

1237

LaH 373

Text: "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers."
(Isa.xxx.20).

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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

Those of you who are God's living children have been feeding upon this particular bread, drinking this water, ever since you have known the Lord, whether you have realized it or not. Christ said to His disciples on one occasion: "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John iv.32); so God's poor tried people may truly say the same about their affliction, for all men, natural men as well as others, are "born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward" (Job.v.7). The trials of the saints are peculiar to them as saints. They are never known to the natural man as they are to the saints themselves. The natural man may be passing through some very trying circumstances: it may be death in the family or personal bodily affliction; it may be precisely the same kind of trial as that through which the saint is passing; and yet to the natural man that trial would not be the same as it would be to a child of God. The child of God would feel it in a way which a natural man could not. So that, with God's dear people, their inward conflicts, the temptations which come upon them as a consequence of their trials, the sighs, cries, and groans which come out of their poor hearts are the very bread of adversity and the water of affliction. The natural man knows nothing about this. This is God's own bread and His own water which He prepares especially for His own people. Christ said to the apostle John: "Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth... and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey" (Rev.x.8,9).

Just as when you and I have sometimes read the obituaries and experiences of the Lord's servants and people, and have had a very precious time through the Lord's goodness. I have known this frequently in the course of my pilgrimage. It flashes upon my mind now that in the earlier days of my ministry, when I was living at Plymouth, I went home one Sunday evening after preaching feeling very low, greatly depressed, very desponding. I had felt nothing for my own soul's comfort during the day; I was writing bitter things against myself. I sat down and read through Toplady's diary, and read it with a great deal of feeling, very much softening of spirit. And when I came to that part of the diary which gives an account of Toplady's last moments - the ecstasy of soul he was in, the inexpressible joy

which rose up in his heart and filled his soul, and his utterances with reference to the truth of God - I was completely broken down. It was a time I have never been able to forget. I felt in such a blessed way the distinguishing truth of God which that man had so ably defended, and realized such a sweet confidence in my heart that I knew that truth savingly for myself, that it was one of the sweetest times which God gave me in those early days of my ministry. Now that, like other things, has often been very pleasant to me to talk about. So, when you have sometimes read the experiences of God's people, and then have had a pleasant conversation with the Lord's children about what you have read, how you enjoyed the book and what you felt, that has been very sweet in the mouth - it has been sweet to talk about. But when brought into some of their paths, and made to taste a little of some of their bitter cups, and to tread their path of tribulation, then these things have been bitter in the belly. Christ said to John: "It shall make thy belly bitter," though it was sweet in his mouth. When the Lord is with us, it will at times be sweet as honey to talk about; but, as soon as we have to leave off talking about it and step into that good man's path of trial, into his furnace, to be tempted with some of that good man's temptations, and to be left to battle with the powers of darkness which so assailed him, it will make the belly very bitter. Now some of you here know what this means. You well understand the difference between merely talking about the ways and dealings of God with others and being brought into those ways and under those dealings for yourselves.

There are four points which seem to be prominent in the text, and upon which, with the Lord's help, I will make some observations.

- I. This bread of adversity and water of affliction.
- II. Why is it that God's dear people should have so much of this bread and this water during their pilgrimage in this world?
- III. The use of this bread and of this water.
- IV. God's promise for the comfort of His people: "Thy teachers shall not be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers."

I. The bread of adversity and the water of affliction. And here it may be well to give the strict and literal sense of these expressions, because a mistake is often made, as I think, by taking them metaphorically, as though intended to set forth something else. I do not say that the portion would not admit of that view; at the same time, that is not the view which I myself take. By the bread of adversity I understand the words

to mean literal bread - just the kind of bread that you have had this morning for breakfast. That bread, being eaten in very adverse circumstances, in times of great calamity, depression, and pinching want, will be the bread of affliction. And if the price of coal continues to rise as the prices have been going up for the last two or three weeks, there are thousands of poor creatures who will sit down and find their bread and their water to be the bread of adversity and the water of affliction. So by the water of affliction I understand literal water, but that water being drunk in times of great sorrow, affliction, persecution, and oppression. For instance, how wonderfully true it was of the Jews, to whom this prophecy so much refers as a nation and as the people of God - during their different troubles, calamities, and times of national pestilences, famines, and other great distresses - that they had, sometimes through long periods, to go on eating the bread of adversity and drinking the water of affliction! Not more true was it of the Jews than it has been of the church and people of God during the persecuting times since the gospel dispensation first dawned upon the world. What bloody enactments have been passed, what barbarities have been inflicted upon the saints of God! What a glare of faggot and fire for no other purpose but to burn them! What a flashing of sword to slay them, what instruments of cruelty have been used, and what real eating of the bread of adversity! It is truly awful to think of. No more literally true has it been first of the Jews as a nation, and then of the church of God as a body, than it is true spiritually at this day with His poor tried and afflicted people.

