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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on 6.12.50

"The trial of your faith" 1 Peter 1.7

Faith is a vital grace and is essential to every spiritual exercise of the soul before God, and this particularly with respect to prayer. For we read that "without faith it is impossible to please Him; for he that cometh to God must believe that He is and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him". Moreover the Apostle James speaks of asking in faith without wavering "For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed". I believe there are moments when a child of God has a particular urgency of faith in the soul in prayer, according to what the Lord Jesus says; "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive". So that while we know that all issues are subject to the will of God and will be designed for our good, there are occasions, possibly not often, when you can feel a holy confidence in your soul when you pray that God will grant your request. There is something very sacred about this although indeed you may often be shaken this way and torn that way, yet there are times when a child of God is able to draw near in the full assurance of faith which is very sacred and very blessed.

Faith is said to live and labour under load, "though damped it never dies." That is true, is it not, for many loads may lie upon the heart and upon the conscience, many loads of temptation and yet, although sometimes it does seem as though it will go spark out, if God has wrought that living principle in our souls it is immortal; that is to say it cannot die because it is a divine gift, it is not given to be taken away, though it is given to be used, and then again to be tried. It is so to speak the eye of the soul, for we see by faith; and it is the hand of the soul because it is by faith that we receive what the Lord gives and by faith we put on the armour of God, and go forth in the conflict to fight the good fight of faith; it is the foot of the soul for we are said to walk by faith and not by sight.

Moreover in regard to all the disposings of God with His people as I have hinted there is a 'need be' for these manifold temptations which occasion great present heaviness and which do constitute in the experience of the Lord's children a great trial of their faith. Yet it must be concluded that an untried faith bears no evidence of divine reality although it may be assumed to be real; but we are confidently assured that every grace God gives will have some furnace work and that this does particularly apply to the grace of faith. At the same time it can be asserted that no other grace can properly or spiritually function independent or separate from this particular grace. That is to say, if you feel in your heart a sweet hope raised up there by some token of the Lord's grace, faith will mingle with that hope, with that grace; it cannot be independent or separated from it; and the stronger your hope is, the more confident you may feel, provided that be a gracious confidence, the more proportionately will that faith co-operate so to speak in the experience of the soul. So it is in relation to love; when a little love flows out to the Lord Jesus, (and it is very, very sweet when it is so with us,) when the affections of the heart are drawn to Him who was lifted up on Calvary, when that choice grace, like the sweet fruit of His own sufferings in the soul, moves towards Him, faith will mingle with that love; and the more clearly the love of God is shed abroad in your heart the stronger will your faith be. So it is with all other graces, with subjection to the will of God, meekness, patience, long-suffering. These graces in the soul of a child of God, flow together, they operate together, they are joined together and at times when we are a little favoured they flow together to the goodness of God in the believer's experience.

But the Apostle Peter speaks here particularly of the trial of faith, which was occasioned in regard to these believers by reason of manifold temptations; by which we understand not so much temptations to evil, in the sense in which the word is used, but more particularly afflictions of divers kinds which in the nature of them, in passing through them, did occasion great heaviness. This is

where in their case the trial of faith consisted, and so more or less it will be with us if we are the Lord's children and are exercised in divine things. These choice graces, so essential, so rich, so rare and so needful, will be put into some furnace. Now is there one here who has been some years in the ways of God and truth, divinely instructed, who has taken root downward and borne fruit upward, that has not known this trial of faith? It has come in some particular way into your souls, your life, your circumstances or by some disposings of God's providence to you, whereby at times your faith, perhaps before that unusually confident, has been tried to the very quick, perhaps in some cases by some sudden blow coming which has blasted your prospects, brought you low, brought a cloud over everything to put you for the time being into utter confusion of mind and of feeling. So your faith, which did for a time perhaps comfortably exercise itself by God's grace in your heart, is now brought to the very death. But it will be tried, you know, you will find it will be tried. Some more advanced in the ways of truth will confirm this, and others it may be not yet so advanced, or that have not been so long in these ways, will prove that trial of faith and will yet prove by the result of that test the necessity of that trial. Is that not a good place to be brought to, in reflection, to perceive even a 'need be' or a necessity of this or that trial of faith. Why is it that there is a 'need be' for this? Is it not because the Lord designs to make that particular grace precious by the trial? Is it not in the furnace that the real metal becomes refined and separated from the dross and comes forth so clear and bright; so it has been at times particularly with the Lord's children. But the trial of faith may not be precious while you are in it; it is more particularly the result of the test. The trial of faith is made precious in the deliverance and the appearing of God to bring one out of the furnace, bettered by the cross, sanctified by the affliction, made more meet for the Master's use, with the graces of the soul revived, brought into more lively exercise and the whole root of God's grace

