

WAITING ON THE LORD

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.

The man who penned these verses lived in stormy days. Life seemed to have turned against him. He had met crushing disappointments and sorrows. He found himself hedged about with adversities. It was not easy for him to look into the future with any assurance.

Many people have similar experiences. 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. But, in spite of his situation, he was cheerful, courageous, and interested in others. Then, 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 thing that enabled him to overcome, 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." As he looked back he realized that the one thing that had kept him going was his religious faith.

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 presence of terrible foes when he should be strong.

If we did not have anything but our own strength on which to rely, we too, would faint. One of the causes of fainting is adversity or trial. Sometimes men faint because of disappointment in their labors, ambitions, and achievements. Sometimes people faint because of reverses in fortune. Sometimes repeated sorrows cause men to faint. Others faint because of the slow progress of truth and righteousness in the world.

We have reached a day 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 also between those nations on an international and worldwide scale. The situation which 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 estranged 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.

Surely the spiritual experience which is revealed in this psalm is one which each of us earnestly desires. 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 pathways that we have traveled. We look at the things we have done, and we note that all of them have been imperfect. We look carefully at the things we are doing today, and the sense of imperfection and inadequacy is even more appalling than when we look at that which we have rendered already. This world is the place of disappointment. We are disappointed in the realm of our aspirations and our hopes. Many of them will never be realized. Those we do realize will not be 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 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 operative beliefs of the psalmist 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.

Let me bring you three admonitions from our text!

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 hurt, the fear of being poor, 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.