

Testings and Trials

1 Peter 1: 3 - 9

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I want to emphasize one side of the future which we are apt to forget. Our portion is a heavenly one, and when we get to heaven it will be a day of rejoicing. But remember, we are to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the things done in the body.

There is heaven, the Father's house, the abode of love, into which the children of God are to be introduced. But there is also *the kingdom* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We shall enter the Father's house because of the divinely established relationship which is common to us all, and in which we stand irrespective of the measure of our growth in grace, as a result of the work of Christ. But when it is a question of entrance into the kingdom, it is very different. Scripture speaks of an *abundant* entrance into the kingdom, and by inference there may be those whose entrance is anything but abundant. The apostle in 2 Peter 1 exhorts us to give diligence that we may grow, that we may develop a sturdy Christian character, that as a result of that growth and development we may have an abundant entrance into the kingdom when it comes.

Meanwhile our lives down here are very largely made up of testings and trials. Why is it that the Lord allows so many of these strange happenings, these trials, these occurrences which naturally we so much dislike? We have an answer to this question in the Scripture before us. It is written to those who have been begotten again to a living hope, not a hope like that of the disciples before Christ died, a hope connected with His Messiahship and the establishment of the kingdom in power. That hope was shattered when Messiah, instead of mounting the throne of David and reigning gloriously, was crucified. We have only to read Luke 24, that pathetic story of two distracted disciples who were drifting away to Emmaus, to realize how utterly their hope had died within them.

By the abundant mercy of our God and Father WE have a hope that is anchored within the veil, a hope that will never be disappointed, a hope that lies on the other side of death and is fixed in resurrection. We have an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. The inheritance that Israel entered into was rapidly defiled and corrupted, but ours is reserved in heaven for us. We are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation ready to be revealed in all its completeness in the last time.

What about the meanwhile? What of those who are in heaviness through manifold temptations?

How these testings do come! We are none of us immune from them. Notice two little clauses in connection with them. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now *for a season*." Thank God for those words, "for a season." For a season we are in heaviness. Our hearts, while we rejoice, feel a certain sense of oppression. Perhaps we personally have suffered very little, but every heart which is capable of any degree of sympathy must surely feel oppressed. In Hebrews 11 we find Moses making his immortal choice. He says, "Give me the reproach of Christ, with the glory which is to follow, and let me not go in the track of the pleasures of sin—they are *for a season*." The pleasures of the world, and the trials and afflictions of the saints are both only for the same brief space of time—"for a season." The heaviness of manifold temptations is but for a season, and when the pleasures of the worldling die within him, the heaviness of the saints will end as well.

The next little bit is sweeter still. It is sweet to know that the heaviness and the trials are but for a

season, but it adds, "if *need be*." We do not get these temptations and trials unless there is a need for them. They are "for a season, if need be." Is there a weight on my heart? I ought then, evidently, in the light of this scripture, to turn to my Father and God and say, "There is a need for this, or I should not have it." There is never a trial nor a testing, never a heaviness in the hearts of God's people, but there is a need for it. What that need may be in my case it might be difficult to say. It is very like that scripture in Romans 8, where it says we do not know what we should pray for as we ought. The verse which follows should begin with a "but." "But we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." There is a *need*. Let us remember that.

We get light as to what the need is in a general way in the seventh verse of 1 Peter 1. "The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth." Faith is much more precious than gold, though it be tried with fire, referring to the most intense form of testing. Faith is never lost. How often it has happened that a devoted missionary has gone forth, filled with love to Christ and souls. He has been like a shining lamp for a brief hour, and has been called home. We say there must have been some mistake. Here was that devoted man, who went to China and had just begun to acquire a command of the language; it looked as if he would be greatly used of God, but he has died. All that is lost.

No, not lost; it is going to be *found*! It says, it "shall be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." The thing that seemed to be lost is going to be found. What a finding it will be when that hour is reached! It will be found unto praise and honour and glory. Whose? That of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the hour when He appears in glory, though He will have His own glory, and the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels, He will not be too great to wear a little glory that has been brought to Him by these things which we imagined were lost.

I hope that each one of us will have our hearts fired by a holy ambition to share in this. I think we see very plainly, if we read the New Testament, that service is going to be rewarded in that day, down to the very smallest act, if it be really for Christ. A cup of cold water will not be forgotten. But we find also that *character* will be rewarded. We read in 2 Peter 1 about adding to our faith, virtue. That is really growth, the development of Christian character. The most beautiful graces were all seen perfectly in our Lord Jesus Christ, and you and I are instructed to give diligence that we develop these things, and if we do, there will be an abundant entrance for us into the kingdom which is coming. In other words, though we perhaps do not perform any great service we can develop the character which is brought out in that Scripture. A saint may lie on a bed of suffering. What can he do? He cannot preach to the heathen 3000 miles away. He cannot even do much in the way of speaking to the heathen in this favoured land. But he may by patience in suffering develop that Christlikeness which is exceedingly precious in God's sight. It will be rewarded "in that day." It is a question in 2 Peter 1. Of the development of Christian character rather than the accomplishment of any great act of Christian service.

There is another thing. If there is one element which is going to weigh heavily in the adjudication of rewards in the kingdom it is not mere service, nor even in a certain sense character; it is those who have *suffered* that are going to reign. We ought not to trade on grace. Grace is grace, thank God, or we should never be in heaven at all. Though we are sure of that, remember there is the kingdom, there is the appearing of Jesus Christ, there is the judgment seat, which will put all things to the test. If we are in circumstances that test us, and if manifold trials and heaviness press upon our spirits, remember there is a need for it. Let us get to our knees and seek that we may know God's purpose in it. It is only for a season, but it is designed to do its blessed work in us, so that all might be to praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ. God grant that we may be stirred in our hearts to play our little part as

those who fear and love the Lord in these days, which we have such strong reason to believe are the last.