

SB. 830

13682
La 1872

SB/JH16

Sermon Preached at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, by
Mr J.K. Popham on Sunday Morning
28th April 1918

Text Hebrews 12 verse 1 & 2

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

This exhortation given by the Holy Ghost is much needed. The discouragements of the way, the readiness in us to faint, or to grow weary. The weakness that is often induced by temptation, or by ignorance, makes this word a great necessity, for if when you are discouraged you look intently on the things which discourage you, and think that perhaps still greater troubles may come, how ready you will be to faint, who can fully express. But if with that faintness, or the readiness to faint, and discouragements that you feel, there should be set before you, set on your heart, an exhortation like this, such examples as are here, and particularly the example of enduring suffering. Christ who endured, continued under the cross and despised the shame and the ignominy that came to Him, by reason of the cross, you will find yourself encouraged. And enabled to say to your cast down heart "Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? and why art thou disquieted in me ? hope thou in God:" (Psalm 42 verse 5).

There is in God more than we can conceive. There is in Him everything we can need. In the text we have, first of all, a great cloud of witnesses, and our attention is directed to that cloud. And we have in the next place, this one witness above them all. The faithfull and true witness. We have the person and the sufferings of Christ, which He endured, as the example, and an encouragement. In the next place we have the testimony of this great cloud of witnesses.

And after that we have the exhortation founded upon it. Seeing that there are such witnesses, as there are round about us, all surrounding us, and saying, that they have something to say, some testimony to give, which bears immediately upon our present case. "Let us lay aside every weight", every discouraging weight, that would impede our progress, and the sin, a particular thing, "the sin which does so easily besit us",

"and let us run with patience (diligently, carefully) the race that is set before us", and particular attention is directed to Christ Himself, as an example above all other examples of endurance. And so we are exhorted to look unto Jesus, fix our eyes on Him, who endured contradiction of sinners against Himself. And therefore look upon Him. He had set before Him a joy, and for that He endured the cross that was laid on Him. He despised the shame that came by consequence of the cross, and now He is set down, at the right hand of the throne of God. And you if enabled, to do as exhorted here, shall in your time, that is in God's own time, sit down with Christ on His throne. The Lord's people need all that God gives them, all the grace and encouragement, the mercy and the comfort, He is pleased to give them.

Here He gives them grace, they are runners in a race, not a race in which only one is crowned, and they have much to cast them down, and discourage them. And lest they should be weary and faint in their minds, (verse 3) it pleased God to say to them, now look at this great cloud of witnesses, and hear what it says. The great cloud of witnesses, you have, in the scriptures, and many of them in the preceding chapter. Suffering saints, martyrs of Jesus, pilgrims safely landed, soldiers weary, and crowned men, who ran the race, and those now harping their praises around the throne of God.

We look within, and find much to discourage, we have then many weights, and a sin that easily besets us, and we are apt, O how apt, God only knows, to regard these things with the feelings that unless we have them removed, unless some particular sustenance is given, we certainly shall fail in the race. And the Apostle says, look at this great cloud of witnesses, they are all around us. You cannot read the scriptures, without seeing, this great cloud, the testifiers of God's grace, sufficiently and faithfully. Or if you should be saying, O but the promises I thought God spoke to me, are naturally now impossible of fulfillment.

Look at Abraham, he got the promise, he believed God, he had to wait so long for it, that it was literally impossible of fulfillment on natural grounds. But "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; (Romans 4 verse 20) and therefore he would say to you, as being much discouraged, why art thou cast down. Why regard natural things, say nothing is impossible, look at my case. God was faithful, there came, as from the dead, the promised son. He came forth as it were from the grave, where you would never think of looking for life. O behold discouraged ones, the great promise of God that cannot be broken, because, God who spoke it cannot lie. And because there is nothing too hard for Him.

If you should be saying, O but look at the surrounding things, my weakness within, my troubles without, why I am but as a worm, and here I have enemies, multitudes against me, and how can I expect to get well through. And Jehosaphat would come forth, and say how Israel was like two little flocks of kids before a mighty host of enemies and I cried to God, and there came a prophet to me, and told me, that I need not to fight in this battle. And I set singers, as we went out to war, instead of singing when the war was over. I set them to sing before them as we went out to battle, and God gave us the victory.

