

ENCOURAGEMENT TO DISCIPLES

SERMON preached by Mr. H. Dawson at Union Chapel, Bethersden, on Sunday afternoon, January 4th, 1959.

Acts. 14:22. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

As you think of a word like this, and the announcement of it as a subject for the preacher to attempt to preach from, you will find there is something alluring in what it proclaims. "Confirming the souls of the disciples." If you weigh up what you come for, if you come to worship God aright, as many of you do, you come to get something for your soul which will confirm you that you are one with God and with His people; you do desire to be confirmed that you are a disciple indeed. A disciple, as you all know, is a learner, and if you and I are taught of God, as long as we live that will be characteristic of us, a learner.

I want, as the Lord shall help me, to look at this subject from three viewpoints. "Confirming the souls of the disciples;" the first viewpoint is Confirmation. "And exhorting them to continue in the faith;" the second viewpoint is Continuation. "And that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God;" the third viewpoint is Consideration. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Our religion, if it is that which is of God, must be fire-tried to make it manifest that it is fire-proof - remember that. The dear Saviour said to His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but, be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." And now, in approaching the subject from those three viewpoints as I have announced, it might be helpful to look just a little at the setting of it, because it is

very suggestive and instructive. You will find - I will not take up time in going into the details - that the Apostle Paul and Barnabas had been much helped of God in preaching the Gospel in their journeying, and the Gospel had indeed been crowned with good success. Many signs had followed, and this the devil became aware of, and he set up much opposition to the Apostles in preaching the Gospel and sought to undermine their influence in doing it. He stirred up the ungodly to become persecutors, and so, in the immediate context, you will read, "And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing him to have been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe." (Acts 14.19,20). You get a wonderful opening up of the worth of so-called popular opinion. The apostle Paul had wrought a miracle when he was at Lystra, and the people were so stirred up that they thought he and Barnabas were gods in the likeness of men, and they cried, "Hosanna"; but when these certain Jews came from Antioch, oh, they easily persuaded the people to think otherwise, and instead of crying, "Hosanna", they cried out, "Crucify", and so the Apostle Paul was stoned outside the gates of Lystra. The disciples supposed that he was dead, but he was unconscious; he was battered about very sadly, and his suffering must have been great to have brought him to such a plight, but you will find, if you look into the second Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 12, that he tells us what was going on between God and his soul when the disciples supposed that he was dead. In his soul's experience he was just outside the gates of heaven, entering into most blissful and blessed knowledge in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, and then God evidently wrought a miracle on his behalf, for as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city. As I read this context, thinking about this being the subject on my mind to bring before you, I felt that there is something very alluring, very admirable, how the Apostles went about preaching

the Gospel in Apostolic times. How evident it is that they were energised by God in that which they did in going here and there preaching the Gospel of His grace. And the Apostle Paul, as soon as he was raised up again and given a measure of strength, returned into Lystra, and it must have been a wonderful witness to those disciples who stood round about him as to the reality there is in that religion which is of God, and the grace of God which is revealed in the Gospel. And then, "when they had preached the Gospel to that city and had taught many, (margin, had made many disciples) they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch." Here is the setting forth of what must ever be the essence of preaching the Gospel. You must look for this whenever you hear the Gospel preached, whoever the preacher is, there must be some of these characteristics about the man's ministry to make it plain that he is one sent with Divine Authority, and he has "Thus saith the Lord" for being on Zion's walls. When the Gospel is preached in the power of Him, Whose Gospel it is, it will be "confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Now that is the setting of the subject.

The first viewpoint, I said, was Confirmation. "Confirming the souls of the disciples." As you come, week in, week out, to hear the Gospel, or wherever you are found under the Gospel, if you are in the attitude of worship aright, you want your soul confirmed in some especial matter to do with you and your soul's good. Some of you want to be confirmed in your souls that you are disciples; oh, you do want to be, and sometimes you hope that you are, but you ebb and flow in your feelings; you have ifs and buts and hows alternate rising, and you cannot always feel as you would like to feel that you are a disciple; but whenever you are found under the Gospel and listening to it, if you are exercised aright, you are concerned to be confirmed in your soul with yet another token for good, somewhat of the favour God bears unto His people. "Confirming the souls of the disciples." You want to be

confirmed, it may be - I just touch on some few things wherein disciples need to be and desire to be confirmed - of your own interest in the things of God. One thing you will realise, if you are indeed exercised unto godliness, that you can have to do with the things of God, and yet the things of God do not have to do with you. What I mean is this: you can sing about the things of God, read about the things of God, hear about the things of God, even speak about the things of God as to the doctrine thereof, but, when all is said and done, "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God". The Word of God speaks about being nigh unto the kingdom of God, but that is not being in it. There are some Scriptures that, as you grow older, search you very solemnly. I can assure you, as you go down into life's evening time, and you know that the grave is not so far off, that it narrows things down in your soul's exercises, and you well know:

"Jesus is the One Thing needful,
I without Him perish must,
Gracious Spirit, make me heedful,
Help me in His Name to trust,
And with pleasure,
In Him as my Portion boast."

In your own interest in the things of God, you desire out of the abundance of the heart for the mouth to speak. You will think:

"A solemn thing a saint to appear,
Grow up with wheat and be a tare."

You will ponder that Scripture: "There is a way that seemeth to be right unto a man but the end thereof is the way of death." There is a Scripture, I have looked at once or twice, thinking I would try to preach from it, but as yet I have not ventured to do so. If I told you why I have not ventured to do so, it was because I did not want to make the heart of the righteous sad in attempting to do it. I should have to preach from it if it was especially laid on my mind, but my concern, my desire is that you might be confirmed as disciples, and that you might be comforted and I would not, as grace is given me, cut any of you off. This is the Word, - a very searching Word

it is - "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." (Matt.13.12)
"Whosoever hath not", - has a place where he sits, week in and week out, as a chapel-goer, but that which he seems to have, being a chapel-goer, will be taken away; he must have something inside; yes, he must have the good work begun which the Holy Ghost alone can begin, and so you will be concerned that you may be confirmed that you are a disciple. Good it will be to look within and to weigh matters up:-

"How stands the case, my soul, with thee,
For heaven are thy credential clear?"

"Confirming the souls of the disciples." As a disciple you will want to be confirmed with an assurance that Jesus Christ died for you. Spoken of in the Word of God as "assurance of hope". The Puritans say much about "assurance of faith", and I want you ever to remember that there is this great mercy made known to disciples - assurance that Jesus Christ died in their stead, and you will not know happiness in your soul's experience in the fulness of it until you can say: "Jesus, I know, has died for me." "For me, O miracle of grace, for me the Saviour bled." You and I need our souls to be confirmed in that blessed, wondrous assurance. I have thought of one word of the Lord Jesus at times: "Ask, that your joy may be full." "And he that hath the Son hath the witness in himself." It is what some of you have longed for:-

"Assure my conscience of her part,
In the Redeemer's blood,
And bear the witness with my heart,
That I am born of God."

"Confirming the souls of the disciples." There is also a confirming of the souls of the disciples when they are given the spirit of adoption whereby they cry: "Abba, Father." A wonderful privilege, some of us have known the mercy of it, and the wonder too. "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name." Oh,

but some of you will be saying:-

"My God, my Father, blissful Name,
Oh, may I call Thee mine,
May I with sweet assurance claim,
A Portion so divine."

How you long for your soul to be confirmed in that sweet, blessed spirit of adoption. "The Spirit itself heareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom.8.16) You will need your soul to be confirmed that the way you go is the right way. It is a wonderful mercy to be led forth by the right way, and as you journey along it you will see the hand of God upon you for good in it; you will have waymarks to set up along side it; you will have Ebenezers to raise, and that will confirm you that the way you are in is the right way and that the Lord of Hosts is with you, yea, "Emmanuel, God with us". Not only so - I can only give you hints - you need your soul to be confirmed as to what the will of God is for you to do and to be. Much the Word of God says about the will of God, and there are some outstanding Scriptures, and one is: "This is the will of God, your sanctification." What does that mean? It means that your life is arranged by God, with Whom you have to do, that you shall be set apart for God; and that you should be shut up for God, and live unto God - for God, as I said.

"This prayer and this ambition mine,
Living and dying, to be Thine."

