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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves  
at "Ebenezer" Clapham  
on Sunday evening 12.8.51

Hymns: 176, 77, 758      Reading: 1 Peter 4      Text: 1 Peter 1.6,7

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ"

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It must be remembered that the people to whom the Apostle Peter was writing were subjected to fiery trials, bitter persecutions, manifold temptations and sore afflictions. He writes therefore to encourage, comfort and strengthen them under those sufferings to which they were subjected on account of their profession of the Gospel. This is what he means where he says, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator". All sufferings for Christ's sake are according to the will of God and approved by Him. The Apostle distinguishes that kind of suffering from suffering the consequences of our evil deeds, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer" and so on. The Scriptures abundantly show that the life and walk of a believer following Christ is attended with a proportion of suffering. Hence, the apostle speaks, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you". He would say, do not be surprised at these manifold temptations, do not anticipate immunity from trial and suffering, seeing that the Lord Himself has said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation".

It is a believer's peculiar privilege and his mercy to have the Lord with him in his tribulations. This is that peculiar favour that He bestows upon His suffering followers which is their support in the deep waters. "When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee". This is an abiding joy and an occasion of great rejoicing. It is noticeable that the apostle would put the joy above the sorrow, rising far above all the heaviness and the manifold temptations, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice - greatly - though now for a season,

if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations". This greatly comes in the joy on the ground that believers in Jesus have to rejoice in Him notwithstanding all the temptations and all the afflictions.

There are these two opposite principles operative in a believer's experience, of sorrow and joy. It is not intended that it should be all joy here, neither is it all sorrow, but what a mercy if we are graciously led into some experience of both and to have sorrow for sin and joy in forgiveness; this joy in what God has done for His people in His alluring grace and in His sanctifying mercy, quickening grace and pardoning love. Actually every opening up of the truth of the Gospel in the soul is an occasion of holy joy. The Apostle Peter goes on to say concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable", not a little joy but great joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory. This is all in Christ though we have not seen Him. That is we have not seen Him with our mortal eyes, but hope that we have seen Him by faith, and every view we have of Jesus by faith will bring a proportion of this holy joy into our souls.

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season...." Now here is a distinction, "though now for a season". It is put very tenderly here by the apostle, "if need be" - "for a season". "Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations", that is as we understand it, temptations or afflictions, trials of many kinds. James says, "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations", but it needs much grace to walk that out. But I believe the Lord's people really know more of grief and sorrow than the world do, and they certainly know more of joy and happiness than the world do, for they have meat to eat of which the world does not know. If the Lord has ever blessed your poor soul would you change with the world for all that it would give? Would you sell your soul for some material advantage? Faith would say, no, no, none can compare with Him, none can compare with Jesus. If we have Him we have all things and abound. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season" - for a season - that is this temptation will last just as long as the Lord designs it should, and as long as He considers there is a need be. There are occasions when believers obtain great comfort from that consideration, because where this

"need be" is in the Lord's purpose we may always conclude that it is designed to work for good to us. There may be things that pain us here or grieve us, wound us, but the "need be" infers that there is a design in it, and so there is, and sometimes it has been very sweet to feel that particular point in your case. It can be as though the Lord were speaking in your heart, speaking comfortably even in the furnace, saying, Be still my child, be still, this is for a season. I have appointed the season and the need be. The apostle does not actually say there is a need be but, "if need be". There is a need be and it is a tender way of putting it, "if need be", as though he would say, 'the Lord considers that there is a need be for our good in this furnace'.

"Ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations", and O beloved hearers is not this a true word because they are so many and of such different kinds in your life - these manifold temptations. They can be altogether independent of any outward circumstances. You may have to walk under the Lord's silence which can be a heavy trial to a believer; or in some inward temptation which it may you would not like to express to another, but you walk in it and you walk in it for a season until the Lord delivers. I believe the Lord delivered me from a dreadful temptation when I was a young man walking in the street at Hove and that temptation never returned with the same force or in the same way - the Lord delivered me. "For a season". You may walk under certain temptations to infidelity for a season until the Lord appears in some way to disperse the flood of infidelity in the heart and bring you forth to the light of His grace and Gospel so that you cannot feel a doubt in your soul about the truth or about the Trinity or even your standing. O there is a marvellous rest when the Lord comes, but there must be a trial of faith and these manifold temptations are according to the word here, for the trial of our faith, so we may not expect to have an untried faith; neither shall we if it is real, because it is under these manifold temptations that faith, at times, is tried to the bitter end and seems to go spark out, so that with all the profession you have made you may greatly fear you will turn out to be nothing better than an atheist in the end. If God has begun the work in your soul you will never, never turn out to be an atheist, no, nor an infidel either Faith is His gift and once given He never takes it away. It is a grace of inestimable value, of more value than anything material, hence