And if you should be saying, O but my sins, my grievous backslidings, these as I view them, and feel the guilt of them. And also my indwelling sins, are such as I do not see how I can possibly hope to get through honourably, and enter into that rest, I looked for, and have looked for. David may come, and he may say, see my shame, my guilt, they exceed yours, I fell foully, and said I should die and not live, when the word of the Lord came to my heart, and told me that I should not die, because, the Lord had put away my sin. One might run through all the difficulties, and find a witness in this great cloud, to meet each one.

Take again, for instance Moses, he stands alone, and has a rebellious people to lead. He has the Red Sea to cross. He has days without water, and to travel in the wilderness. He has an idolatrous people to contend with, as he comes down from the mountain, he sees the people, so sottish and blind, dead and wicked, that they are positively dense before the golden calf, saying these be thy gods O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt. And yet Moses would say, all these things God caused me to face and get through. And I brought the people to the borders of the goodly land.

O discouraged one, hold on. The cloud will be round about you, my friends, whatever you may be suffering, whatever discouragements you may be feeling, whatever death may be in you, or about you, there is in this cloud of witness, one, or more than one, to speak about, who can say Hope in God. If it be temporal difficulty, if it be want staring you in the face, if every stream be dry, if something should be saying, well now you have come to the end of all your resources, there shall come faith. And Elijah, he shall say, I was by the brook, and I had no bread. And God sent ravens with bread and flesh. Hope in Him. Remember that the cattle upon a housand hills, and the gold and silver are His. Remember that there is nothing too hard for Him. That when Israel needed bread, it rained down from heaven every day for them. That when they required water, then the flinty rock was smitten for them. Remember these things. Paul would have this great cloud of witnesses heeded.

O but I am afraid I must suffer, I am afraid I must suffer for the name of Christ. I am afraid, I am afraid at last, it may come near to me, and I cowardly and carnally may prove false and faithless. Ah, and there shall come one who will say, I was sawn asunder, grace kept him. I suffered persecution, and hunger, I wandered homeless, in dens and caves of the earth. One should say, and he would say, hope in God. One may say, but I have lost something. I am bereaved of something and I must be so, it must remain as it is. There is no hand, no power, no hand to alter it, and one of these witnesses will come and say. I received my dead raised to life again, and therefore there is nothing in your case, beyond the hand and power of God.

See the cloud of witnesses, and more of what they may testify, I would not stand here to speak about, but we have this great cloud of witnesses, they tell what God has done for them, and as it were, stand around and say, now be not discouraged you runners, heaven is before you. God has brought us to heaven, delivered us out of our troubles. He guided us through our difficulties, He supplied all ^{our} wants, He sustained us when we were weak, He fought our battles for us. He is your God, and He will do it for you, all that you stand in need of. Dear friends divine testimonies are for use, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Romans 15 verse 4). Such is the testimony of the Apostle Paul.

God has caused these things to be written for our learning. The ends of the earth are come upon us, and many difficulties are before us. It probably will be much more difficult to hold on, in a profession of the name of Christ, to some here, that it has been to any of us in the past, or even in the present time. And if not unbelief, ignorance of god and a variety of things will come, and say, how can we stand. Paul says remember the cloud, look at the cloud, it is around you, every character, as it were, sit in a circle around you. And as you look at these witnesses, they speak for God, and they speak of His wisdom in guiding, His fulness in supplying, His power in sustaining, His ^{faith}fulness in bearing with thee to the very end. And therefore O discouraged ones, O weary pilgrims, O coward soldiers, look at this great cloud, listen to what it says and you will find encouragement.

But there is one witness above this great cloud, Him I would now direct your attention to. Looking unto Jesus. He stands on a prominence, to which no mere creature, should ever think of aspiring. Alone, alone in His sufferings, alone in the dignity of His person, alone as being under vindictive wrath, suffering a vicarious sacrifice, even offering Himself.

