

## "The trial of your faith."

1 Peter 1: 3-9.

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There are found in this short passage quite a number of things that have been occupying us very largely during this week. For instance, I notice that mercy is emphasized, and hope, and an inheritance, and salvation, and faith, and temptations, and trials. Now we have been in our thoughts moving amidst the first, second, third and fourth of these things, and thank God for an occasion like this when we can retire somewhat from the world and our ordinary duties and callings and give time to the consideration of the things of faith that circle around the mercy and hope and the inheritance and the salvation. Still, of course, we have got to come back to the ordinary, humdrum, and frequently rather trying circumstances of daily life.

We have got to the end of our week, and I want to have just a few words with you about this resumption of the ordinary duties of life. But, first of all, just a word on these four things. You see each of them is characterised in a certain way, each is mentioned with an adjective. For instance, mercy is *abundant* mercy. Thank God that we have received of the abundant mercy there is in our God, in that He has begotten us again. Most amazing mercy that we should be begotten of God, and begotten unto a hope which is connected with a risen Saviour. Here, too, we find an adjective, it is a *lively* hope. You know we might have been forgiven in a stinted fashion. We might have had mercy strewn to us but of a very limited order, as is always the case amongst men, but the mercy of our God is an abundant mercy. We can admire it, when we do see amongst men something that is a pale reflection of the abundant mercy of our God.

Some time ago I either read or heard a story told of a famous pianist. It ran something like this:- A young lady, who was a pianist of considerable powers, found it very difficult to get an entrance and earn her living as she desired. She was going to give a recital in a continental city and she fell into a very sad temptation. She was to play some of the works of the celebrated Abbe Liszt, and she felt, If I could somehow get the prestige of his name (he was at the height of his popularity at that time) it would greatly help me. So she had herself advertised as being a pupil of the celebrated man, when she had never even seen him. However, when she arrived at the town a day before and booked her room in the hotel, what was her horror to see the name of Abbe Liszt in the hotel books. The great man was there himself in the town. She had a fearful night, overwhelmed with horror and remorse. She said, Whatever shall I do? I am ruined. He will refute me. I am caught indeed. After breakfast the next day she sought an interview with the great man, she told him the truth and broke into tears. He said, "My dear young lady, what has possessed you to do a thing like this? Why wreck your fair name at the beginning of your career?" She told him of her struggles and of how she was tempted to do it. At last he quietly said, "My dear young lady, I forgive you. We will say no more about it."

That was good, was it not? It was mercy to forgive her, but he was going to show her abundant mercy. So he said, "What were the works of mine you were going to perform?" "Oh," she said, "so and so and so and so." He said, "I would like to hear you play them on the piano." In the presence of the master she had to play a piece. He said, "Yes, very good, but I should rather play it like this." And he played the piece so that she might get the idea. Then she played it again, and he listened and suggested this and that. Suddenly he said, "Look here, mademoiselle, you *are* my pupil for I have just given you a lesson; and as I happen to have a free evening, with your permission I am coming to your concert and I

will introduce you to your audience. That was handsome, was it not? He had redeemed the situation, and she found her concert a brilliant success.

That comes to my mind as an illustration of *abundant* mercy. But how faint a shadow is that of *this* mercy. He had become her musical father, but here is One who has begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The hope that is ours is a *living* hope because it is connected with a risen Christ, who being raised from the dead dies no more; death has no more dominion over Him. He has come out of death, and the hopes that are centred in the risen Lord Jesus Christ are hopes that will never die.

We not only have a mercy which is abundant, and a hope that is living, but an inheritance. Now you have about four adjectives. *Incorruptible, undefiled, unfading* and *reserved in heaven*; that is to say, out of reach of man's interfering fingers, reserved in heaven for you. For that we are kept. Salvation is ready to be revealed and it is guaranteed by the power of God on the one hand and by faith as regards our side of the matter. The power of God is indeed infinite and unfailing. The inheritance is reserved for us in heaven, and we are preserved on earth for it by the power of God operating through faith.

Now faith has been very much before us in our meetings, and by it we are kept unto that *ready-to-be-revealed* salvation, which is coming. We greatly rejoice in that, though at the present moment we are plunged into these temptations and trials. They have an adjective you see — *manifold*. They catch us all unawares. The wind of temptation seems to blow from all points of the compass at once, a thing it does not do in nature. Satan has all kinds of artifices, he appears in all kinds of guises, and the flesh within is treacherous beyond all words. Manifold temptations, and God permits them. Many of us will be saying — That is the trouble. We come away from a season like this, from enjoying a spiritual retreat, we resume our ordinary duties in the old humdrum circumstances and there are the testings and the trials of every kind.

Your difficulty is not mine, very likely, and you may look at me with an envious eye and say, It is all very well for you. Well, is it? I may have testings of which you know nothing. Testings are so manifold. Because I don't visibly have something you have, it doesn't mean I have nothing at all. I may have that of which you know nothing. Indeed I am sure I have. There *are* manifold temptations, and we are oftentimes *in heaviness* through manifold temptations. We feel it. The weight of them comes down upon us and we cannot escape the weight, and, let me tell you this, we are not intended to. We are intended to feel these things; so that we are tested by them. The test that they impose upon us works out things of value as the next verse says.

