

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
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1 PETER 1 v 7

"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"

I have recently spoken to you about faith, naked faith, trusting in God, centring in Him, living on Him. A great grace, faith is. God has put singular honour on faith. It is a precious grace. Peter, in his second epistle, speaks of it as precious faith. The strangers, to whom he addressed his epistles, he said were partakers of that precious faith. Precious, because it is God's gift. Precious, because it is His Own mighty creation in the heart. Precious, because of its object. It has one only true Object. Damped, weakened, troubled, it may be, but it has but one object - God, as He has revealed Himself in Holy Scripture, and as He reveals Himself from time to time, to His people individually. If we possess that grace, we are the favourites of heaven, but it must be tried. An untried faith will never stand. You may profess to have faith, but if it be not tried in some way, it is not worth having. God puts His Own work to a test in some way, in some degree. Every believer has his great grace put to a great test. A great test may be very small in some people, but it is great to them. A weak person may have a weak test, but it is a great test to that person. Here, the Holy Ghost, by Peter, says that they rejoice greatly in view of what they have to inherit. They are made partakers of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein" - that is, in the salvation of their souls, in the inheritance incorruptible, to which they are heirs by God's blessed election - "ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season if need be" - if God sees it needful, for that is certainly what is implied; if God sees it needful - "ye are in heaviness

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through manifold temptations". Temptations here mean trials, the same as James says - "Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"; divers troubles, and affliction. And this trial of faith is more precious than of gold that perishes, which wears out by use. The trial of faith does not wear faith out. It is more precious than gold that perisheth though it be tried with fire. "Might be found unto praise and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

By the Lord's help, I shall speak of this trial of faith. There are certain things, or events that come to the Lord's people which are trials to their faith. And the first that I will name is the worst of all, indwelling sin, a heart that is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; an unfathomable heart, and inconceivable as to the measure of it. Deceitfulness in the heart will always be, for the Lord's family, a fiery trial. You cannot believe without being opposed by sin. You cannot hanker after God without sin opposing you. Every grace of the Spirit is opposed by some lust of the flesh. Every motion of the soul Godward has a bar to block up its way. All confidence is tried by things which look against confidence. Let me a little enlarge here. We read of the lusts of the flesh lusting against the Spirit. "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit". Take that dreadful lust, pride, that haughty monster, that deceiving monster, working by fraud, or force, to keep us from the Lord. It would have us independent, it rebels against dependence on God. You know I am speaking the truth, those of you who have conflict. Now it tries faith. Proud reason tries, reliance on what is understood. Pride that is against dependence on God. Pride, self-will, self-confidence, self-direction. These stand in the way of believing. Every believer finds that to be true - "When I would do good, evil is present with me". Not evil from without, in the first case, but evil within. I find, says the Apostle, a law in my members, a law which holds, which reigns, which has authority, and this is the law of sin in our members. Can you kneel, O lively Christian, before God, and try to call on His Name, and not sometimes often painfully feel that the old man rises up against you? Can you cry for humility, and pride not oppose that cry? Can you desire holiness, and some pollution will rise in your spirit? Can you pray to God to guide you into truth, and pride of intellect, and searching, and reading, not come up, and oppose you? Faith, in this matter is tried, for it wont give in, it

wont yield. It is a grace that is given to fight. "Fight the good fight of faith." And here will come sometimes real comfort. "When I would do good". And when you can perceive, and sometimes God causes you to perceive, that you would do good, you would be holy, you would fear Him, you would walk with Him, you would walk before Him, you would cast your care on Him, you would believe in promises unfulfilled, you would believe in a work begun, but unfinished; there is comfort in that. You may say, the Lord knows, and I can appeal to Him sometimes that I am opposed to myself. But then you say, myself opposes me. "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me". God has said, of all the evil beasts in the land, Destroy them not. I wont drive them all out at once. And we know that to be very true regarding the beasts of our fallen nature, that awful spirit, pride. My brethren, is not this a trial to your faith? Your faith cannot walk without interruption, cannot believe without interruption, cannot follow God without interruption, cannot love without interruption. The whole of our fallen nature is against believing. "All men have not faith". If we have faith, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, and say, He has made us believers, not we ourselves.

You will find this too, that the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, may be like a fire in you sometimes, a burning fire, threatening your religion, threatening your hope, threatening your life, whereas faith opposing them, faith standing up for God - "Now abideth faith, hope, and charity" - this faith stands. And in the Cornithians - you remember that chapter on faith, hope, and love - the Apostle says it believeth all things, beareth all things, endureth all things, and this is what faith does. It believes all things good of God. It beareth all things that come from the devil opposing your afflictions. It hopeth all things. You will never entertain, by faith, one ungracious thought of God, but you will never get through without multitudes of such thoughts intruding themselves, yea, coming as it were from your very heart, oozing, as it were, from the very pores of the body.

