

## **FORTIFIED TO ENDURE**

We are seven days further on the journey than when we last broke bread together. It is a weary journey in which we need rest and refreshment or else we should fail altogether by the way. Like the children of Israel, we are going through a great and terrible wilderness, wherein are scorpions and fiery flying serpents. We read of Israel that "*the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way.*" It is no wonder. When difficulty succeeds difficulty apparently without end, human strength and patience are likely to give way. Israel's journey was long and trying; but under divine leadership, they persevered, and the end came at last. They found themselves at the end of the forty years, (and after a few years' fighting), settled in peace and safety in the land of promise.

These things were types and examples. They serve their purpose if we learn from them to be patient under all the toils of the journey we are making through the present evil world. The journey will not last for ever. It is sure to come to an end. It may end sooner than we are expecting. It has ended for Bro. Ingram, and may end for any of us in the same way. To fall asleep in Christ is a quicker road to the Kingdom than having to wait for his appearing in the land of the living. By a single step, we go from the presence of the darkness at present brooding upon life on the earth, into the glorious presence of Christ returned; for the death state is but a wink of sleep to the dead.

But while we are here in conflict with the evil we need to be fortified—fortified to endure. To fortify the mind is to make it strong, and to make it strong is to fill it with ideas that give a joyful reason for action. There are ideas that have no power to influence the mind in this way, but contrariwise. This is why some books are profitable, and some not; some men helpful and some not. The ideas that inspire us to endure tribulation, and to deny ourselves are those that are connected with God. As David says,

*"I saw the Lord always before me, therefore I shall not be moved."*

In proportion as God is a vision before the mind, will we feel strong to sustain the part of waiting for Him. We cannot in our day get this vision apart from the Bible. We cannot see God with the natural eye. We could even do this, if God permitted. We may hope to see and feel Him in the glorious ages, if we are permitted to have a place therein. But, meanwhile, our privilege is limited to knowledge and faith, and these we do not get as students of nature, but as students of the Scriptures. God has put it in our power to know Him by the abundant revelation He has made. Oh, how privileged we are to have this revelation. It is communicated to us in a form so full of interest and so able to thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works. Those discover this who read methodically and daily. By this habit they open for themselves treasures of acquaintance and conviction that cannot be reached by the casual, desultory, or indifferent reader.

The Bible is the book for men in trouble, and trouble is the thing for preparing men for divine use—always pre-supposing that they know God and fear Him, and habitually subject their lives to Him. We profess to belong to this class by assembling ourselves at this "table of the Lord." The use for which God is preparing us is not visible now. It is to be discerned only in the revelation of His purpose by His servants, the prophets and apostles; and even here, our inherent weakness and lack of experience in the matters presented to our view is necessarily feeble. But we can see enough to re-echo all that Paul says about its exceeding glory. We can form some faint idea of the satisfaction that must accompany divine recognition and acknowledgement in the day of Christ, and its consequent bestowment of immortal vigour of constitution and allotment of a place among His glorified associates, and the conferment of power and dignity among a happy and submissive population in the new and righteous order of things He will establish upon the earth. Consider how high and great is

the position offered to the friends of Christ, and that death will never terminate their felicity. Realising this, we cannot marvel that we are called on to suffer now. It is a rule among men that the severity of a man's training is in proportion to the eminence of the position for which he is intended. If you want farm labourers, there is no need for training of any kind. Any education or no education will do; but if you want a man to lead an army or guide a state, you must bring to bear much preparatory discipline. Now, though the qualifications required in men for divine use are very different from that which human employment calls for, the same necessity exists for discipline and preparation. The use to which God intends to put His chosen is great and lasting, and, therefore, the trial is sharp and long. Peter tells us to "*think it not strange.*" We are enabled to catch his thought by such reflections as these. Apart from these reflections, we are liable to "think it strange"—very strange—that God should hide His face and leave those who seek and love Him in affliction. Human nature—weak and blind—is apt to grow weary and doubtful under the process. The words are needful which say to us,

*"Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him."*

The reason is all powerful:

*"for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."*

The Scriptures enable us to endure with patience. They do so by the perceptions they impart. Wherever we dip into them, we find something to aid us in this matter. Even in so apparently stern and barren a portion of the Word as that read this morning from Amos, we find something to furnish the man of God in his warfare. Damascus, Gaza, Tyrus, Edom and Moab are addressed on the subject of their sins, and not only they but Israel and Judah—God's own people—of whom He says in the third verse of the third chapter,

*"You only have I known of all the families of the earth."*

There is not a good word for any of them: there is condemnation for all. From the divine standpoint, they are all wrong—"none that doeth good—no not one." There is no book on the earth in which God speaks but the Bible. Man speaks in all other books, but in this it is God and God only. We have refused to listen to those who would invite us to allow a place to man also in this book of God. We will not have it, and for this we are in trouble. But what is there in this unfavourable portraiture of human nature, to upbuild and strengthen the man of God? Just this: the truth has called upon us to accept the monstrous conclusion, as people consider it, that the world at large is walking in the way of death. We have accepted the conclusion, but the weight of it is sometimes burdensome to human weakness. We ask ourselves, Can it be? We look at the Truth again. We say "it must be." Amiable neighbours reprove, and uncertain believers suggest, and astute-minded critics maintain it cannot be. In the conflict of feeling and opinion, conviction is liable to waver. But here, in the presence of a prophet, through whom God speaks, discernment is fortified and confirmed; and we are enabled, in spite of the apparent presumption and enormity of the thought, to hold on to the attitude imposed upon us by the testimony of Jesus and the apostles, and to say, "By ecclesiastical sorcery, all nations are deceived" and "if men speak not according to the oracles of God, it is because there is no light in them."

