

WITHSTANDING TEMPTATION

Psalm 73:1-15

Through the centuries the Psalms have been of tremendous value to God's children. In them are found an account of things that have happened to godly men in their lives and warfare. The Psalms provide for us the comfort and the kind of teaching we need, and which we cannot find anywhere else. They are just as fresh today as they were on the days in which they were written. Because they have something vital to say to us, they are indeed invaluable to us in the realm of personal helpfulness. As we read and study them, we discover that the experiences of God's children in those days are very similar to our experiences today. As George Eliot reminded us, the heart of humanity is the same through the years, ever pulsating to the same great needs, the same great loves, and the same great longings. It is of tremendous help to us to study the Psalms, and to receive therefrom the light, the knowledge, and the instruction which we need so much.

From a certain height the Psalmist looks back across the yesterdays. As he views the road along which he has traveled, he notes one place where he had encountered a great difficulty. He does not hesitate to share with his readers the experience which he had. Very frankly he told the truth about himself. He very freely admitted that he had been subjected to great temptation. He confessed that his feet had slipped. He acknowledged that he had acted in ignorance and foolishness. He knew what it meant to be cast down, and to be in sore and grievous trouble.

We can and should be grateful for this spiritual biography of this man who struggled and triumphed centuries ago, and whose life-story is amazingly up-to-date. What was it that came so near tripping him? Over what did he stumble? It was evident that he was greatly bewildered at God's perplexing ordering of things. For the life of him, he could not understand how the infinite and holy God could govern the world in this manner in which he thought that the world of his day was being governed. The beginning of his difficulty was that the facts of life that he observed and experienced failed to check with his faith. Because he believed in God's kingship, he was convinced that the man who did right would come out first and best, while the man who did wrong would meet with disaster along the way. He was confident that a good man prospered in purse as well as in his soul. He had the notion that a bad man would be certain to go to the wall financially and otherwise. That was the same idea that was held by the would-be comforters of Job. When they saw that Job was a great sufferer, they at once concluded that he was a great sinner, and very frankly said so.

There were people all about the Psalmist who ignored God, who did not make a profession of religion, and who had little or no respect for the rights of others, and yet they seemed to be getting along very nicely. It is not surprising especially that the Psalmist grew envious of the wicked, and was unable to understand why God blessed some of them more than He did many of the righteous. He remarked, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." This is another example of one who became sour in spirit when he saw the wickedness flourishing in high places and many of the godly victims of misfortune. The Psalmist said, "For there are no bands in their death; but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." He was perplexed when he thought of the way in which they showed insolence toward others, and laughed and jeered at holy and sacred things, in much the same manner that so many today ridicule reverence, honest, and purity as being old-fashioned and back-woodsy.

The Psalmist tells us that he was very badly shaken, and that he very nearly fell. He had been practising the godly life, avoiding sin, meditating upon the things of God, spending considerable time in prayer, examining his life, confessing his sins to God with regret for

them, and seeking God's forgiveness. He had wanted his life to please God. In spite of all that, he had been plagued and chastened; he had experienced a difficult time. He does not tell us exactly what had happened. It may have been sickness in his life or in his family, or trouble of some other type. Whatever it was, it was very grievous to him. To him it seemed that everything had gone wrong. Believing that God was holy, righteous and true, and that He intervened on behalf of His people and surrounded them with loving care and wonderful promises, his problem was how to reconcile all this with what was happening to him, and still more with what was happening to the ungodly. His perplexity concerning this was not surprising, but quite understandable. Perhaps you, too, have thought that God should be blessing His children always and never chastise them.

When in perplexity about these matters, the Psalmist absented himself from the house of worship. Naturally he fell into doubt and despair. Finally somebody induced him to return to the house of worship and there enter into delightful fellowship with God. There it was revealed to him that he had taken a very short view of the whole matter when he had regarded the temporary prosperity of the wicked as being permanent.

One purpose of our scripture lesson is to teach us how to withstand temptation when it assails us. If you and I really learn how to deal with temptation in the right way, it will bring us great satisfaction to turn it into a great source of victory. We, like the Psalmist, will come to the realization that God is good in all circumstances, in all ways, and at all times.

When things have gone wrong with you, it is likely that you have been tempted to doubt. While that is not surprising, it is not necessary for you to yield to the temptation of Satan. Truly, God is always good to those who are His children, who are of a clean heart, and who are really striving to please Him.

It is wonderful that God teaches us how to control ourselves, which is one of our major problems of living on this earth. To manage yourself is the most difficult task that you face. It is so much easier to manage other people than it is to control yourself.

The Psalmist was suddenly tempted to say something or to do something, and was almost thrown off his balance. He was on the verge of yielding to temptation. Fortunately he took himself in hand, perhaps without knowing just why he did so. He just kept himself from saying what was on the tip of his tongue. It was there, but he did not say it. He realized the importance of never speaking hurriedly, or on an impulse. It is never best for a Christian to say or to do anything in haste. The New Testament tells us, "Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath" (James 1:19). If this verse alone were obeyed, how much trouble would be avoided! What a lot of irritations, quarreling, backbiting, and unhappiness would be avoided in life, if only this injunction were heeded! Stop and think. When the Psalmist saw the prosperity of the ungodly and thought of his own troubles and those of others who were righteous, he began to think about it and to talk to himself about it. When he looked at it again and rightly, he overcame his temptation. He knew for a certainty that it was wrong for him to be a stumbling-block or cause of offence to others, so he was perfectly willing not to try to solve the problem at once, and after he went back into the sanctuary, where he should have been going in the meantime, but which place he had neglected, he found the right answer. There he discovered that he had greatly exaggerated the prosperity of the wicked. There he also was convinced of the presence of God and that he possessed great riches in and through Him. So often God's hand is hidden in our lives, but He overrules the evil for our good and enables us to see the good in the end.