"That the trial of your faith". A solemn trial comes from the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and the stronger the faith you have is, the stronger will be your opposition,

the opposition of the old man. The more you believe, the more will unbelief, that inveterate devil unbelief, oppose you. It is very solemn to be a believer, because it means a life of conflict. As you are lively, so you will be troubled. "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow". As you increase in the knowledge of God, you will increase in the conflict which you have to go through.

The trial of faith is in providence. It came to Abraham. And it came to pass that God tempted Abraham, not to do evil, but tested his faith; that is what is intended there. It put to a test the faith that Abraham had. Abraham had, childless, an unfulfilled promise, a begun, an unfinished work. He had faith, he looked to the stars, and he believed what God said concerning his coming seed, and it was counted to him for righteousness. God tempted Abraham, put him to a great test. Providence may come to you; it came to David. It was not an indifferent thing to David that God caused Samuel to pour the anointing oil on his head. He was then a king openly anointed, not actually on the throne. No, years of trouble intervened between his anointing and his ascension to the throne. O the troubles that David had. So severe, so heavy, and so near destruction at one time as you will remember, he said - "As the Lord liveth there is but a step between me and death."

The Apostle, speaking of himself, said only one thing was certain to him, namely that bonds and affliction abided him in every city where he went. Providences come to us. If they be pleasant, then there is a conflict, for our ease loving nature would rest in the pleasant things of God in providence. We have not to beg, as Huntington had, for all his clothes, and his bread, and everything in providence, for years. You say, No, I have not got that. If you are easy, are you not tempted at any time to rest in that which is your ease? If you have faith, it will say, this is not right, you are not to rest here. This is not our rest, it is polluted. Arise, get hence. Leave this, in your affections; leave this, as to confidence; leave this, as to permanence; for there is nothing permanent in providence. Vicissitudes must attend us. Today pleasure, to-morrow grief. Pleasure may be a trial to faith. Faith says, there is only one rest for my soul. For me there is only one comfort. There is only one God, only one Redeemer, only one arm to lean on, only one wealth

to drawn from, only one fountain to look to for supplies. And nature says - O, no! "Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; eat and drink, take thy pleasure, for tomorrow shall be as this day". You understand it. Providence may come in the other direction, may send bitter sorrow to you. God may blight everything that you have, or part of what you have. He may send sickness to your body, sickness in your family. He may send ruin to your circumstances, and blight your business. Anything, and everything, in His hand, and He may touch them when He will, where He will, and in what measure He will. What has faith to say to this? Unbelief says - This is the curse. Sense says - This is intolerable. What does faith say? Faith waits on God. "I will wait for the Lord who hideth Himself from the house of Israel" So God puts faith to a test by solemn dealings in providence. We need faith to observe His hand. We need faith to rest on His promises. We need faith to go to Him in everything, every difficulty, everything that comes to try us. Faith is put to a test here. You believe in God in the face of all that you are suffering. Do you believe in His wisdom in all this confusion about you? Do you believe in His goodness, with all this bitterness in your circumstances? Do you believe in His love, when there is nothing but affliction attending you? Here faith has to have a voice - I believe in God. That is the language of faith, when the ship must be broken, and every person on it must get to land. But how? You may get into a place; God may try your faith exceedingly by some circumstances.

And the third test, for I can only name two or three, the third test is direct temptation of the devil. Either a violent temptation, by which you are all but overthrown - a temptation to infidelity, a temptation to pride, a temptation to curse God - or a subtle temptation that you can hardly perceive to be a temptation; more, in some regards, to be dreaded than violent temptation. And when that devil roars against Christ - for Christ is his special object of hatred and assault - from time to time; when he roars against Him; what does faith say? Good Master; he calls on Him, looks to Him, looks to His blood, to His righteousness, to His grace, to His goodness, to His power. When things go against faith, faith has a shield to object. When fiery darts are hurled, there is a shield of faith. "Fight the good fight of faith". Fight for Emmanuel's honour. Fight for the promise of God in the Scripture, and in your heart.

Fight for the fulfilment, though it be long delayed. Fight for the faithfulness of God. O, but the trial, when you are living in a struggle, when you are conscious of a struggle in your soul, when two members are at work in you, one for God, and one for the devil, one for heaven, and one for hell. Which is to conquer? "These all died in faith". You may speak of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, as exhibiting an army of noble believers, but, true though that is, the same chapter reveals soldiers, dangers about them, enemies surrounding them, everything against them. The trial of faith. Heaven in promises disputed, promises unfulfilled yet, or partially only fulfilled. "Lord what wilt Thou give me?" said Abraham in a moment when all around him was as nothing, because he had not the promised son.

Precious is this trial. It is more precious than gold. Though beaten gold, it has ore about it. It is put into the crucible that there may be removed from it all the ore and that it may be proved to be the precious metal. Yet this trial is more precious than that, because faith is more than gold. Faith has an object that gold cannot have. Precious in the sight of God. He looks on as a Refiner of gold and silver, not indifferent to the issue. Precious in God's sight, as we may see a little later. It honours Him. Yes, when you struggle through unbelief, and against all your vile nature, to reach God, and are enabled by faith standing in the power of God, to reach Him, what a blessed victory that is. What a blessed trial that opposition has proved to be. You come off a conqueror, just for that particular time, and moment, more than a conqueror. A precious trial. Yea, you will say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted", good for me that I was tempted, on that occasion. Good for me that I was enabled to believe when everything about me contradicted faith. Good for me to eye a promise, to believe a promise, when there is no prospect of its fulfilment. "More precious than gold that perisheth" This faith wont perish. The trial will pass, but the faith wont perish. As long as it is needed it will live.