And says the Apostle Paul, when you have heard what the great cloud of witnesses say, when that great cloud of witnesses in its testimony shall have been given to you, and you have felt it, indeed look off from that. Take your eyes from the creature to the Creator, from suffering saints to their suffering captain. Take your eyes from their God given victories, and look to Him who tread the wine press alone. And He got the victory, not only over sin and death and hell for Himself, but for you, and the victory that you have had in measure, and the victory that you are to have, and the victories of all victories, that death itself is destroyed, all must come to you, through and by His one victory. It is a heavenly direction, to a heavenly Person, a Divine Person. Looking at all the directions to be inclusive, is to exclude, this view of Christ. Every other object, for the time, and for the eye, is to be fixed on Him.

First, on His person, Looking unto Jesus. Secondly, on what was before Him, and Thirdly, on what comes, of that which was set before Him, which He endured, and Lastly, where where we are looking, unto Jesus. He has no fear, He will brook no rival, Almighty God in our own nature, of whom the Father speaks by the Prophet saying "Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." (Isaiah 55 verse 4). And it is good for the eye to be on the commander, and to see His discouragement, will be out of the question. If you view by faith, you have His person, as that Blessed One given by God. If you see Him I say, you will find yourself greatly heartened, in this matter of running for the heavenly crown, no perishing soul, but a crown of gold. To whom I would now direct your attention. Looking unto Jesus.

Jesus is set before us in the scriptures, as The eternal Son of God, in our own nature, as the witness of God. "Who being the brightness of His (the Fathers) glory, and the express image of His person," as that blessed one "upholding all things by the word of His power." (Hebrews 1 verse 3). And to Him our attention is directed, look to Him. We are apt through reason, to fix our gaze on self, and Hart's direction is a good and healthy one

Pore not on thyself too long,
Lest it sink thee lower;
Look to Jesus, kind and strong
Mercy joined with power; (Gadsby's 780 verse 7)

On Him the eye of faith is to be fixed, He is its proper object, you will never find stability looking elsewhere, or on anyone who has faith fixed on man. The sinner sees, everything that a living soul, a weary pilgrim, a tried sinner can possibly need. Look to his person. He is "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." (Isaiah 32 verse 2).

Look to His work for that cleanses from guilt, look to His grace for that can strengthen, against all the moving, and working, and wriggling, and endeavours, of indwelling sin, to gain the victory. Look to His promises. Looking unto Jesus, O blessed object, the only direction of faith, the great all in all. As the God of all grace enables you to fix your eyes on Christ, you will find your soul so encouraged, that you can say to your soul ' my soul march boldly on'. Look to what was set before Him. The joy as it was set before Him. His joy if I may so speak, had several parts to it. One was to do "the will of Him that sent Me" (John 6 verse 40). I delight to do Thy will, O my God: yea, Thy law is within My heart. (Psalm 40 verse 8). He came to suffer, it was the will of God His Father that He should suffer. He came for this, and it was His great joy, His meat and drink. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of" (John 4 verse 32) said Christ to His disciples, as He sat on the well. I have a joy in doing that, which My Father sent Me to do. Look at this, He had the joy of one day possessing His bride, of sitting down to the marriage supper of the Lamb O when that is consummated, it was before the Lord Jesus, as He was a sufferer, it will be a great day.

The joy of having the vilest of the vile sanctified, and justified, and with Him. The joy of having a poor wanderer brought to Him in safety. A backslider restored, a prodigal brought into the house, wearing the best robe, and a ring, and shoes, and eating the fatted calf. The joy of removing the sin of the land, all the sin that attached to the church removed, and seeing the whole Israel of God, without spot or blemish, or any such thing (1 Peter 1 verse 19). He came for this end "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24 verse 26). Did He not come for this, would not He have missed the great end of His birth, His incarnation, had He not thus wrought the will of God? "For Christ is the end of the law" (Romans 10 verse 4) He came to be that for every one that believeth. This was the joy that was set before Him, and ultimately the joy was this, that with His saints, He their head, would take them, and present them to His Father, saying "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord (God) has given Me", (Isaiah 8 verse 18). Looking unto Jesus Paul says to the Hebrews. Now look at Christ in these things, when you are discouraged, remember Christ. You have many saints with you, He had none with Him, in His sorrows and sufferings. He endured the cross, you will through Him. We may be saying, sometimes, how hard is this life, how difficult to live according to our profession. Christ endured, He ran not away, when Peter said he would have Him immune from suffering, what did Christ say to him, "Get thee behind Me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men" (Mark 8 verse 33).

