

SERMON PREACHED BY MR. J. DELVES AT

"GALEED" BRIGHTON

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, 7th DECEMBER, 1955.

Text:- Romans V.3,4,5.

THE APOSTLE in these three verses particularly, describes what may be termed a deep, real, gracious, spiritual, blessed experience, an experience only known to those who are taught of God, brought into the ways of Divine truth, led into the mysteries of the gospel, and favoured, especially favoured, in the midst of all difficulties, trials tribulations and crosses, with a sweet sense of divine love in their souls, which so sanctifies the appointed path to them as to enable them to glory in tribulation. This experience is as foreign to flesh and blood, to human nature, as it is possible for an experience to be; and the fact that I have so much of the opposite working in my heart renders it very difficult to attempt to speak on such a word. But the apostle defines it as being the experience of these believing Romans of whom he declares that they with himself, "we" are justified persons.

It is confirming to link the last verse of the fourth chapter with the first verse of this fifth chapter. The apostle, after referring to the faith of Abraham, and stating that "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;" and that therefore "it was imputed to him for righteousness," affirms that this was not only imputed to Abraham, "but for us

also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification." There is the ground and the foundation of what follows, centring in the glorious Person, work, death and resurrection of the dear Redeemer. The rest follows: what may be called the marrow of a gracious experience, the fruit that follows, such a blessed standing as is felt and enjoyed in a believing heart. "Therefore" - seeing that the Saviour was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification, "therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The other things link up, as links in a chain, and flow out of this blessed standing; it has in it the earnest of heaven and seems to carry us above the changing, bewildering things of this time state, lifts us into a higher atmosphere altogether, takes us from this earth to a sweet meditation of heavenly things. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." You cannot separate these two things: what I mean is, if the Spirit of the Lord is pleased to bring, even for a few moments a personal sense of your justification in the merits of the Lord Jesus, you will feel with that in your soul a blessed peace. It cannot be otherwise, for if justification is received and felt and enjoyed by faith in the soul, there are no barriers between such a soul and God, everything is right, the crooked is made straight and the rough places are made plain. Therefore there is this blessed

wonderful peace felt in the soul through the sin-atonement blood of the Lord Jesus applied to the conscience, and His righteousness imputed. What a wonderful thing it is to come experimentally even for a few seconds to feel what one hymnwriter says:-

"My breaches of the law are His,
And His obedience mine."

If we can really come there for a few minutes, I know we shall enjoy this peace - you will, I shall. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Another blessed fruit of this standing is access to the throne of grace. That is upon this ground, by this grace of justification felt and experienced. "By Whom" -- the Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom every covenant blessing is known and experienced - "by Whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." This brings us to a point, a very blessed point indeed, so as to enable justified persons, feeling the ^{sweetness} ~~truth~~ of that truth in their hearts, to rejoice in hope of the glory of God, of one day seeing that glory and dwelling eternally in the light and blessedness of it.

Then the apostle proceeds to dilate upon a point which is even more mysterious. "Not only so" -- I would point out the linking-up here - "not only so, not only have we this peace, this access, this standing, not only may we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, "but we glory in tribulations also." Now it is not in nature to do this, but just the reverse. I would not speak of this point lightly, because I realise many of the Lord's people have painful tribulations, heavy things

laid upon them, bitter ingredients in their cup, things that cause them grief, sadness and sometimes anguish of spirit; sometimes in the family, sometimes in the Church, sometimes in the home, sometimes in the business. And these things in themselves make us feel like Hezekiah, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me." Yet I believe it can be possible, and is so at times though perhaps not often, the sweet experience of the Lord's people even to rejoice in tribulations also, and it is because of the gracious effect of these things.

Now the apostle links up several things here together. "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." What rather strikes me here is the link-up, not only the linking-up in the several links in the chain mentioned here, but the link-up between the first and last link. They are all banded together one with the other, but there is a particular link-up with the first and last link, though at first sight there may appear to be no connection at all. What connection can there be between tribulation and love? two such different things appear to be such opposites that one would seem to sever the link. But it is just the reverse. "We glory in tribulations." Why, how can this be? "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." That is why the Lord's people can, at times at least, glory in tribulation. O what a sweet link-up there is in this golden chain of spiritual experience. It may seem a little strange that the apostle should commence with

with tribulation, because this first link seems as if it would bring a depression, things which might be resentful to all of us. Yet he delineates just what the people of God prove they have to walk in more or less, and we cannot take one link out of this chain and call it a complete chain, because each link is welded one into the other so that they cannot be separated. There are five links - tribulation, patience, experience, hope and love: five wonderful links, and each of them may be said to constitute very principally the experience, the life and path of a child of God in his heavenly pilgrimage.

