

762

La D 389

preached at Ebenezer, Clapham, by the Pastor, Mr. J. Delves, on Sunday evening, December 4th, 1955. Text. Romans 5, vs. 3, 4 & 5.

"And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience experience; and experience, hope; And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us."

These verses, the first of which I attempted to speak a little of this morning, constitute, as I hinted, what may be termed a very rare, choice and blessed experience, proving to the subject so favoured, the evidence, not only of a work of grace within, but of affliction sanctified, trials made to work for good, and all so designed in the Lord's purposes in that sense, to fit us for heaven. As we read this evening, so in measure I believe it true that "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." What a mercy if that is truly the case with us! All will agree with this - not in nature - but if we are the Lord's people, if we may reasonably hope that He has quickened us into divine life, then there is something in us which is not of nature, but of grace. It is that grace that bears these choice and blessed fruits. The apostle refers to justified persons. What an amazing mercy it is for one to feel rightly that he is indeed justified in the sight of God, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, so that he can rightly feel that

"The terrors of law and of God  
With me can have nothing to do;  
My Saviour's obedience and blood  
Hide all my transgressions from view."

What a blessed place to come to! When under the influence of that grace, there will be this peace, access, joy, experienced in the power of faith - faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. "Being justified by faith" we have access by faith, we enjoy this peace by faith and moreover "we

glory in tribulations" by faith.

I spoke a little about the connection between the first and the last links in this golden chain. It seems, so to speak, to take in and gather up the life and experience of a believer, more or less, in that there is actually what might be termed an automatic passing from one link to another, but more the experiencing by God's grace, of something of the blessedness of each particular link in this golden chain. As we have stated the apostle says, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also:" I am not at all competent to preach about this and cannot take any very clean page out of my own book and put it before you, but still here is the blessed truth; when the Lord is pleased to visit His people, comfort them with the visits of His grace, support them by His word and power, favour them with a sense of interest in Him, and give them to see their times are in His hand, then, although there may be a heavy cross pressing upon them, they can even rejoice in their tribulations - at that particular time, at least. The apostle James makes some refer<sup>re</sup>nce to this; referring to their persecutions, He says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Indeed it would appear that patience has 'her perfect work' when the subject is sweetly brought into conformity with the Lord's will and can say, "Thy Will be done," and have no disputing in the heart. It is a sweet place to come to, and it is here very particularly, not only where a child of God may rejoice in his tribulations but where "tribulation worketh patience", that is, endurance, as it is generally understood. It is

then, the Lord's way with His people to bring them into the path of trial and affliction, more or less, in order by this means to bring them nearer to Himself, to strengthen them in faith, to establish them in His word and grace, and to give them a deeper, closer, and richer experience of divine guidance, and thus to help them to endure.

"Tribulation worketh patience." Patience is spoken of a lot in the Scriptures; and as to this grace - and it is a grace - we might say that the Lord Jesus Christ is a perfect example of patience in suffering. Writing to the Thessalonians, the apostle said, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ," or, as it is in the margin, the patience of Christ, by which we understand the Redeemer's patience in all His sufferings. By patience we may understand a bearing of trials and calamities calmly, meekly and with a spirit of subjection to the Lord under them, waiting upon Him. The apostle brings, as it were, three points together in chapter 12, where he exhorts us to "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;" and it may be seen that if we are enabled to the first and the last, that will bring us, as a means, into a gracious experience of the central part, to be patient in tribulation. "Tribulation worketh patience."

Patience is a grace, although, naturally speaking, it may be said that some people are much more patient in their trials than others; but patience here is to be looked upon as a grace, whereby one who may, like myself, be naturally terribly impatient, can be brought into this place, as anyone can if the Lord is so pleased to deal with them, to fall flat before Him, have no dispute, no inward fighting, no quarrel, no wrangling with God, but just, so to speak,

"lie passive in His hand  
And know no will but His."

and when this is truly so, then indeed tribulation has worked patience. But patience has also meant a waiting upon God, that is, in continuing to wait upon God under dispiriting conditions. The Psalmist said, "I waited patiently for the Lord ; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry." That word 'patiently' there seems very speaking, as though he may have had, not only to wait a long time, but that there was much to come up against it that may have disposed him to give up; it suggests difficulties, temptations, oppositions, and moreover the Lord's silence, His apparent disregard - although that is not truly so. But when there is no response, when prayer seems to be fruitless, when you get into such a low place as to fear you will make shipwreck of faith, you are still helped to continue to wait on Him, notwithstanding all. "I waited patiently for the Lord. I ~~w~~waited patiently." This is a grace then, and where it is exercised you will not be able to give it up, although there may be many temptations so to do. You will not be able to give it up because the Lord will keep you to it until the appointed time that He disposes to bestow the blessing. That will be the reward of patience, will it not? and a rich reward indeed. Why, if the Lord were to come and bless some here you could at once say, It has been worth all the waiting. Moreover, you would perhaps have to confess much impatience in the course of that waiting.