It is natural for men to run away from trouble and suffering, but it was of God that his Son should suffer, therefore he endured, and He despised what came upon Him. O the magnanimity of the soul of the Lord Jesus. O the glory of a suffering Saviour, who in His sufferings, and because of what was before Him, the end that God had set before Him, despised all the things, the mocking, the spitting, the smiting of men, the shame, the reproach, and dishonour, which broke His heart, He endured. He despised them, they were as of no account to Him, because He had a great end before Him.

"Himself He cannot save," (Mark 15 verse 1) they said mockingly

Himself He cannot save.
Insulting foe, tis true;
The words a gracious meaning have,
Thou meant in scorn by you. (Gadsby's 1012 verse 1)

And lastly where is He, where is this once suffering man Jesus at the end? He has sat down at the right hand of God, no more cross for Him, no more thorns, no more burden of imputed sin, no more temptation of the devil, no more society with wild beasts, all gone. No more seeming defeat, no grave to enclose Him, no guard over the grave. Victory, a victors crown, the throne of a King, the Father's throne, His glorious throne at the hand of His Father.

And says the Apostle Paul to this people, these professors. Your path must be difficult, your conflicts be heavy, your trials many, call to remembrance, what these witnesses say, look at them. A torn body, a wasted creature, a wanderer without a home, hiding in dens and caves, a few here worshipping under fear of arrest, a few here getting what they could in the providence of God to sustain their lives, and all because of the name of the Lord on which they believed, and faith in them eyed God. And this is the one great point, for us to observe, their faith centered in God. Moses endured all his troubles "as seeing His who is invisible" (Hebrews 11 verse 27).

"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." (Romans 4 verse 3). Gideon in his weakness, that was still about him, but God said, "If thou fear to go down, go thou with Phurah thy servant down to the host" (Judges 6 verse 10). Where he heard a dream related, and the interpretation of it, and that interpretation God intended that Gideon should hear, and Gideon stood. William Cowper, say's beautifully on that subject:

O ! I have seen the day,
When, with a single word,
God helping me to say,
My trust is in the Lord
My soul has quelled a thousand foes,
Fearless of all that could oppose.

But unbelief, self-will,
Self righteousness, and pride,
How often do they steal
My weapon from my side !
But David' Lord and Gideon's friend,
Has helped his servant to the end.(Gadsby's 338 verses 4,5)

So says the Apostle, now eye this great cloud. A great cloud, all in this chapter, with others not named. Grace leads the Apostle Paul to enter fully upon the cases, he names several of them. Look at them he says, hear what they have to say. What was it, that they had to say? God is faithful, God is sufficient, God will help you. Hang on Him, cleave to Him, follow Him, and He will help you to the end. Then chiefly as I have before observed, He sets Christ first, above all else, and how should He not do so, why should it be otherwise? Paul was so enamoured of Christ, that He should not leave him out anywhere. He was so enamoured of Him that he said to the Galatians, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Galatians 6 verse 14). To the Corinthians, he said "For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2 verse 2).

Dear friends, let me in conclusion just say this, that as you are discouraged, as you feel the burden and the discouragement of sin within, and of afflictions, that the one thing to help you is, when regarding first, the great cloud of witnesses, and secondly, and chiefly, and above all else, the Lord Jesus. I have dwelt on these points this morning, on the exhortation, it is at present on account of another point. It is a great exhortation, and a greatly needed one, but I have given you the grounds of it first. If through grace, you get the feet of your faith, on this blessed ground, that Paul here lays down. The cloud of witnesses, and especially, above all else, Jesus Christ. Then you will find yourselves encouraged, and also you will see the beauty, and the reason, and sufficiency that Paul has for so exhorting us to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us, and let us run with patience".

Do you not find it difficult, sometimes in these days, when the Lord is with you, to repress, and wish to be gone?

O hold on a little longer, and the day will come, when the Lord will say to some, Come up higher. He has been saying it lately to some in this congregation, today fortnight since, our sister Miss A. was with us. The following Lord's day she was in heaven. This morning our dear friend Mr Marchant died, and he is in heaven. A poor and afflicted man he has been for a long time, struggling to get here, and at last he has gone home.

He at least needs no more exhortation, but is for ever with the Lord. May our end be like his.

Amen