Naturally speaking, this is not a persecuting day, it is a wonderful day for profession, and it is a wonderful day for hypocrites. Some may exclaim, "Don't say that!" That is what I do say. This is a day for that character which Bunyan describes as Mr. Talkative. Jesus said: "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt.xxii.14). It is your mercy if you are amongst the chosen. God's real people have such trials and afflictions, such burdens and sorrows, such conflicts and difficulties; they meet with such adverse things in the world, they often have such bitter cups to drink, they have such paths of trial in their experience - that the very bread they eat will often be the bread of adversity and the water they drink the water of affliction. Some of us here know what this has been - sometimes from providential trials, sometimes from deep, acute, soul-piercing domestic affliction, sometimes from terrible temptations, sometimes from great darkness and great fear of being deceived and not being right with God. I have often sat down at the table feeling no appetite and as though I could not eat a morsel. What little I have eaten has been real bread of adversity, and

every drop of water has been the water of affliction. Some of you here know what I am talking about.

II. Now, why should God's dear people have so much of this bread and water? I met a dear child of God only yesterday, who told me that both his wife and daughter are now in the asylum. He asked me a plain question: "What do you think of such a profound mystery?" Poor man, he was indeed deeply wounded. What a mystery! How is it, then, that God's people should have so much of this bread and water? Am I going to stand in your pulpit to reflect upon my God - to attribute mistakes to Him, to bring His wisdom to the bar of my judgment? No; He has answered the question. It is because the Lord gives it to us. We should never accept of such a portion at the hands of man. But the Lord gives it; and what the Lord gives, He enables His children to take. What the Lord makes crooked we cannot make straight (Eccles.vii.13); and what the Lord makes straight we cannot make crooked. We cannot "make one hair white or black" (Matt.v.36). All those calamities which came upon the Jews, and all the persecuting times which have come upon God's church from the beginning of her existence in the world down to the present time, were all stored up in the womb of Divine Providence. God empties no vials of His wrath upon the nations, and He pours down no fatherly chastisement upon His church, but such as were prepared and fixed beforehand for them. Do you believe that? I firmly believe it, and what God prepares and fixes is always according to His wisdom. I believe this, though my carnal nature sometimes goes against it. God never gives too little or too much trouble. He gives what in His wisdom He considers best for His people. Why it is that some of His children have so much anxiety and such troublous paths, and others have so little, I cannot pretend to explain, and I am not called upon to explain it. I have many times looked upon some of God's dear people and have said to myself: "How very little trouble that good man has, so far as I can see! What a comparatively smooth path!" I have looked at others and thought: "Poor things, they are almost drowned in sorrow!" They are like that man who spoke to me yesterday. You will never be able to explain it. All God's people have just what He gives - no more, no less - and no mortal can make it less or more. This is all I need say upon this point, because I want to meet this question and nothing more: How is it that God's people have so much trouble, so many trials, and such a bewildering path? Just because God says they shall; He has ordained that it should be so. The Lord knew before I was born how much ballast I should need to subdue my pride, and to keep me fixed on His truth. God knew what trials, what losses and crosses, what ups and downs would be for

your good from the beginning to the end of your spiritual life. Trials come from God. "Affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground" (Job.v.6). Here, then, is the reason of our many trials and afflictions.