the apostle speaks of the trial of it "being much more precious" - not just more precious, but much more precious - "than of gold that perisheth". Gold is a material and is a perishing substance eventually but faith is a principle; gold has to do with this life, faith with the life to come. Hence the trial of it is much more precious than of gold that perisheth.

Where does the trial of faith come in the experience of the people of God? It can come in a great many different ways and that at times by the dealings of the Lord with His children and the path they may be called upon to walk in. Sometimes faith may be sharply tried by certain perplexing, bewildering things in providence that stumble and confuse your reason. This was so with Asaph as described in the 73rd. Psalm. He was confounded within himself and pained at heart and his feet well nigh slipped because of the prosperity of the world and the adversities and afflictions that were laid upon the people of God, but all was put straight when the Lord came and nothing is put straight until He does. All these crooked things never straighten themselves, neither can we straighten them, but the Lord can; who can make that straight which He hath made crooked? O, it may be, some of you have tried hard to straighten certain crooks and have made them more crooked still. What to do then? Why what James tells us; "Is any among you afflicted let him pray"; take this crook, this burden, this awkward, this perplexing, bewildering matter to the throne of grace. And have you not sometimes, at least, had them straightened there? I will tell you one way the Lord has of straightening crooked things and that is by giving you grace to fall into His hands and say. The will of the Lord be done; He puts straight then. Have you had moments when, although things all seem to conspire against you, you have seen them to be straight with the will of God and have felt a conformity to it? But there is a trial of faith here; look at the trial that some of these believers in the Scriptures had of their faith, in the ways of God, in His providence with them. What a test He put them to! One striking instances is the test He put Abraham to in commanding him to offer Isaac. Viewed by sense and reason it was like a command to commit an awful murder upon his own offspring, but viewed in the light of faith it was a remarkable act of obedience to a covenant God who never failed him. But it was a remarkable test. His hand was raised to strike the fatal blow, another moment and the dagger would have penetrated

the heart of his beloved child. Remember God is never before His time and He is never behind. O but this trial of faith! Sometimes it comes in turning something upside down in your life. The Lord has a wonderful way of working; things may appear to be going so easy and comfortable and then suddenly something comes to put you to the greatest confusion, tries your faith, but it does not weaken it. There is a great difference between having faith tried and having it weakened. Faith is strengthened by the trial. The trial of your faith may sometimes be occasioned by something that may be very humiliating, like Naaman who was a great man but he was a leper. If it had not been for that affliction upon his body apparently everything would have been all right and so it may be with some of you. If it was not for a cross here, a burden there, a hard thing, a bitter thing, but there is this cross. Yes, and that is where faith is tried. We are not to have easy things here and yet it is in this trial of faith that the Lord brings His people into the sweetest conformity unto Himself that they can experience. I understand that the eastern refiner will sit and watch the metal in the crucible until it reflects his own likeness, then it is time to withdraw it from the furnace. Some of you can understand that. The Lord may have put some of you in a furnace for a season under some of these manifold temptations, until He has brought you down. You have struggled against this and fought against that and rebelled against something else in your spirit. You may perhaps have looked very quiet and composed outwardly but in your spirit was the fighting and conflict, the resentment. Still the Lord has kept you there in this furnace until one thing after another has fallen away from you like the dross from the gold and eventually you have been so brought down before the Lord in it as to say, "Thy will, not mine, be done". Then you come out of the furnace. It has done its work, and O the peace that is felt! When this is the case there will be no quarrelling then with the Lord's ways.