I. Tribulation. What do we understand by this? The apostle refers to it a number of times, and usually the reference is to the persecutions and sufferings of believers for the Lord's sake. The Lord said to His disciples: "These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Was it not kind of the Lord so to speak? Not "In the world ye shall have tribulation" only, but He gives this comfortable assurance, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." These early believers suffered much persecution for Christ's sake, yet they counted it a joy. We read that after Paul and Silas had been beaten, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame; they gloried in tribulation.

And then sometimes the term refers to the things that press heavily at times on the Lord's people, painful trials in their lives in their circumstances, more particularly the inward conflict of

their souls, much that they have to pass through and endure, unknown it may be to anyone else.

Sometimes the term refers to the things that shall come upon the earth. "There shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." There may be inward as well as outward tribulation. But there is a bitter ingredient in the cup, a crook in the lot, a thorn in the flesh, some hard thing to bear that may constitute some part of this tribulation, and which indeed as to some things are a cause of grief and sorrow in themselves.

But there is a wonderful linking-up in the 8th Romans. The apostle says:-- "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation" - here it is again - "or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" All these things, shall they separate? No. He says, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Not all this tribulation, that cannot separate. Tribulations did not separate Christ's love for His people; all He suffered did but bring that love into clearer and sweeter review. "Not only so, but we glory in tribulation also." So the Lord's people may sometimes glory, that is, rejoice, in tribulation, when the Lord's sweet love is shed abroad in the heart; that is the link here; "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost."

But not only so, but I believe the Lord's people at times rejoice in tribulation when His sweet presence is felt in the heart. That can bring such quietness and gracious submission to His blessed will as to enable you rightly to say and feel that you would not have one thing altered. When supported by His word and promise, when the power of a promise is felt in the heart of a child of God, it can as it were so turn the tables as to enable one to rejoice even in these tribulations. So that although this is so foreign to us naturally speaking, yet it is a gracious experience when the Lord's sweet mercy is felt; it can be walked in in the sweetness and comfort of it sometimes just for a few minutes it may be.

2. But the reason why we may glory thus in tribulations is because we know that "tribulation worketh patience." What are we to understand by patience? I look upon it not so much in the sense of a natural endowment, for some people are more naturally patient than others. Some worldly people may be more patient than some professing people. But the point is that even the Lord's people who may be naturally impatient, are brought in their souls' experience to find that tribulations work patience; and that is a spiritual experience only known to those whose trials are sanctified, who are divinely supported and are favoured to see all their concerns in the Lord's hands, designed for their good and His glory, and feel in some measure at least that all is a gracious, Fatherly discipline designed to wean them from the world and its things and bring them into a closer conformity with Himself. So it is that tribulation worketh patience.

Let us look at it. What may we understand by patience? It refers

sometimes to waiting upon the Lord under conditions that are difficult and discouraging, without giving up or rebelling against the Lord's providential dispensations. The psalmist said, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry." He did not just say, "I waited for the Lord and He heard my cry," but, "I waited patiently for the Lord." That word seems to speak such a lot; it is as though he continued waiting for a time under dark and discouraging conditions, and, it may be, to all intents and purposes, in vain. So sometimes it seems, although it never really is so. But patience consists in continuing to wait upon the Lord in the exercise of faith in the face of opposite things with a calmness of mind, an inward assurance that the Lord will never fail His word of promise; and therefore in the grace of patience a believing heart will continue to wait upon God.

It consists also in holding fast to what we profess to believe although there may be so many opposite things and so much inward conflict. We read of the worthies, Abraham particularly, that "after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise." Patience more particularly signifies endurance, holding fast and pressing on in the face of all opposition. "Tribulation worketh patience." As tribulations are sanctified the soul becomes as it were inured to the path of trial and difficulty, and becomes more solidly stayed upon Him. The soul's experience brings this; Tribulation works patience.

3. "And patience, experience," Here is a very sweet link. What does the apostle mean by experience here? I take it to refer

particularly to the experience of the soul in tribulation, because that is where the great part of the experience lies as tribulation is sanctified by the Spirit to the establishing and building up of a believer in the faith and hope of the gospel. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience, experience." It is an experience of this patience that is wrought in the heart whereby one may have to walk in a painful path for a long time, and yet be blessed with patience to wait upon the Lord in it, to watch His hand and to wait upon Him until delivering mercy appears. This patience consists in a calmness of mind, a quietness which enables one to be still and to prove that in quietness and confidence is their strength. It consists moreover in submission to the Lord's divine will in His disposing of us in the concerns of this life and many other things. "Patience, experience." What a choice linking-up. Here, then, is the third link: Tribulation, patience, experience. The path of trial and difficulty inures the soul as it were to the Lord's appointments as these things are sanctified; and this brings us into that experience of divine truth and grace that is peculiar to the Lord's redeemed people, an experience of our own helplessness and dependence upon Him in all these things. It is not an experience that works self-confidence or natural conceit in us, but an experience of our utter dependence upon the Lord's mercy, grace and goodness, to support and sustain us and bring us through our trials and afflictions to His praise. It is sweet to have a little experience. We must not despise experience, we need grace to put it in its right place.