Then we look at the things that God charges against these communities, and we learn another lesson not just visible in the charges themselves. They are different in form; Damascus had inflicted cruelty on Gilead; Gaza had handed over Israel to captivity; tyre had violated the covenant with Judah; Edom had nursed perpetual anger with his brother Jacob; Moab had burnt the bones of the king of Edom into lime, etc. But though differing thus in form one from another, all these offences (here made the ground of condemnation) resemble each other in this that at the time they were committed, they were apparently unnoticed and unrecorded. Those who got the upper hand in them and by them, seemed to do so with

impunity. When Moab's slow fire, for example, was incinerating the bones of the enemy whom they had got into their power, it did not seem to matter to any one. There was no interruption to the sunshine; the fresh air was not withheld; the Moabites were able to go home and sleep and rise and partake of their meals in all peace and security. Yet the iniquity was seen and remembered by One who does not forget, and here it comes forth by the pen of Amos, written on the indelible page of that Scripture that cannot be broken.

This reflection has a special value in our own circumstances. The most depressing part of our experience consists of this very thing. In hundreds of matters, we see the wrong done with presumptuous fearlessness on the part of the wrong-doers and without the least indication that God sees or regards. Time passes, and the wrong-doer not only seems none the worse, but all the better for his wrong doing. In this, our faith is sorely tried. But if we are wise, we will endure the trial. We will not be deceived by appearances. We will be guided and fortified by this instruction of the Scripture. We will behold, without dismay, the success of evil doing in the knowledge of a final and effectual remedy. We will hearken to the voice that addresses us by Solomon:

*"If thou seest the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of justice and judgment in the province, marvel not at the matter, for He that is higher than the highest regardeth."*

We will remember that though God suffers long, there is an end to His patience with iniquity. This end is an appointed end and a revealed end. Great Babylon comes at last into remembrance before God, *"to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath"* (Rev. 16:19). God's elect crying night and day unto Him, will at last be thoroughly avenged, as Jesus tells us (Luke 18:8, 7).

*"God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil"* (Ecc. 7:14).

Here, saith the spirit, is the faith and the patience of the saints. That is, it is these convictions that inspire faith and induce patience. We can endure when we have reason for it. We have great reason for endurance when we know that God will at last put right the dreadful wrongs of the present hour.

The second of today's readings (1 Tim. 4:5) tells us that the Spirit expressly foreshadowed the evil state of things from which we suffer.

*"The Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thankfulness of them which believe and know the Truth."*

The "some" spoken of here as departing from the faith are by Peter described as "many."

*"Many shall follow their pernicious ways"* (2 Peter 2:2).

So many are they at last that *"all nations"* are ensnared (Rev. 12:2, 13:3); and the situation among men at last is so spiritually barren that Jesus did not anticipate finding faith upon the earth at his coming, though that coming was to be in response to the prayers of the faithful (Luke 18:8). Yes, he plainly says that the state of things at his coming would resemble the state of things *"in the days of Noah,"* when only one small family were found in an acceptable attitude before God. In view of this, what can we say concerning our evil day but that in a certain sense, things are as they ought to be. Few are they who are found honouring the name of God and waiting upon Him in the way appointed in His Word. Few are they with whom His commandment is a law, and to whom the things in which He delights are a pleasure. Few are they to whom His Kingdom is a reality, and the high calling a business of practical moment. It was thus in the days of Noah. The multitude now, are where they were then—seeking their own ways, finding their own pleasure, looking upon the claims of God as

an intrusion; His will, an inconvenience; and His purpose, a distasteful interference with their rights and occupations. It is an evil situation—a dark and dreadful day. But let understanding rule, and we shall not be overthrown.

What we see and mourn at, was foretold. It was foretold because it was foreseen. It was foreseen because to God all things are known; and with God, we may abide in peace, even during the evil day; for, not only has the evil day been foreshown, but the glorious day that comes after—the day of light and gladness, and righteousness and honour. The fact that the evil day has come, is a guarantee that the day of good will come. Come it certainly will, however long it tarry, and however sore the evil, with which, in the wisdom of God it is preceded. And when it comes, it comes to stay. Never again will darkness cover the earth or death reign. Never again shall we know the weakness of mortal nature, the distress of human misjudgment, the inexpressible misery of sojourning, poor and powerless, in a benighted population that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord will not only be without cloud, but without end.

We are unable to grasp this fact in all its magnitude and power. But the knowledge we have, enables us to receive it in faith, even if the faith of a helpless little child. Reason leads us to the threshold of the morning dawn, even if our weak eyes are unable to behold the brightness of the everlasting glory, that presents itself to our view. By this we are strengthened to endure the horrors of the night. By this we are enabled to hold on in the face of all discouragements; to retain confidence and purpose in the midst of a thousand contradictions; to pursue an indomitable way against a world in arms, and the path of our pilgrimage through this great and terrible wilderness, notwithstanding the hiss of the serpent and the arrow of the Amalekite. The night will end and the day will dawn; and happy shall we be if it then appear to have been our part now to have walked—not as children of the night, but of the day.

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