"Tribulation worketh patience." But there is something else in this patience, and that is - doing the will of God. The apostle writing to the Hebrews defines it thus, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise!" There must be a doing then of the will of God, which seems to take up all our providences, includes all our trials and afflictions, marks every cross that the Lord may be pleased to lay upon us, walking in

the path He has appointed to us, in a measure subjected to His sovereign, blessed will - all this is doing the will of God, in which we have need of patience. Yet in the walking out of all these things, His dear people do prove, more or less, that tribulation works patience and that patience is a sweet grace. This patience consists too, in holding fast under extremely difficult conditions. The apostle James refers to Job. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord;; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." When we look at Job's case it does not seem to present itself like that, does it? as though the Lord was very pitiful to His servant and of tender mercy, but we have to come to the end of the Lord in this. When we come to the end of the Lord we can see how true it is. As to Job, we can speak about Job's patience, and his impatience, for as concerning some things he did speak harshly and said some extreme things;

but the point with regard to Job is - he endured, and whatever he may have charged home upon others or vindicated his integrity, the patience of Job appears to consist in the fact that he did not turn upon God, he did not charge God foolishly, he received divine omnipotence and thus his faith and grace prevailed over all his enemies, and the Lord brought him through; indeed in his case tribulation worked patience, and so it has to be seen in many cases. It is a mercy then to be thus favoured to possess a little of this spiritual grace which may sustain us, help us, strengthen us and give us patience in the dealings of the Lord with us, patience under the cross, patience in afflictions, patience under disappointments, patience when things just seem to tumble to pieces, patience under cross providences, patience under what may sometimes seem to be a frowning God, patience under a silent God, patience under

unanawered prayers for the time being. Faith and patience grow together in a believing heart. Faith will say, The Lord will not fail of His promise and that will strengthen patience and enable you to press on, press your case, and still continue to wait upon Him, believing, as we sometimes sing,

"The time of love will come,  
When we shall clearly see,  
Not only that He shed His blood,  
But each shall say, "For me."

Then there is another link in the chain, a third link that the apostle refers to. Here it can be seen how these three links are, so to speak, welded together and joined one inside another - in fact, you cannot properly separate them. "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience;" Experience - that is the third thing. What is experience? We understand the apostle to refer more particularly to a personal experience of the power, grace and goodness of the Lord to His people in and under all their afflictions. Therefore if there is no tribulation there can be no experience of the Lord's supporting grace, of the comfort of His word and His gracious presence, and if there is no patience, then there is no experience of that waiting upon Him under these difficult things - the three things are placed together, experience is a knowledge of things gained by trial and practice - this is very different from theory. You may have the theory of a certain thing, but if you have not the experience, you will find when the time comes, that theory will not stand you good. You must have experience though it is in the things of grace; we may read things up and know a great deal about the doctrines of grace, the plan of redemption and the historical parts of the Scriptures - all very good - but still we need something more. We need a personal experience of divine truth in our souls, which is only to be gained and known by

tribulation and tribulation working patience. That can bring into our spiritual life a sweet experience that can be supporting, strengthening and confirming. Patience works experience, merges into it, as it were. But what is this experience? Well, it is an experience in the first part painful, an experience of our helplessness, an experience of the truth of what the Lord said to His disciples, (although some do not much like that Scripture where the Lord said) "Without Me ye can do nothing." But still, after all, I believe the Lord brings His people into that experience to feel their own helplessness and dependence upon Him for all things.

"Patience, experience." It is an experience then, on the one part, of our helplessness and dependence upon the Lord, but on the other hand it is a confirming experience of divine sufficiency for every need that may be in us. It is very very sweet to be led into some experience in this way of the things of God; it is an experience of the Lord's power. "Is there any thing too hard for Me?" He said. Moreover of His power in the salvation of His people, an experience of the sufficiency of Christ's merit, of His perfect righteousness, His sin-atonement blood. It is an experience of the sufficiency of this to bring comfort and peace into your heart, enabling you to go on from strength to strength, helping you to commit your way unto Him, and to put your trust in Him. It is a mercy to have a little experience gained <sup>thus</sup> by trading as we journey on through our pilgrimage here. We shall be sure to be brought into some things to try faith and patience - we cannot expect it to be plain sailing - far from that, some of you find it to be, and some of you may feel to have special need, very special need of the Lord's power and supporting grace. Tribulation did work patience, and patience experience

in the case of Paul who in the first instance prayed three times for that thorn in the flesh to be removed from him, but who later was enabled to receive the Lord's word to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." It is an experience of His goodness too; not in the sense of seeing that we do not have any trouble or painful things to walk in or pass through, but more particularly of His goodness in them. Why, surely some of you here could bear witness to the goodness of the Lord in some things, even in some trials and some afflictions. It is an experience of His goodness, for it is said, "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble: and He knoweth them that put their trust in Him."

It is also an experience of His faithfulness to unfaithful people, for in one respect, we cannot say anything other of ourselves but that and yet still the Lord remains faithful to His promise in His word and to His people. He is a faithful, promise-performing God. It is an experience then, and we need to speak rightly of experience because of its importance and value to us. It is only by experience of the things of God in our souls, that we may know that we have part and lot in the blessed gospel. Experience is an application, as it were, of the doctrines of divine grace by the Spirit of God making them life and power in our souls. It is sweet to have some experience of them, some experience of a revealed Christ, some experience of the atonement purging away our sins, some experience of the Spirit's blessed witness in our hearts that we are the children of God. Here is a third link then in this remarkable chain. Patience, experience.