Experience flows out of a gracious knowledge and application of the precious doctrines of the gospel. When they are applied to the heart by the Spirit of the Lord, then you have a sweet and gracious experience of them in your hearts; and that is the sweetest experience any of us can have in the world. Experience is knowledge of things by trial and practise, having to walk things out, sometimes having to walk out a promise, sometimes walking a long time in a dark path of bewildering providence, torn this way and squeezed that way; sometimes your soul fainting within you, everything just giving out, it may seem, and you cannot go on any longer, sometimes telling the Lord that you cannot stand this trial any longer and asking him to remove it from you - all this is experience. Sometimes it is an experience of the badness and wickedness of sin in our poor depraved old nature that makes us ashamed of ourselves to think we have it, and we can hardly lift up our heads before God, but just weep before Him with shame and confusion of face. It is a real experience with the poor afflicted tempest-tossed children of God; yet it is a sweet experience of the Lord's goodness and mercy, grace, love and power manifested in the midst of these things that holds you on, keeps your mouth above water, so that notwithstanding all, you cannot give up, and often have to prove what David said, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." So tribulation, and patience in the tribulation, works as sanctified this sweet experience in the heart, so that at times you can thank and praise His holy name that ever He should have mercy upon such a wretch,

and sometimes you may wonder that you are not in the hell you deserve and yet in the face of all, His goodness, mercy and grace may melt you down. So you are favoured to prove the link-up of these three things -- tribulation, patience, experience.

Well we have got so far, but there are two other links in the chain. "And experience, hope."

4. Hope. What a sweet link in the chain is hope! What is this hope? Not the hope of the hypocrite. When one is brought so far they will know something different from that. The hope here is a good hope through grace; only those know it who are brought in and through this path of tribulation, given a little patience in it, gain a little choice experience -- only such are brought to a good hope in the mercy of God in Christ in their own souls. It is sweet to feel hope, hope of heaven; it is a hope that notwithstanding all your fears, things looking black so that you can hardly bear to look at the future, cannot see how you can possibly come through some things or endure in them, yet this hope leans on the Lord's promise, and when His presence is felt in your heart, hope springs up and over-rides all the opposite elements; then you can believe that after all He will bring you through, You can come to this place sometimes:

"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."
Well, do you know anything of this hope? I believe this hope is brought into the heart by the Spirit of the Lord when He takes of

the things of Christ and shews them to you. I know it is true from my own case, because if the Spirit of God reveals Christ to your heart you hope, you cannot help hoping; hope will rise up within you and fix itself in the Person of Emmanuel. You can feel it, you can distinctly feel it to be an anchor in your soul, as Paul speaks in the Hebrews: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the Fore runner is for us entered, e ven Jesus, made an high Priest for e ver after the order of Melchisedec." What wonderful words! This is a hope that takes you, in this reading, right up into he aven where Jesus is; and a hope that does not do that for you is worth nothing.

"And experience, hope." What a sweet link is this fourth link. One now begins to feel a little establishing, a building-up; he is brought thus far and the Lord holds him there. What a mercy to feel a hope that one day we shall enter heaven, leave all sin behind, leave all these wretched perplexing things, these distressing things that so often tear us away and bring us into such bondage. Hope. It is like taking one on pilgrimage, going from one step to another. Or to use the figure, it is like a golden chain with five links, each one welded together. Tribulation, patience, experience, hope. What kind of a hope is it? It is a "hope that maketh not ashamed." This is the kind of hope that will never end in disappointment. Some things do with respect to this life; we have hopes in this or that perhaps; we may build castles in the air, and all of it be o_verturned and come to nothing.

But this hope will never end so; it "maketh not ashamed." This is a sweet word. You will never have to be ashamed for hoping in Christ, never need to be ashamed of that, because it is a hope that will never fail, it is a hope that will one day give way in a full realisation of all that is hoped for here.

5. The last link in the chain seems to be the sweetest of all - love. "Because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." It is this love that binds each link in the chain from the first to the last. If you can feel in the tribulation a little love, if you can feel a little love in the patience, if you can feel a little love in the experience, if you can feel a little love in the hope, all flowing together to the goodness of the Lord in your soul, that will bring you into the enjoyment of this last wonderful link. I feel persuaded of this, that if we are brought into the first, the same Spirit that brings us there will bring us so to speak through each link in His own good time, although these experiences may sometimes be much mingled together, until eventually we shall come to that place where sin no more defiles and where the love of God will be like a river to swim in.
