be faithful unto his commandments, and we feel that a similar time is approaching. We are reminded of these words of the Apostle Paul when speaking of one he says, "He was not ashamed of my chain, but sought me out very diligently." We recall his words that he was determined to know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings. *The fellowship of his sufferings*—and you and I have been called unto the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus Christ and of this great cloud of witnesses by whom we are surrounded. And this applies to all of us. Not only to our young brethren of military age. It is our duty to declare to the world that we are as our young brethren are in the matter of this affliction, and those young brethren will realize the source of strength that comes by the example of brethren who have suffered and will yet suffer in the Name of the Lord, who will patiently endure as seeing Him who is invisible. But, some will say, times are more difficult now. Bro. Jannaway is dead (we remember his wonderful work with affection). Many of his co-labourers are dead. The brotherhood is divided; and we as a body can no longer call ourselves Christadelphians. The world will surely not be friendly to conscientious objectors. What shall we do? Shall we compromise? Shall we entangle ourselves in some way either with the world or with those from whom we have separated? "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the Name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction and of patience."

Remember what happened in 1916. The Chairman of the Council at Whitehall said, "Listen, Mr. Jannaway, can you inform me what occult influence there is at work at the War Office, what is the power that protects these people? How is it that no matter what the Tribunals do, even though the Christadelphians are arrested and handed over to the military they are sooner or later set free?" What was the occult influence? Whose was the power? —The hand of the Lord. And now we are once more facing a similar trial. Let us then take courage, remembering the patience and example of those who have gone before, for the hand of the Lord is not shortened.

And so we conclude in the words of the Apostle Paul, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

M.L.E.