You desire to know what the will of God is in some especial matters, it may be, and you need your soul to be confirmed therein; you want to hear the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, as it was with the Psalmist long ago, to know when it was the will of God for him to make a move at the right time. The will of God revealed. As a disciple you need to see the cloud moving on ahead of you that you might go into a proper resting place, as you read in the Old Testament early on: "The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord of the whole earth went forth a three days journey to seek out a resting place for them," (Num.10.33) and that is how you are confirmed in your soul as to the will of God, and led forth by the right way. Much might be

said under that heading. "Confirming the souls of the disciples." One thing that is especially confirming is when you get answers to prayer. Remember godly Hannah: "For this child I prayed, and his name is Samuel," asked of God. Godly Joseph Hart says :-

"That Christ is God, I can avouch,
And for His people cares,
Since I have prayed to Him as such,
And He has heard my prayers."

Every answer to prayer is a sweet confirmation that you are a disciple, yea, a disciple indeed. "Blessed be God, for He hath heard my prayer, nor turned away His mercy from me." And I might amplify this, and look just a little longer at it from this viewpoint of confirmation. As a rule, you will get your souls confirmed in the means of grace, public or private, remember that. "In all places where I record My Name, there will I come and bless thee." And you will find sometimes, when you are in the attitude of worship, as you are, when you are singing the songs of Zion, you will find that you can sing praises with an understanding heart because you and the hymnwriter walk in agreement in the things which you sing about, and that is confirming to your soul - bespeaks you to be a disciple. Sometimes when you read the Word of God, you will find the truth set forth therein is like a mirror to reflect what you hope you have tasted, handled and felt of the good word of life, and you can declare: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path", and you are confirmed thereby in your soul as being a disciple. When sometimes you get help to pray, and you can declare with Asaph: "It is good for me to draw near to God", oh, that is a sweet confirmation.

"A little talk with Jesus,
How it smooths life's rugged road,
How it cheers and helps me onward
When I faint beneath my load."

When, under the Gospel, you get your soul confirmed, you can say then: "The watchmen that go about the city, they found me." What you have felt within is set before you in the Gospel as the preacher unfolds it, and yet the preacher knows nothing about you or your case, but it is the preacher's Master Who knows all about you, poor sinner, and thus your soul is confirmed in being a disciple indeed. "Confirming the souls of the disciples." I might add that when you can speak to one another about the things of God, it often proves very confirming to a sinner's soul, when you can have fellowship in the Gospel:

"Saints' fellowship, if it be managed well,
Will keep the saints awake,
And that in spite of hell."

"As in water,
face answereth unto face, so does the heart of man to man." Much might be said as to how this confirmation is known in the souls of the disciples in a right use, a godly exercise in the means of grace, in public and in private too, but I must look now at the subject from the second viewpoint of it.

"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith." There must be Continuation. You will remember there were those who set out to be disciples as the dear Saviour preached His Gospel, as He alone could preach it. When He laid the axe, as He did, at the root of freewill, and He declared: "It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing," (John 6. 63) The Word of God says: "From that many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him." "Then said Jesus to His Own disciples: "Will ye also go away?" And Peter had an answer, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth was speaking: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." (John 6.68.69) The saviour said: "If ye continue in My

words, then are ye My disciples indeed " (John 8.31) There must be continuation. "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." (Matt.10.22) And now, in preaching the Gospel, there will not only be this confirmation I have just hinted at a little, there must be exhortation; and my mind has often been troubled because I fear that many people do not like exhortation under the Gospel, and yet every man whom God sends to preach has got to do it as grace is given. "Exhorting them to continue in the faith." To continue in "the faith" means the doctrine set forth in the Word of God: "Ye should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints," (Jude 3) there will be no additions to it, nor will anything be taken from it, as long as time shall be. God has laid down in the Word of His grace, sound doctrine, issuing in a gracious experience, and being made known in a corresponding practice in our lips and lives. It will be good for you to heed exhortations, and what a needs be there is to continue in the faith. Oh, we do not want to be like those Hebrews of whom the Apostle Paul says: "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition," but we desire to belong to "them which believe to the saving of the soul." (Heb.10.39) How often some of you have tried to plead with God with Whom you have to do:

"Lord, hast Thou made me know Thy ways? -
Conduct me in Thy fear;
And grant me such supplies of grace
That I may persevere."