Then the apostle goes on to the next link, "Experience, hope." Here again is a golden link because by all these things, this tribulation,

tribulation working patience and experience of a choice and real nature in us, we are raised to a hope in Him - a good hope through grace, as distinguished from the hope of the hypocrite. A blessed hope it is indeed! Hope is some expectation of promised blessing upon some good grounds that we may receive it in the Lord's time. It looks to the future and anchors in divine faithfulness, rests upon the Lord's promise and finds a sweetness in looking forward to that day when all sin, pain, suffering and sorrow will be left behind. Hope is a sweet grace. It lifts the subject up a little from the verge of despair; it can bring a sweet quietness into a disturbed and troubled mind, it goes forth into things not seen by the mortal eye or understood by the mortal sense, for "Hope that is seen is not hope:..... But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Thus we have to see the links in the chain bonded together - you cannot take one out and have a complete chain - they are all joined together. So we find the Psalmist, when in circumstances of distress, saying, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise Him for the help of His countenance." It is sweet to feel a hope, is it not? What an anchor it is in the soul! It is sweet to be enabled to lean upon Jesus, to feel a hope that He will bring you through, and not only bring you through your pilgrimage literally speaking, but that He will bring you through some trial or heavy thing you may be walking in now. Hope seems to lift the veil a little and joins with faith and love and brings a sweet confidence that the Lord will not fail of His promise. Things may look very dark, very heavy, very threatening, and indeed may be very distressing but if this link in the chain is felt in your soul's experience, it will help you to look above that which may be so dejecting and distressing

in itself, and perhaps in your inward cogitations you will be saying, I believe the Lord will bring me through, He will not fail of His promise; I have tried to lay hold of this or that, and He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." It is hope that anchors in His promise and holds the Lord to it. It is not presumption, but is the sweet actings of faith in divine faithfulness. It is sweet to feel a hope in our end, to get just a little breaking of the cloud, a little shining in the midst of the darkness, which revives this sweet hope and enables you to say,

"Yes, I to the end shall endure,  
As sure as the earnest is given;  
More happy, but not more secure,  
The glorified spirits in heaven."

Here is the fourth link then and a very sweet link it is, and, as I hinted this morning with regard to this chain, each link seems to shine a bit brighter. Actually they are all golden links although in this particular, tribulation may not seem to be a very bright link in the chain; it may be a feature that gives patience whereby the soul is strengthened and inured to trouble, which brings us to the next link in the chain, which shines even brighter still, an experience of the mercy of God, as it can be seen in all the painful chain of circumstances and the chequered pathway in which the Lord's people walk.

"Experience, hope." Another bright link in the chain of divine grace, bringing the subject nearer and nearer to the portals of eternal bliss. Here is the last link in the chain. "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our

hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Blessed place to be brought to! Everything is right then. When His sweet love fills your heart, then all the links are bonded together in a right way and you would not try to take one link out from the next; it is all set in order by the Lord's infinitely wise purposes. "Hope maketh not ashamed," that is to say, will not end in disappointment; we shall never have to be ashamed of that hope or the exercise of it, and what we have hoped in, that the Lord has promised. Hope maketh not ashamed. Hope is the grace to issue eventually in full realisation of all that has gone before. Hope maketh not ashamed. You will not have to say I tried to hope in this or that which the Lord has said and now it is all going to end and finish up in disappointment; you will never have to say that, although I quite agree, sometimes it may look as though it will and you may fear it will. But this is the voice of unbelief for God will never fail of His promise - hope maketh not ashamed - for that which faith hopes for is what the Lord has promised will surely be fulfilled. It is said of Abraham here, "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Hope maketh not ashamed because of the love of God and if you can come to that, if you can set your eyes upon this last link, that is if you should be favoured with some sweet shedding abroad of the Saviour's love in your heart, if that time of love should come, then you will be able to say, Hope maketh not ashamed. I am not ashamed of that hope I have had or what I have hoped for, the Lord has brought it to pass, proved Himself to be a faithful God, notwithstanding all my fears and temptations. "The love of God is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

Just in concluding, the Holy Ghost is in each of these links. The Holy Ghost is in tribulation causing it to work patience. The

Holy Ghost is in the patience under these trials and afflictions and the Holy Ghost is in the experience, because it is an experience which by His grace and divine operations works in the soul. And the Holy Ghost is in the ~~experience~~- hope because it is a good hope through grace that He has borne into the heart, enabling you to put all your trust and confidence in the Redeemer's precious atoning blood and righteousness for the salvation of your soul. It is the Holy Ghost Who sheds His love abroad in the heart thus giving you to prove that such love is a river to swim in, a river that will not have to be passed over.

What a mercy it will be to be brought ~~through~~ through, to have some knowledge of each link of this wonderful chain that will take us step by step through this pilgrimage here, to that heavenly land, that better land, where sin no more defiles.