

THE SAINT'S TRIALS AND THE DIVINE DELIVERANCES

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A SERMON
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*"I cried unto God....Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron."
 Psalm 77:1, 20*

THIS psalm describes the condition of a child of God under deep depression of spirit. He is much tried and bowed, and yet, at the same time, the saint at last gets the victory, and before the psalm is over, the clouds are all removed from the sky, and the heart rejoices in the sunlight of divine love.

It is known to every believer that the experience of a Christian is very variable. We are like our own strange weather in this land. South winds blow, and all is warm and balmy, and in a few hours the north wind comes or the cutting east wind, and soon the ground is covered with snow or hard white frost, and yet, perhaps, in another day or two there will be a storm. Some believers have all spiritual weathers in a week. Being somewhat excitable, perhaps naturally, they readily take to themselves wings and mount aloft, but then as a high soar is often followed by a great fall, these very believers are soon sighing and crying out of the very depths, and half doubt whether they are the people of God at all.

Nor must I say that is common to merely excitable people. Some of the very noblest heroes in the Christian army have had a very dark experience to go through. If you read the life of Martin Luther, of whom we may well say that never braver soldier fought beneath the banner of the cross, you will find him the subject of the most terrible exercises. He was strong in his God, but he was very weak in himself—subject to ferocious temptations—temptations the like of which probably few of us have ever known because we are not men of his gigantic mold, and God does not allow trials to come upon us which were only suitable for him. He oftentimes seemed to lie at hell's gates, and then, again, the man seemed as if he had looked heaven in the face and lived in perpetual communion with his God.

John Bunyan's description of the progress of the pilgrim to heaven would lead us to expect that there would be changes, for at one time we find the pilgrim safely housed in the Palace Beautiful—all around him is redolent with the odor of flowers and the song of birds—next day he descends to the Valley of Humiliation. Even there he has a conflict or two, but a little farther on he comes to the Valley of Death Shades, and there he has to fight for every step while darkness surrounds him, and the adversary of souls comes forth to meet him.

We are uphill and downhill all the way to heaven. Like the children of Israel, our path to Canaan lies through a wilderness, and though, blessed be God, the grace of heaven has made the wilderness to rejoice and blossom as a rose, yet are there fiery serpents in it, and it is a wilderness, after all. Notwithstanding all that God does for us while in it, this state in this present world is a state of bondage. "We that are in this body do groan, being burdened"—longing for the time of the home-bringing, when we shall come to our own country, and be at rest forever and forever.

Now at this time I shall not attempt to describe all the spiritual conflict with error. If I am not able to describe that (and who is?), I can at least speak with a measure of assurance of the spiritual experience of some of God's servants, for I will go no deeper than I have gone myself, and if I do that, I shall be able to speak with some measure of assurance.

First, then, let us make the remark that *the child of God may undergo great spiritual trials*. But secondly, we shall ask you to consider *the conduct of the child of God when in the condition*—very

different from that of the worldly man. And thirdly, we shall notice *those springs of comfort which relieve saints* in that spirit, and will relieve us also. First, then—

I. A TRUE CHILD OF GOD MAY UNDERGO VERY DEEP MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL TRIALS.

No superficial trials, such as are common to men, but really overwhelming trials, seem to come to those who are favorites of heaven, who lean their heads on Jesus' bosom, and are amongst the most gracious of the Lord's chosen. Asaph's trial was no light one, it was a great grief that came upon him. From some words in the psalm, one would think it was a personal disease under which he was suffering, but from other words it would seem to be a deep affliction that had come upon his family and those he loved. This had caused him to be depressed in spirit and heavy in soul, and that to a very solemn degree, for he declared that his sore ran in the night, and ceased not. He complained that his spirit was overwhelmed. Don't, therefore, conclude that you are no child of God because the joys you once had are gone.

I am delighted when I have been with young Christians full of their first joy, and I earnestly pray that it will be very long before those joys are dampened, but at the same time, it may be prudent to let them know that should those joys depart, it will be no evidence whatever that God's love is departed too. We must always beware of living by feeling. It is pleasant in summer, but it is an ill way of living in the winter of the soul.

We walk by faith, not by sight, nor yet by feeling, for we remember that our feelings are often of a very mixed character, and what we think to be holy joy may be, some of it animal excitement—may not be altogether that joy of the Lord which is our strength. Don't, don't, I beseech you, base your evidence of the possession of salvation upon your joy, because if you do, you will be in sad trouble when your joy varies or flies.

