

SERMON PREACHED BY MR. HEMINGTON, AT GOWER STREET CHAPEL
LONDON, ON SUNDAY MORNING, 14th DECEMBER, 1890

Text: "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice; (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He sware unto them."
 (Deut. iv. 30, 31).

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Beloved friends, it is very good when, in reading God's word, it seems to have a mouth and to speak directly into our hearts as though saying, "I mean you." I know that it is frequently very difficult to form a correct judgment as to whether portions of God's truth come directly from Him into the heart. But, if such portions are suitable to our state, case, and circumstances, we may rely upon it that we are right in believing that they have been spoken to us by the Lord, whether we meet with them in the books of good men or in the Bible itself. When a portion directs our attention to our condition both in time and for eternity, creeps into our feelings, yields relief and comfort, and encourages us to hope in the Lord, we may safely conclude that the Lord has spoken it to us with power.

"In the latter days." Some of you who, like myself, are old in a profession had no conception, in the earlier years of your profession, what heavy trials, perplexing providences, hard and stubborn circumstances, adversities, losses, crosses, temptations of and conflicts with the devil, would come upon you in your latter days. When I was a young Christian I never thought of what would come upon me in my latter days. But all this was known to God even from eternity. It is sometimes a wonderful comfort to my mind to feel it. Nothing can come upon God's children by chance; nothing has ever taken place in the lives of His dear people but what God intended should take place. I most firmly believe that God has (if I may so express myself) His packages of trials for all His people before they are born into the world (Acts xv. 18). Look at the packages piled up in December on the platform at the Great Western Railway station at Paddington. Yet it is all labelled, and, as a rule, each finds its way to the right owner. And so our infinitely wise God (I repeat it) has had in His mind from all eternity what packages each of His people should have - you must have this one and I must have that one. Do you believe it? When felt, it will be a very comforting

truth; because, as Scripture says, "affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground" (Job v.6). The whole is known unto the Lord.

"When thou art in tribulation." How very glad we should be, in our old age, if our tribulations were much less instead of being more! How do you feel about this? Instead of less troubles, burdens, and trials, I believe that most of God's people find them to be considerably greater in their latter days than in their earlier Christian days. I find it to be so. The devil thrusts at us so hard, flings bigger stones at us, knocks us about with more fury towards us in our latter days than when we began, by the grace of God, to make a profession of His holy name. I believe the outward trials of God's people, in many instances, are more severe in their latter days. Their trials are not light, like the vapour of the morning, but are often consolidated, condensed trials, packed solidly together. I am speaking honestly, and for myself I have to make this confession. In the great aggravation I am sometimes under, I find the particular risings of unbelief working in me a great deal more strongly than they did twenty or thirty years ago.

"When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee." Observe that the word "tribulation" here is in the singular; "all these things" in the plural. What does that mean? It means a great diversity of trials - providential trials, family trials, church trials; perhaps an afflicted body, perhaps great adversity in circumstances. In many instances such trials come upon the people of God in their latter days. To use a simple illustration: if one drop of boiling water should fall upon your hand, how intense the pain! But how much greater if the whole contents of a vessel of boiling water should go over you! So spiritually. Sometimes the thought of a very painful thing will give us a great deal of sorrow and cause pain; we then think it is real tribulation. But when there is an accumulation of bitter and painful things, how much greater the sorrow! Sometimes there will be troubles in connection with sons and daughters, and an aged saint may say, as he steps over the threshold of his house: "I shall soon be gone, and I have to say with David, 'My house is not so with God'." And he may ask:

"And must it, Lord, be so?
And must Thy children bear
Such various kinds of woe,
Such soul-perplexing fear?

Are these the blessings we expect?

Is this the lot of God's elect?"

Yes, it is the ordained lot which God has laid down for His people. And I believe, dear friends, with all my heart - am obliged to believe it from my own experience - that God makes the latter days of His saints to be His time for settling a good many controversies (Hosea xii.2). What I mean is this: the Lord makes His dear people go over the whole of their lives; He brings to remembrance their past years - particularly their past years in a profession of the Lord Jesus Christ. He shows them what very great sinners they have been. That is what I have found, and still find, God to be doing with me. Now I speak honestly to you, and I assure you, in a most solemn way, that my God has most wonderfully made me to see what a very great sinner I have been. He shows me how I have departed from Him under a profession of His blessed name, how untowardly I have walked before Him, how I have slighted His gracious goodness and His lovingkindness. And sometimes, as a result of this (not always, blessed be His name!), I have had darkness of mind, a sense of God's displeasure, overshadowing of fear lest one should not be right - all of which, I am persuaded, come upon many of the children of God in their latter days.