It is precious to the person who has undergone the trial. You may say sometimes, Now I know that I did not prop my faith up; God held it up. I know that God was with me in that trouble. He has fulfilled the promise - "When thou passest through the waters, I will

be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." You shall not be overcome; I will be with thee. And faith looks to that promise. You may be sinking, you may be burned, destruction may threaten you. Have faith in God. And that faith that He has given you will stand; when devils roar, when creation passes away, as to your experience, and all the good you hoped for does not come, faith will stand. A naked faith on God's naked word; that honours Him. "More precious than gold though it be tried with fire". As if God would destroy it by His dealings with you; as if He would say, I will have nothing to do with you. Here is a trouble, there is an affliction, there is a sorrow, and everything seems to say, God has left you. Faith says, No, I will wait for Him. He hideth Himself, but I will wait for Him. He promised good and I will wait for it. Faith has no doubt in it. Faith has much doubt about it. John's faith was tried. Prison tried it; the absence of Christ tried it. So at last his faith sent two of his disciples, yet you may say, his unbelief sent them. No, though unbelief was in the business, it was that he hung about Christ - "Art Thou He that should come?" He had not given up, and you will never give up. This precious trial of this precious faith will be for the honour of God. O may the Lord help us to believe. It is one of the greatest wonders upon the earth that a sinner should have faith, and that if hell, and earth, and devils, and men, and all circumstances, should come and hurl themselves against it, it lives, it labours under load; though damped, though assailed, though contradicted, it never dies, it never will.

And the reason is this, just briefly, that it has God for its Author, it has God for its end. It has heaven at the end of all. It is to be found unto praise. What praise will come out of your trials. Praise to God who had not let you sink. Praise to that arm that held you up. Praise to that power that enabled you to come up out of the wilderness leaning on your Beloved. Praise to the Holy Ghost who sanctified that affliction to you, and brought you more and more to your knees. You say, O all that trouble, it came when I was careless, and carnal, and all but a dead professor, and the trouble blessed me, quickened me, taught me, reprov'd me, helped me, and I came to my senses and called upon the Name of the Lord. Ah, one should value

trouble, we should value trouble, if we were more spiritual, and had more spiritual discernment. "Found unto praise" to the dear Redeemer, the Redeemer of our souls, who would not forfeit, give up, and abandon, His Own purchase, His Own children. Honour to God. A man honours God in trouble when he is enabled to say - I believe in God. There is more honour to God in that than we may often have thought. I believe in God. You wont believe in yourself when you believe in God. The two never live together in the same person at the same time. O, but it is wonderful to believe in God. I esteem it as one of the great mercies that God gives to me, that my naked faith goes to Him. I have nothing to prop it up in myself, but He props it up. You may get one day, or in the night, mourning over your sins, and confessing them, a sense that you are a creature, finite, and without lessening the awfulness of sin, it may be made out to you that every action that you, as a creature do, is finite, limited. It wont make you think little of sin; when that comes as a solemn realisation, it wont be alone. This may be made out to you at the same time; the Redeemer is infinite. The blood He shed has infinite worth; the righteousness He wrought out is infinitely great, and good, and durable; the riches of His grace are durable, and you will see in the infinite One that that props you, holds you, comforts your soul in trouble. I got that the other night. O it was sweet to me. It did not make sin little but it did make Christ great, infinite, glorious. "Found unto honour" and it is to the honour of the believer. "Them that honour Me I will honour". You never will honour God by believing and He not follow that with an honour put on yourself. What is that honour? He smiles on you. Think of the honour He gave to the Syrophenecian woman - "O woman, great is thy faith". Faith honours Him, and He honours faith. If you care for God's honour by faith, He will care for your honour by blessing and smiling on you. Not because you merit a smile, but because He approves of that faith which He has wrought in you.

"Glory". And again, the glory is shared, shared by Christ, and the person, the believer. He wont be in glory and not glorify you. And even here, when you believe against unbelief, when you hope against hope, when you hang on His promise, when you plead it, when the devil cannot make you give it up, when unbelief is obliged to retreat for the time being, O Christ is glorified, and He glorifies

you in that. You do not see that glory on you, but He gives it. Peter speaks this in another place; he says, if you believe, if you accept what God gives you, and does for you, the Spirit of God and of glory resteth upon you.

My dear brethren who believe in God, look at this. It is a brief and poor word that I have uttered, but still there is truth in it, and let the rest go. Hang about truth that I utter to you. It will be for your establishing, and comfort, and we need both, establishment, and comfort.

AMEN.