

WATCHWORDS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Psalm 27:13-14

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." Psalm 27:13-14

This season of the year is a time for stocktaking in matters of the spirit as well as in business. As we shall do so, we shall discover that there is much for which we can and should thank God. We may have had failures, losses and sorrows, but they will bring their compensations if we will let God use them. This is also a good time for taking stock of our position and arming ourselves afresh for uncertain days. We do not know what lies ahead in our personal lives or in the world in which we live.

The Psalmist had come upon difficult days in his journey through this world. Life seemed to have turned against him. It was not easy for him to look the future in the face with any assurance. But he recovered his perspective. As he looked back he realized that the one thing that had kept him going was his religious faith.

Many people can say the same thing. A man who had done a wonderful work for Christ had a misfortune so devastating that it seemed the whole world had crumbled and that life itself had collapsed. In spite of his situation, he was cheerful, courageous and interested in others. But one day while talking to a friend he opened his heart and said, "If it were not for God, I could not live."

By looking at things in the wrong way the heart of David was beginning to fail him. The rope to which he clung as he was being swept along on the tide of his fears toward the dark gulf of despair was the conviction that things were in God's hand, and that therefore they were bound to grow better. He gave utterance to a striking expression of the sustaining and strengthening power of faith in the words, "I had fainted unless I had believed."

How very expressive is that word "faint" in the biblical phraseology! It indicates not only that physical strength is gone, but that courage, hope and spirit have departed also. One who faints is helpless in the face of terrible foes when he should be strong.

If we had nothing but our strength upon which to rely, we would faint. One of the causes of fainting is adversity or trial. Sometimes repeated sorrows have the power to make men faint. Men faint sometimes because of reverses in fortune, or because of disappointment in labors and ambitions. Others faint in their spirit because of the slow progress of truth and righteousness in this world.

We have reached an hour in the history of civilization which is one of the most crucial mankind has ever faced. We are living in an age in which we see the accumulative consequences of the defects inherent in human nature coming to their climax. On every side we see a world torn with constant conflict within society itself in the various nations and between those nations on an international worldwide scale. The situation we face today in the sphere of human relationships has a basic cause hidden behind the scenes. That hidden cause is the fact of man's broken relationship with God. That is why we are not going to make progress in efforts to cope with our human problems and we are not going to be successful in efforts to deal with national and international problems if we approach them from a purely human and materialistic standpoint. If we are to make progress, we must be sufficiently realistic to recognize that beneath and behind all of these problems that stem from strained and broken human relationships lies the irrefutable fact of man's broken relationship with God.

Psalm twenty-seven is a song of cheerful hope. It is also a psalm of personal experience. It bears testimony to personal blessings received, and of assurances growing out of them. Here is a prescription for the avoidance of spiritual fainting. Note the affirmations with which this Psalm opens: "The Lord is my light and my salvation....the Lord is the strength (stronghold) of my life."

Surely the spiritual experience which is revealed in this song is one which we all earnestly desire. The tumult of sorrow we know. Is triumph over it possible? Our sorrows are so subtle, our pains are so poignant, our difficulties are so complex and our circumstances are so peculiar that we wonder, we question and we sometimes doubt.

We look back over the pathway we have traveled. We look at the things we have done, and we note how imperfect they have been. We look closely at the things we are doing today, and the sense of imperfection is even more appalling in the presence of immediate service than when we look at that which we have rendered already.

The land of the living is the place of disappointment. We are disappointed with ourselves, and we are disappointed in others. We become disappointed in the matter of our hopes and our aspirations. Many of them are not realized; and those we do realize are not entirely what we thought they would be.

~~The land of the living is the place of mystery. Oh! this tangle of human life; the injustices and the perplexing problems that fret the soul. The land of the living is also the place of indiscriminating, ruthless and ghastly death.~~

The Lord of goodness is the Lord of all that is right, all that is beautiful, all that is joyous, and all that makes for the true prosperity of the life. He is the fountain from which all these good things proceed and the means by which these things become real in the experience of human beings.