"If thou turn to the Lord thy God, and shalt be obedient unto His voice; (for the Lord thy God is a merciful God;) He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them." God will not leave it to us whether we will turn to Him or not - that is not the way of His dealings with His people in His covenant. For He says: "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer.xxxi.33). This law is not the law of Sinai, but the law of the new covenant of mercy. Here is our relief: if in our afflictions, trials, and temptations - let them be what they may - we turn to the Lord our God, we shall prove that He is a sin-forgiving God. I have proved this even in the last week.

In some particularly heavy trials, I have lately felt a great reliance upon the mercy of God. I have felt Christ Himself to be such a blessed reality in His promise that I have been enabled to believe that when, by death, I step out of this world, I shall step out of all tribulation, pain, trial, temptation, and affliction. I have also said, when upon my knees before God: "Lord, it is not only my anticipation of heaven, and thus getting out of all trouble, that makes it so lovely and sweet; but I shall get away from sin, and I shall see Thy dear face and hear Thy voice, behold Thee in

Thy brightness and praise Thee in Thy matchless glory." So that I shall not only escape from everything that weighs upon my spirit and depresses me, but it will be a stepping into that holy place where sin will no more defile.

All this arises from the mediation, the intercession, the substitutionary work of Christ. The words, "the Lord thy God," could never have been spoken but for the intercession of Christ. We need that intercession just as much as His death. Without His death we could never have been saved; without His intercession we should never have had anything to do with mercy. God is such a holy God that He would never have suffered the high priest to come into His presence had it not been for the Mediator. Under the Levitical dispensation the incense burned by the high priest was kindled by a live coal from the brazen altar; and it was one of the greatest sins under heaven to burn that incense with strange fire - that is, fire not brought from the brazen altar to ignite the incense. You know how the awful judgment of God fell upon Nadab and Abihu for that very sin (Lev.x.1; xvi.12,13).

Now the spiritual truth of all this is that the atonement of our blessed Christ is the basis of His intercession. It is His own immutable work - His death, His resurrection, His infinite merit - and the promise of the Father to Him, by virtue of which He intercedes for all "that come unto God by Him" (Heb.vii.25). Real believers have a title to heaven by His intercession, who merited heaven for them. You do not deserve heaven, pardon, salvation! I deeply feel that I do not deserve salvation, but I believe that my precious Christ has deserved pardon and salvation for me. By His intercession He secures heaven unto His people. By His death He has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; and by His intercession He keeps that door open for every real believer - for the very weakest, poorest, most doubting, fearing child of God, as well as for the strongest believer. Every sinner that is saved by the grace of God may enter there.

And let me say this. Though I touch upon it, some will scarcely understand or be exercised about it. All the affairs of God's providence in the world, as well as all His pardoning mercy to the church, are carried on every day by the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ at the right hand of God. Kings ascend their thrones. What for? Their own glory! Politicians speak. What for? For the most part, to receive praise. Judicious statesmen devise plans for the progress, prosperity, upholding, and influence of the nations. Other great men of

note - philosophers, astronomers, and what not - work out their problems and schemes. Kings, politicians, statesmen, philosophers altogether are just working out the great purposes of God, and nothing less - the great purposes of this Intercessor at the right hand of God. Yes, my dear friends, in divine providence Christ intercedes for the whole world. He says: "By Me kings reign, and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule, and nobles, even all the judges of the earth;" He gives "to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment" (Prov.viii.16,29). "He turneth rivers into a wilderness" (Psa.cvii.33). He creates and He destroys; He kills, and He makes alive (Gen.vi.7; Deut.xxxii.39).

He is the God of all grace, patience, and longsuffering. Had it not been for Christ's intercession, the cumberer of the ground here in God's church would have been long ago cut down. "Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" But the Intercessor says: "Let it alone this year also" (Luke xiii.7.8). Otherwise the careless, thoughtless, wretched, hell-deserving sinner would never have been suffered of God to live for so many years. And what thousands and tens of thousands of ungodly sinners have lived, and are now living, in all the pernicious vices and wicked ways pleasing to their natural condition! This would never have been borne by the great and holy God of heaven were it not for the intercession of Christ, by virtue of which "the heavens and the earth, which are now,... are kept in store, reserved into fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (II Pet.iii.7).