in the soul deepened. So it is that each one by walking things out year after year thus takes root downward and bears fruit upward and by all these tempest tossings and changes that come, it may be some heavy things, by the uprooting of things here, faith is brought to resolve itself more fully and more definitely upon one foundation only and that is the Rock Christ.

Sometimes faith will be tried by what may be termed the permissions or sufferings of God's providence, that may be very mysterious and very opposite to us, superficially viewed. So it was in the case of Asaph in Psalm 73; how distressed and confused in his own feelings he became by what, according to the view of reason, was altogether wrong. But when the Lord took him into the sanctuary, dealt with him, opened his eyes, showed him the 'need be' for such a condition of things and the ultimate end both of the righteous and of the wicked, he could say 'Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory'. Now that was where the trial of faith was made precious with Asaph, and so it may be with some of you; perhaps passing through some painful series of cross-providences, that in themselves constitute a sharp trial of faith. You struggle on with an inward battle, fight hard against self and reason and the world and unbelief in your poor heart, till you are worn down, until the Lord comes; and He, when He comes, in a moment can unravel the mystery, confirm your soul, give submission, show the 'need be' and enable you to fall sweetly into His hand. Thus He makes the trial of faith precious. Not only may that be by the permission or allowings of God in His providence with men, particularly His people, but also by the appointments of providence. To everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under the heavens. All is appointed, we understand, "Parents, native place and time, All appointed were by Him", not only parents, native place and time, but all events through life are at His command and are by

appointment. We see not what lies ahead, but He brings the blind by a way that they knew not, leads them along into the waters, into the fires and out of them and makes the trial of faith precious. So at times this trial will be in certain circumstances in your lives or some particular thorn in the flesh, or crook in the lot, as it is in the Scriptures where the wise man says "who can make that straight which the Lord has made crooked?" We cannot can we? If the Lord puts a crook here or there we cannot straighten it; yet He can straighten it, and sometimes He does, for does He not declare that He will go before His people and make crooked things straight and rough places plain. The trial of faith often does consist in the passing through some particular circumstances in the life, peculiar to oneself; but surely there must be this trial of faith.

Sometimes faith is tried by the Lord's silence. I have known good men who have had deep and heavy exercises which involved issues that affect their whole future life, and I have known them wait upon God concerning this matter as to what decision they should come to, or what course they should take, and the Lord has been silent, has not given any clear direction, no word in it. Doubtless there is a 'need be' for this in God's account; yet it may and does constitute a trial of faith when the Lord is silent concerning matters of considerable importance in our lives or our future. You pray and yet, it may be, get no particular sense of access. You wait and watch and yet get no indication; watch it may be in every service to see what the hymn may be, or the reading, or the preaching, and yet are still in the dark for a certain time; and this may constitute a considerable trial of faith in the experience of a child of God. David appears to have dreaded this where he prays "Be not silent unto me; lest, if thou be silent to me I become like them that go down into the pit". At other times prayers remaining unanswered constitute a sharp trial of faith. You may pray earnestly and constantly about a certain matter, you may pray

for a particular blessing, you may pray for that which appears so needful and which will be, as you feel, for your good in every way and which your soul does earnestly desire; and yet still the Lord withholds, the answer is not given. This constitutes a sharp trial of faith too; yet the Lord will never keep one of His children waiting, or withhold a needful blessing, without in His account a 'need be' in that delay; and though that delay is to us, may be, painful in the experience, yet when the Lord does bring the answer, when He does convey the blessing, then the trial of faith is made precious.