III. Now, then, the use of this bread of adversity and this water of affliction. One great use is that it prepares the people of God for the proper reception of the gospel - not merely hearing it. There is not much in that unless it is received in the power of the Spirit into the heart. As being stripped of our filthy rags of creature righteousness prepares us for the righteousness of Christ; as condemnation wrought by the Spirit through an application of the law to the conscience, prepares for a sense of pardon; as wounding under God's hand prepares for healing; as humbling prepares for exaltation - so this bread of adversity and this water of affliction prepare God's people to hear His ministers. An experimental minister and an experimental people are well matched; a tried people and a tried minister go on well together in the worship of God. John the Baptist's work was to "prepare the way of the Lord" (Matt.iii.3), and it is a blessed thing when people are prepared for the preaching of the word. And how are they prepared? What brings you here from time to time, you that come as really hungry souls - not merely from your house, but from your knees, after having said something like this: "Lord, do be with Thy servant to-day; do speak a word into my heart. Thou knowest what temptations I have had during the week, what a state I seem to have got into - so hard, cold, and indifferent. I do not feel this morning as if there will be anything for me. Lord, do grant that there may be something in the ministry this day that will be for my soul's good." That is what I call being prepared for the Lord, chastened under the hand of God; exercised from day to day in a spiritual way. This is not walking in carnal security and coming to the assembly merely according to habit and custom, but it is coming with a feeling that you really do long for the gospel of God's grace, and that it may be heard by you "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (I Thess.i.5). Here is the use of this bread and this water. God gives grace, and He gives comfort. He is the God of comfort; and, when He gives a promise, He drops it into the heart. I believe that just as much as I believe that He gives this bread of adversity and this water of affliction. It would greatly help us if the Lord would enable us really to believe that and thus to look upon the different trials, as they come - to look upon all the crosses in providence, all our temptations, every rugged path, every stripping process, and to be able to say, with a gracious

feeling: "This is just what my gracious God sees fit to give me. He knows what I am and what I need. The Lord has not appointed me to wrath, but to obtain salvation (I Thess.v.9). These thorns in the flesh are not marks of reprobation; they are marks of fatherly chastisement" (Heb.xii.6). We all need to be thus brought low, stripped, and humbled. We all need to be crucified, for in our flesh are all the vanities of time and sense. We all need to be brought into such experiences, so as to feel what a sin-afflicted world this is, and be made to say from our hearts: we "would not live away" (Job vii.16); for, left to ourselves, we should be full of the world and should care nothing about God, His grace, or His gospel. Here is the use of this bread and this water.

IV. God's promise for the comfort of His people: "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers." Now if the minister who stands in this pulpit - and no matter who it may be, whether a young man or an old one - if he is a real sent servant of God, a tried man, an experimental minister, and you are not a tried people, the minister will be hid in a corner; you will not see him spiritually. But if you are tried as the minister is; if you have similar temptations and fears, and if you have to drink similar bitter cups; if you have to tread a path of sorrow resembling his, if you are exercised in your soul as he is - then there will be times when you will say: "Blessed be God! Our teacher, our minister, has not been hid in a corner; I saw him with both my eyes." You will say: "He is walking about in the experiences of my soul, going into my paths, my difficulties, my sorrows, telling me there must be conflicts; his case answers to mine. He knows where I have been, what I have to contend with; he has the same devil that I have to meet; he has trodden the same rough way as I have." He will not be hid in a corner. And it is very blessed when this takes place. It has sometimes taken place in my own soul. I love to have an opportunity of hearing the servants of God, though I get few such opportunities now. I have now and then sat hearing them, and they have been so led into my path, the power of God going forth with the word, that it has had an uplifting effect upon my heart. I will just relate one time only, which took place in the early part of my ministry. I had been in a very desponding state in regard to my preaching. Some weeks before I had resolved to give it all up. To tell you the truth, I used to wish from the bottom of my heart, time after time, that the next Lord's Day might be the last. Then the Lord would sometimes very much help me and give me a great deal of comfort;

after such an occasion I would make more engagements. I used to say: "Ah, poor foolish young man! I have broken my resolve." Then I used to despond again, and I began to carry out my resolve by saying, in answer to one invitation after another: "No, I am going to give it up." After all this I heard Mr. Kershaw. He went into all my difficulties and fears, touched upon my case very blessedly, and said something like this: "Now if there is any young man here this morning that has been exercised, tempted, and tried about preaching the gospel in the way I have been describing, let that young man take comfort. God will teach him." I then saw my teacher. I saw him as the servant of the Most High God. I felt like the woman of Samaria, who saw Christ and went to her own people, and said: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did" (John iv.29). It is this which makes the gospel such a blessing to tried and exercised people. "And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers."