Marcus Aurelius, a Roman emperor of the second century, was one of the noblest pagans of history. Through all his writings there is a melancholy strain suggesting the futility of life. Of him Dr. T. R. Glover of Cambridge, in estimating his character said, "He does not believe enough to be great." Truly, our capacity to believe will determine very largely the effectiveness of our lives. Dr. E. Griffith Jones put it like this: "All of us in the end tend to become what we are in virtue of the operative beliefs of our life."

The Psalmist lived in a stormy time. He found himself hedged about with adversities. He had met crushing disappointments and sorrows. Life had almost overwhelmed him. Looking back over the experiences through which he had passed, he said, "I had fainted unless I had believed." The operative beliefs of his life saved him from despair. Despite the contradictory evidence visible all around him, he still believed in the divine government of the world, and this faith garrisoned his heart with courage.

The price of strength is its constant renewal from the sources of strength. We are familiar with this in the case of our bodies. No man is strong for a year or a week except by replacing what he is losing. Food, air, exercise, rest and sleep go into the daily remaking of a strong man. When deprived of any of these he will be weakened. This is equally true of strength of mind. Mental vigor is not his who rests upon past possessions of knowledge and intellectual interest. The same is also true in the spiritual life, and there above all. No man can live on bottled sunlight. Neither can any man live spiritually on past experiences, however, bright and encouraging they were in themselves. They must be left behind in the onward march to things still better and higher,

or they become a hindrance rather than a help. The price of spiritual strength is humble, patient, personal, active waiting upon God.

Those whose righteousness exceeds any ordinary standard are the ones who constantly depend on God for spiritual strength. They know that grace is not something that is given once for all, any more than is sunlight, but that it is something that is constantly received.

Our confidence as God's children is that in the midst of the storms of life there stands a Rock, confronted by chaos there is Certainty, lost in the maze of conflicting roads, there is for us a Way, perplexed by multiplied philosophies there is the Truth, facing inevitable death we are offered Life, and surrounded by false messiahs there stands the living Christ, man's only access to the Father.

As we face this new year there are three simple watchwords that we should take to heart.

I. Have Faith!

This may sound commonplace because it is an exhortation that meets us repeatedly on the pages of God's Word. But it may be well to ask ourselves how much it means to us.

Faith in the Bible sense is an unqualified commitment. It means that whatever happens we are prepared to hold on or to stand firm. It is a compact with God. We can depend upon His faithfulness.

Faith expresses itself in the memory of God's goodness and help in the past. It was so with the troubled soul who penned this psalm. In his past he had discovered that God saved and delivered; therefore, he was sure that God would not forsake him. That is both good reasoning and good believing. When did God ever leave or forsake you? God's mercy is expressed not only in the pardon of your sins, but in His daily grace and the strength that he gives you for your daily life. Because He has been your help, therefore, you can trust that He will be.

II. Have Courage!

There are various kinds of courage. Some service men have said that it took as much courage to leave a group of companions in order to go to church as it did to go into action.

W. R. Maltby says that when Christ had come back to His disciples after the resurrection they lost "the fear of being unpopular." These fears in some form or other effect many of us and they can only be overcome by the courage that springs from the faith that whatever happens there are resources in God which are available.

Most of the things we fear in life do not happen, and if they do, and we meet them in the courage of faith, they have something to give us which brings gain out of loss. Courage is God's gift. It will come as we take life from Him and meet it with Him. The Psalmist said, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart."

Hope that is born of faith makes a man courageous and strong. Amid all of life's vicissitudes he is sustained by the thought that within and around all things is the unfailing mercy of God.

III. Have Patience!

Having patience enough to wait is one of the difficult lessons in life. What is meant by waiting on the Lord? The word which is used here means one thing twining itself around something and clinging there like ivy around an oak, or like a child with its arms tightly thrown about its mother's neck. To wait upon the Lord is to twine the life about the Lord, to twine one's thoughts, aspirations, purposes, emotions and will about Him. In our desires, purposes, prayers and lives we must not allow anything to entice or tear us away from the Lord.

As we wait upon the Lord in spiritual meditation, prayer, Bible study and attendance upon the services in the Lord's house, His grace will flow into our souls and we will receive strength for His service. Our strength will be renewed and we shall be equal to any task, duty or emergency. Our strength comes from the Lord.