Moreover this may sometimes be when the Lord brings a death upon a promise. Some of you may have felt to receive very clearly some promise and indication from the Lord with regard to a certain matter; felt it came from Him, could not question it at the time; yet instead of that being fulfilled as you had anticipated, quickly, there is a death comes upon it; and that is a trial of faith. I believe that the Lord does often put a promise into the furnace; neither will He ever give one unless there will be a real need for that promise in your life. Yet what a mercy it is to have from God a word, a promise, that constitutes a foundation as it were for you to go on in things, to wait on Him, and to bring before Him, notwithstanding all attending difficulties. Faith will be tried in the Lord's own way. Is it not at times tried by the uprisings of evil within our hearts because so many things in us are opposite to that tender, filial, spiritual exercise in the renewed heart? It will be tried. Sometimes it is tried by an overturning of things in your circumstances and by certain things coming to nothing that you had felt that the Lord would fulfil on your behalf. O yes, I have known good men who have almost as it were put immutability upon some providence, that they were sure would be fulfilled; but it never has been. We are not infallible in our judgment and may be mistaken with regard to the Lord's way of making the trial of faith precious, but still He will make it precious. Sometimes it is tried by afflictions that befall the

Lord's people; sometimes by darkness and sometimes by going down into the valley of deep depression and despondency. Why sometimes, even with regard to temporal things, you may hear the Lord's people say, That tries my faith; and much more is this so at times with spiritual things, when faith is sharply tried; yet the wonder is that notwithstanding all, where this grace is, it is not so much a case of holding on to faith, as that faith will hold us up. Where the Lord imparts that faith, though it may have many a load upon it, yet it cannot die; it is a living proof of divine life in the soul, and it will not die; so that although you may go through deep waters and suffer afflictions, have peculiar trials in a path of providence, yet even in those things your faith, though tried, will come to the light and these particular things can be and are a means of exercising that particular grace.

So it is that the Lord's people often have to say "Lord all my desire is before Thee and my groaning is not hid from Thee". Do not the Scriptures themselves say that faith will be tried? Was it not tried in the case of Abraham when God said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac." What a remarkable way of expressing it, "thine only son", as though He would bring it home to him. You love him, he is your Isaac, he is a child of promise, one whom you have long watched and upon whom hangs everything concerning the future; take him and offer him up. Was not the faith of Jacob tried when he sent his sons to buy corn in Egypt and the man who had charge of the stores there treated them roughly and said, Is your father alive, and where is your young brother? You shall have no more corn unless you bring Benjamin here. Jacob said "You will bring down my grey hairs with sorrow to the grave". It was a sharp trial of his faith, and yet evidently as in the case of Abraham it was made precious. So with Joseph; he had to go down into Egypt and be sold there and thrust into prison. It is said that the word of the Lord tried him, that is his faith concerning what the Lord had indicated was brought to the very death by such opposite dispensations of

providence to him. Yet the trial of faith was evidently made precious. So with David in the case of his son Absalom; it must have been an exceedingly sharp and bitter trial of faith, of such an unusually bitter nature, in his own family, that caused such depression upon him; and yet the Lord delivered him. And at Ziklag too, how he encouraged himself in the Lord when the trial was made precious.

Yet is it not hard to believe that a good purpose is to be served in God's account by the trial of faith, that it is so needful to us and will be made precious, more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, and shall be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ? He appears unto His people to work deliverance to manifest Himself as a delivering God, and at that great day He will appear and will gather all His children in one. We are on a pilgrimage here, and each one's life and circumstances differs from another's, and what may be a great trial of faith to one may not be such a trial to another. But the Lord knows how to order and dispose things rightly to each particular case. So He will make no mistake; and what a mercy it will be to be brought through, and to have it proved eventually that this faith was real in our souls and has been made precious, and found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. The reality of it is thus proved by the test and where it stands the furnace it will be honoured of God because it is His own gift and will sustain the soul through all the changing conditions of this present life, and through the swellings of Jordan until we see Him as He is.

O that this trial of faith which you may be walking in now may be used by God for a good end and be not only for the reviving and strengthening of His grace in our souls but also for His own glory and praise eventually at His appearing unto us. May He remember us in these things for His name's sake. Amen