Build your hope on something better than unsubstantial delights, namely, on the finished work of faith, such as the poor publican had, crying still, even in your best frames, "God be merciful to me a sinner; God be merciful to me a sinner," for between here and the gates of heaven you will have to go by a weeping cross, perhaps many times, and if the Lord loves you more than others, you will have more trials than others—strange trials shall come to you. Therefore, regard it not as though some strange thing had happened to you. Some of the best of God's people may pass through the deepest trouble.

And remark, next, that *this may not only be very deep, but very frequent*. It appears to have been so with Asaph. He describes himself as being by day and by night vexed with his trouble. It was not a transient cloud, it was a heavy storm that brooded over his spirit. For forty days and nights the heavens seemed to pour down their torrents, and his soul felt no rest. Do not wonder if you sometimes shall come into that condition. I pray you may not, but if you do, I say be upon your guard not to condemn yourself.

You remember how holy Job's friends, when they saw him upon a dunghill scraping himself with a potsherd, began to tell him that he must be a hypocrite or he would not be there? How could he be what he professed to be and yet be there? Now that is what the devil will tell you. If you are in deep trials, and are on a dunghill too, he will say that, and perhaps some of your Christian friends will say the same. It will be very ungenerous and un-Christlike if they do. Worst of all, perhaps you yourself will think the same, but let the warning of this evening help to keep you from such a temptation.

It is no evidence whatever that God has no love to you if He even chastens you, for remember who it was—that it was none other than a great servant of God who said, "All the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning," and He who was greater still, even your blessed Lord and Master, was the "man of sorrows" and the acquaintance of grief. Do not, then, for your own soul's sake, permit any insinuation as to God's love being shown in your happiness, or His hatred being manifest in your depression of spirit. Do not suffer it to cross your mind.

Some of the best of God's servants have, moreover, not only been in the deeps, and been there long, but when in such a condition *they have refused to be comforted*. Read the second verse, "My soul refused to be comforted"—as if he had put away everything that could cheer him. A man of God and a

poet too—a man inspired, and who could cheer others, as he has done by the sweet lays which he has left us in the Book of Psalms—yet when these sweet things were brought before him he said, “Put them away.”

And have you never known, O you advanced Christians—(I know you have known)—what it is to say of a promise, “No, it is very precious, but I am afraid I should deceive myself if I were to think ‘That is mine.’” You have found the word come very precious home to your soul when you have heard a sermon, and then at night, when you have tossed upon your bed, you have said, “I am afraid it would be nothing better than presumption if I were to suck in all the consolation out of that.” All the while the comfort was yours, and you might have had it, and the sweets were meant on purpose for you, and yet you could not take them.

Now there is something good about that. A holy anxiety is a thing that is desirable, and I would never preach up the full assurance of faith so as for a moment to speak a word against that holy anxiety. My soul has often said, “I will not be comforted till Jesus comfort me”—put away the peace that many have spoken and said, “No, no peace shall ever come to my soul except the peace, the Master's peace—peace from His own lips by His own Spirit,” and I believe that is right. But sometimes that anxiety may be carried to an unbelieving extent and state. We set up tests for ourselves that are not warrantable, and condemn ourselves when God does not condemn us, and though we be the precious children of God, comparable to fine gold, we reckon ourselves to be as the earthen vessels, the work of the hands of the potter.

It is very easy to write bitter things against yourself when the clouds of darkness are hanging over your soul. This good man did so, he refused to be comforted. When this occurs, it is not at all remarkable if the grief of soul that is caused in the man *should break his sleep*. Observe how he puts it, “Thou holdest mine eyes waking.” The eyelids—those guards of the eye were made to keep their station, the eyes would still be open, there was no rest for the man. And who can rest when he does not know that he is a saved soul? Let me doubt whether I am God's child, and dare I rest?

I am often astounded at the ease with which some men talk of their doubts and fears. Do not know whether you are saved or not and yet go to sleep! Perhaps you may wake in death. An enemy to God, or afraid that you may be, and yet find rest! My dear brother, I will not condemn your doubts, but I must condemn you if you can be in ease at all while you are under them, for surely this is a matter of the first importance—“Am I His or am I not?”

Am I really regenerate or is it all pretence? Am I made to seem to live, while I am dead, or am I truly one of those whom God has made to be a new creation in Christ Jesus? Now when a man gets really disturbed about that, and that is the question, and he is afraid lest God's mercy and God's promise should not be to him, that he is left to himself to perish—when a man is in that state, he cannot rest, he must feel then that until this quarrel be over, and this problem is decided, he can find no rest to the sole of his foot.