And, as for God's children - so long as they are encompassed with infirmities, defiled in different ways in their conscience, forgetful of God, backsliding in secret in spirit, so provoking in a multitude of ways to the Holy Spirit - there must be a secret somewhere as to why the Holy God bears with all this. That secret is the intercession of Christ.

When we consider the coldness and lukewarmness, yielding to the flesh, slighting the means of grace; so little zeal, love, and faith amongst us in these days, and so little real wrestling prayer with God for the prosperity of His church, so much indolence - it must be grieving to God. He would have removed the "candlestick out of his place" and spued us out of His mouth (Rev.ii.5, iii.16) had it not been for the love and mercy issuing forth from the intercession of Christ.

One important result of Christ's death, resurrection, and intercession is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ said to His disciples before He ascended: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever" (John xiv.16). What a mercy that, when the Spirit takes possession of the heart, He never goes away! You may lose your sense of the Spirit's indwelling, but the Spirit never departs when once He has taken possession of the heart. And, my dear friends, I feel to want a righteousness within me as well as a righteousness without me. The righteousness without me (the imputed righteousness of Christ) is my title to heaven, but the righteousness within me is my fitness for heaven. Christ intercedes in heaven that we may have this inwrought righteousness of the Spirit. I believe there are many who are sure about the imputed righteousness of Christ, but very few who are confident with regard to the inward witness. Can you sometimes say: "Blessed God, I have the witness here"? "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (I John v.10).

"If thou turn to the Lord thy God." Poor, fearful child of God, - poor, backsliding sinner - if you have a real, God-wrought faith in your heart, it will cause you to turn unto God in Christ, a pacified God, a covenant God, a Father - that God who is unchangeable and rests in His love in Christ.

In conclusion, just take these three points, which are of vast importance:-

1. The need of turning. - There is need of our turning every day to the Lord, by His help. No matter how or what we may feel, how dark our minds may be, what the devil may suggest, how unbelief may rise up, - how we need the grace of God every day to be turning to the Lord.

2. The need of God-given faith. - You cannot exercise faith unless God has produced it in your heart. You cannot produce it. I never contend for such a thing; I dare not. "Faith is the gift of God" (Eph.ii.8). I want my God to work faith in my heart, so as to be relying and hanging upon His blessed promises. "He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee." Oh, what a blessed promise is this! "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psa.ciii.10). He will bring you to say with Jeremiah, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam.iii.22).

"Nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which He swore unto them." "Oh," says the child of God (like the Psalmist): "Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for

for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" "Wilt Thou hide Thyself for ever? (Psa.lxxvii.8,9; lxxxix.46). This is the self-reasoning and infirmity of the child of God. It is not the truth; it is what the devil and your unbelieving heart say. Therefore you need God's help to shut your ears against all that sort of thing. Blessed be His dear name, He does sometimes help me to shut my ears against voices of that kind; and that is a mercy.

3. Great encouragement. - We have wonderful encouragement - in all our tribulation and under all the things which come upon us - to turn unto the Lord our God. Why will not the Lord forsake, destroy, nor forget? "For the Lord thy God is a merciful God." It is just as though He should say: "Poor sinner, were it not for that propitiation which has been made on your behalf, my majesty would burn you up like a bundle of faggots in a blazing furnace. Were it not that my just wrath has been appeased, I would not suffer you to speak to me. It was my act in choosing you, loving you, giving my Son to you. It is true that I am a great God, and that My 'greatness is unsearchable' (Psa.cxliv.3). You would never have known what it is but for that propitiation. My glory is enough to strike terror into you, but to Me you are now 'the excellent, in whom is all my delight' (Psa.xvi.3). Therefore be not afraid; I am thy God, thy covenant God; though many things have come upon you in your latter days because of My controversy with you, yet, poor sinner, you may come to Me. I love to hear you knock (Song ii.14); I love to hear you groan (Psa.xii.5), I love to see your proud spirit brought down as the result of sanctified affliction (Psa.xviii.27). Therefore, don't be afraid, poor sinner. I will never destroy thee, never cast thee to hell, never leave thee in bondage, never suffer my wrath to take hold of thee; but thou shalt obtain salvation by Jesus Christ (I Thess.v.9)."

The Lord, then, give us comfort in His own truth; and may we exalt and praise and bless Him as the Lord God of our salvation both now and for ever! Amen.