"The trial of your faith". Has your faith sometimes been tried by great darkness of mind concerning the things of God and your own case? O the uncertainty about eternity, of not knowing where you stand or how you stand, everything enveloped in darkness. Do the Lord's people know anything about that? I feel sure they do. Moreover you may walk in a certain path which can be a means

of bringing you into bondage. I have known what this darkness and bondage is until I have hated the sound of my own voice in prayer. O the extremities that we can be brought to under this trial of faith and yet we prove that it is for a season. We could not bear it always and yet could you believe me if I were to say that there has never been in your case a trial of faith but that you have gained something by it and been better afterward for the trial? Job was in a remarkable place when he said in the 23rd. chapter, "He knoweth the way that I take: when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold". It was a wonderful thing to say when he was right down in the depths of that trial of faith, as he was groaning out of the bitterness of his soul. Yes, I shall come forth he said, I shall come forth as gold. That was a wonderful thing to be able to say.

"The trial of your faith". There are many things wherein faith is tried in the experience of the Lord's children. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth". How can it be much more precious? Have we not often said in this or that thing that if only I could have avoided this, if I could have foreseen this or that trial I would have made a great attempt to have escaped it. But that could have been the worst thing for you in the end. No, there does not seem to be any way round the fire, the Lord does not say, 'I will bring the third part round the fire' but through it, and this is the trial of faith and will be much more precious than of gold that perisheth. How can it be? Because in this trial of faith the Lord's people receive some very gracious and confirming teaching. O the valuable lessons some of you may have learned in the furnace! Not only so, but it is much more precious because it is there where often the touches of His love are felt and enjoyed in the soul. It is much more precious because the Lord walks in the furnace with His children and that will not make you so anxious to come out of it, will it? Nebuchadnezzar saw with the three Hebrews the form of a fourth like unto the Son of God and not a hair was singed. May be some of you have been tossed about in this thing or that thing and brought in your feelings to the end of all things and yet have proved eventually that trial to be a season of great blessing. The trial of faith is made much more precious because faith is so much more important than gold is. That is necessary for the concerns of this life but faith is of greater importance because

faith is ,to use a figure of speech, eyes and ears and hands and feet to the soul and has to do with the things of eternity. It is not so much for time. The trial then is much more precious because faith is of so much greater value than all material things. "Much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire". That means it may be a severe trial and a trial where much will be burnt up by that fire. That is the Lord's way. We shall never get to heaven without some fires but every fire is in the Lord's hand. He and He alone can fan the flame. All is in the hand of God with respect to His people in this furnace work to try their faith; yet the trial of it is much more precious though it be a severe trial, and there are some sharp trials. You will feel perhaps that something is coming upon you, you may see a trial looming ahead, affliction; what then? That is a matter to take and lay before the Lord in prayer. No one can manage things as He can.

"Much more precious". Have you not at times been able to look back upon some things and see, not only the need be but the blessing in it? O it is when the Lord comes in His sweet appearing that the trial is made precious. It is in the deliverance, when the Lord comes and speaks in your heart saying, I love thee well my child, I love thee well enough to put thee into the fire, to purge thy dross and make thee more like Me. "Might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ". Every trial of faith will be found in the issue to be to His praise and His glory. Has there been any appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ to you in a way of deliverance, putting an end to the 'season'. This is where it issues to His honour and praise and glory. Why, have you not at times had to bless and praise Him as much for the bitter things as for the sweet things? Can you not look back and say, 'He blessed me there in that affliction, in that trial of faith, He blessed me and delivered me" and perhaps delivered your soul in it. Then it is found unto praise and honour and glory. He makes His arm appear in deliverance as He did when He brought Israel through the mighty flood. He appears also in spiritual blessings, in the forgiveness of sin and in the witness therein to your sonship. What an appearing this is! When the spirit of adoption is felt in your heart and you can look up with the simplicity and affection of a child and say, "my Father". This is the white stone and the new name that is written upon it. This is forgiveness,

this adoption that issues to His praise and so it will to all eternity. The Lord Jesus shall come again in power and great glory with His angels to receive the purchase of His grace and to raise these bodies from the dead and gather His people unto Himself. I have attempted to say that there is a ground of joy and rejoicing notwithstanding the manifold temptations. Let us not, beloved hearers, lose sight of the ground wherein we may greatly rejoice notwithstanding the manifold temptations and that the Lord makes the trial of faith precious, much more precious than gold tried in the furnace - material gold. He designs all these adverse things for His people's good and for His glory; and this involves the changes that come into the lives of the Lord's people, perhaps sudden changes from pleasant comfortable circumstances to some heavy sorrow, loss or bereavement; but there is a support under it, more or less, so that His dear people are brought through the floods and flames and all to be eventually to the praise and honour and glory of Christ at His appearing. Amen

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