Verse 7 speaks of faith again, and every word of the verse is full of meaning. The trial of your faith is like the refining of gold; and, you observe it says, "of gold that *perisheth*." Gold does not perish very easily. No. When they dug up poor old Tutankhamen, with all his splendid surroundings, there were things of papyrus and fine linen of Egypt, brown with age and at a touch crumbling to pieces. But there were things of gold, and they were not much affected compared with all the other objects in that famous tomb. Gold is an enduring thing but it perishes; the inference evidently being that faith does not. Faith is much more *precious* than gold that perisheth. God treasures your faith, and that is the adjective He applies to it. In the sight of God faith is something of very, very great price.

Why does that goldsmith take all the pains and spend time over his crucible in which gold is being refined? Because it is such a valuable thing he wants to remove the dross and have it of the finest quality. God permits His people to be put into the crucible and tries them, even by fire, but it is because faith in His estimation is a thing of exceeding value. So we are going to look at our testings in the light

of this, God is dealing with us for the refining of faith, and to strengthen it. The fact of the matter is, if we Christians suffer no testings we shall never be anything but weaklings in a spiritual sense: It is the very testings that make us spiritually strong.

Now I am going back for a moment to verse 6. There are two main clauses here. You greatly rejoice in the coming salvation though now "*for a season*" and "*if need be*" you are in heaviness through manifold temptations. It is a fact that we shall never be in heaviness through manifold temptations except there is a "needs be" for it. God does not test us capriciously. It is not that He delights in our testings and our heaviness or even in chastening or rebuking or scourging; we are assured of that in Hebrews 12. So we each have to say to ourselves, If God did not see some spiritual need to be met I should not be face to face with, and under the heavy pressure of, this trial.

And then, look: it is only for a season. I expect you all will remember another place where it says something is for a season. "The pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11: 25). Moses lived a long life; one hundred and twenty years. He turned his back on Egypt and its sinful pleasures at the end of forty years. He had forty years in the back side of the desert. Then a much worse forty years, worried and irritated by people who behaved in a very very perverse way. God suffered their manners in the wilderness and Moses, the meekest man in all the earth, broke down under it just before the forty years terminated. I could not have stood it forty minutes: Moses stood it forty years, and then he could stand it no more. But Moses never regretted turning his back on all the pleasures that could only have lasted another eighty years. The reproach of Christ that he embraced only lasted eighty years.

Your trials, your testings, which God sees to be necessary they are only for a season, because He is going to reach His blessed and glorious end. He is going to make them efficacious. They are going to accomplish blessed results, and the faith that has been tested in the crucible, and like being lost, is going to be *found*: "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Ah! this puts a different aspect on things. We ought not to be so frightfully distressed when our faith is tried. Though we may feel we are being worn out with the same kind of difficulties and troubles and exercises week after week, month after month and year after year, there is a day coming when it will be found unto praise and honour and glory; primarily, no doubt, of the God who so patiently deals with us, but also, without a doubt, to the reward of the one who has stood the testings.

My mind reverts to another story, a musical one strangely enough. The story is told of a young man who went to take lessons under a very celebrated master, great on voice production. He had very good vocal chords. The great man heard him sing and then set him a long course of vocal exercises that he was to practice for hours every day.

Up and down his voice went, up and down, in and out — a very tiresome kind of business. He went on and on, week after week, until he was absolutely sick and tired of the whole business. However, when he remonstrated the man said, You must go on. Months passed, and to his disgust he was kept on and on and on at the same extraordinary sequence of exercises. One day, when his patience was very nearly gone the master said, Now I think we shall be able to finish these exercises at the end of next week. The end of next week came round and he began to think, Now for some lessons that are new! But the master said, "Young man, I am finished with you. I have nothing more to teach you. Go. You are the finest singer in Europe." And it was so.

Something had been wrought in him. He had not realised it but the master knew what he was doing and he developed his singing powers by a very tiresome course of preparation. He was often in heaviness through the repeated testings, not quite realising what was being done, and it is often like that with us. Young Christian, you are likely to get impatient in learning your lessons, but depend upon it

God is testing your faith. We have spent several mornings discussing faith as seen in Hebrews 11. It has been a serious business. It is very certain we shall be tested in faith and if we answer to the test it will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

But before he appears we see Him by faith and we love Him. We cannot see Him with our natural eyes, yet, believing, He becomes a great reality to us. All these testings clarify the eye of faith, and hence we can rejoice. Our joy has an adjective with it — *unspeakable*: Not merely greatly rejoicing, as in verse 6, but now rejoicing with a joy impossible of expression, and full of glory, receiving the end of our faith — soul salvation, soul emancipation.

Let us not shrink then at the thought of the testings that are bound to come, because there is the power of God with our faith to carry us through the testings, and there is the glorious result produced by the testings as God works by them in our hearts. It is not lost exercise or waste of time. It is going to be found to His praise and honour and glory when Jesus comes.