"Exhorting them to continue in the faith." What does that mean - apart from continuing in the doctrine of it? If you and I are taught of God, we have just the same faith wrought in our souls that was wrought in all the pilgrims of olden times, from Adam's day onward, even unto this. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8.32). "They shall be all taught of God." To continue in the faith will sometimes mean that you hope against hope. You cannot always feel that you have a "good hope through grace",

still less to feel you have got what the hymnwriter terms "thrice comfortable hope". Sometimes you continue, and it is to hope against hope, and yet, underneath it all, you continue to believe in God, and you know: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4.12) Some of you this Sabbath, as you are here, may be in a cast down state, but you are still believers; you are here with a hope in God, though it may be you are hoping against hope. Something is saying:

"Though by my sins deserving hell,
I'll not despair, for who can tell."

You are continuing in the faith. As I judge, "exhorting them to continue in the faith" means to continue in a profession of it. To

"Hoard up the Sacred Word,
And feed thereon and grow;
Go on to seek to know the Lord,
And practise what you know."

And then, to continue in the faith will mean to continue in the simplicity of it, which is not easy for a preacher to explain, and yet, it is just this: "To Whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." (1 Peter 2.4) "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6.37).

In these tremendous times in which you and I are living, there is such a solemn needs be that all disciples indeed should be concerned every day, all day, to continue in the faith, and show Whose they are and Whom they serve. "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world." (Phil.2.15) "And exhorting them to continue in the faith", - continue in the profession of it, continue in the practice of it, continue, I say, in the

simplicity of it.

There is the third viewpoint, which I touched on, Consideration. "We must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God." God has laid this truth down, and it will not be abrogated or altered; each one, every one, who is a disciple indeed, must go through much tribulation to enter aright into the church of Christ on earth, and possess a proper knowledge of the things of God whereby "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth may speak". Much tribulation. I have no time to go into the details of the tribulation. It may be God will lay affliction upon you, and that will be to you much tribulation, and you will need Divine Aid to bear it aright, and get some good for your soul. It may be adverse circumstances are allowed to arrive, or sometimes God sees fit that poor sinners, taught of God, are persecuted for righteousness' sake. The Psalmist says: "Thou hast caused men to ride over our head", and that is much tribulation. It will be from within, and from without. Sometimes it will arise from earth, or hell without, and oft times it will arise within as you realise what you are by nature, and the discipline that you need that it shall be kept in check that it does not bubble up and bubble over. You cannot escape this much tribulation. "This is the way, walk ye in it." "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord", and it will always be through much tribulation. "The kingdom of God" refers to the church of Christ. You will remember that the Saviour said: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation" - margin reading: "is not outside show". "The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power." "The kingdom of God is within you." It is a kingdom set up in a sinners heart, and one hymnwriter says - oh, can you say "Amen" to his petition:-

"Thou my dross and tin consume,
Let Thy inward kingdom come."

Sometimes in the midst of much tribulation, grace does superabound in a poor sinners' heart over all that one is by nature, and brings one into a right mind, and a right apprehension of the needs be of it, and then there is a confession:-

"Let cares like a wild deluge come,
Let storms of trouble fall;
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my heaven, my All."

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." At the end of life's journey, there will be an entering into the kingdom of God on high. Godly John saw the redeemed in the realms of bliss, and it was made plain: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb." (Rev.7.13) Much might be said along that line of thought. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." This tribulation is likened at times to the furnace where the goldsmith sits by with the gold in the crucible. The furnace is heated until the goldsmith can see his own likeness reflected in the crucible itself, and when he can do so, then the metal is at the right heat for him to do what is in his mind to do with it. And so in much tribulation that you must enter into, poor sinner, you must know something of being conformed to the image of the Son of God therein.

"As the image in the glass
Answers the beholder's face;
Thus unto my heart appear,
Print Thine Own Resemblance there."

Much tribulation

There is also this thought about it:-

"God sendeth sun, He sendeth shower,
Alike are needful for the flower;
And joy and tears alike are sent,
To give our souls fit nourishment."

Sometimes tribulation is like that in our soul's experience. "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." And now, whatever tribulation God has ordained for you to enter into in journeying through life, if you have the great mercy to be a disciple indeed, when you go down into Jordan's swelling, and in heaven's own light, you can see the way that God has led you along, and as you find the bottom to be good, and realise you have got some religion to die by, whatever tribulation you have had to go through in life's journey, you will say: "Right is the pathway leading to this." "He hath done all things well."

Amen.