Moreover, in such circumstances, it may sometimes occur that *the good man cannot tell his story to anybody else*. So it is here, “I am so troubled that I cannot speak”—dare not tell it to anybody else—too great a grief to be unburdened. He could whisper it low at the Redeemer's feet, “My Lord, have pity on Your servant,” but he cannot come and tell others because he does not know that any other has been through the same. He is afraid that his course is singular and so remarkable that if he were to mention it, his brethren would shun him. Besides, perhaps he has begun to mention it to some, and they, not understanding him, have given him such a harsh reply that he shrank altogether from them.

There are many fat kine that push and push with horn and shoulder the lean ones of God's flock, and 'tis ill, 'tis ill when we do this. He that is troubled in spirit and cast down is often as a lamb despised by those that are at ease. He may be the best man of the whole company and yet, if he were to tell his experience, they would think him to be the worst. He may be the best in the whole church, and yet such may be the turmoil of his soul sometimes that were he to narrate his experience, many who are not to be

compared with him for a moment would fight shy of him altogether. He has a grief within him which he cannot tell.

And now comes one other point, and this, perhaps, is the worst phase of the depression through which this man of God may go, namely, that even that *which ought to comfort him will minister to his yet greater grief*. He says, "I remembered God, and was troubled." Why, brethren, our thoughts of God are refreshing to us, they always should be. Just as good meat ought to nourish the body (only when the body is sick, that good meat turns to mischief), so always thoughts of God ought to delight our soul, and I rejoice that they do for the most part. In our pilgrimage there is nothing yields us such a delightful song as the thought of our God, the Father, the Savior, and the blessed indwelling Spirit.

But when the soul is sick, and a gracious soul may get sick in that way, the very thoughts of God become a trouble. See how it is. You will think, "He is very just, how can I stand in His sight?" But He is very gracious. Yes, and how gracious He has been to me, and how unworthily have I made any return for that grace! He is loving, ah! and very loving. How can I expect that I should taste of that love after the poor return I have made? And shall every attribute of God will at such times seem to be black against you. His very faithfulness—you will feel. "Ah! if He is faithful to His promise, what part and lot shall I have in that promise? It must be, after all, a mere delusion of mine that my name is written in His book. How can it be that I shall have a share among His chosen?"

Whereas, when the soul is right, every attribute of God is cheering, when once it gets in darkness, and gets away from the cross-foot—gets away from looking with a poor sinner's tearful eye to the sinner's Savior, simply and alone, shall every attribute of God will seem to roll with thunder and flash with lightning on his spirit. I do know what this means.

I have stood and seen the storm fly o'er my head, cloud on cloud, blacker and yet blacker, and my spirit crushed and utterly broken, until not a hope was left. Then have I seen one rift in the midst of the cloud, and a lone star shining there, the Star of Bethlehem, and looking up, all seemed calm beneath my soul, even on that sea. Just then the storm stopped at sight of that star, and there I seemed to see the love of God to the very guiltiest of men, to the off-scouring of sinners, and the refuse, and resting as a little child, humbly, simply, and alone, upon what the Master did for sinners on the tree, joy and peace have come back.

But many and many, and many a child of God has known what it is to see every hope blasted and all experience gone, and all grace withered—that is, apparently so, for it was not really so—because after all, perhaps we are never richer than when we think we are the poorest of all, never so well clad as when we know we are naked in ourselves, never so near to God as when we feel we are near to hell if the grace of God does not interpose.

Thus I have given you but a very brief outline of the mental and spiritual trials through which an heir of heaven may sometimes pass. Now, secondly—

II. WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE CHILD OF GOD WHEN HE GETS INTO THIS DEPRESSION OF SPIRIT?

Well, I will tell you what a man does when he is not a child of God. He cries, with Pliable, "The first time I get out of this, if I get out on the side nearest my house, you may have the brave country to yourself for all me, for I am not going floundering through this bog of mud." Anybody's dog will follow me if I feed it, but only my own dog will follow me if I beat it. And any man will be a Christian, or profess to be one, while it is all joy, and silver slippers, and gravel walks, but only the man who really loves God, who says, "All the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning"—it is only the man of God that can say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him—if He takes away my comfort, and I have no joy but in himself, still will I cling to him."

Now Asaph did not go off, as many men would, to worldly pleasures to make up his loss. He did not say, "Well, well, I am not as happy as I used to be in my religious profession—I shall go to a theater or find gay companions, or stick to business to drown my thoughts." No, no. He, just as the child which has been chastened by its parent (if it is what it should be) can only find comfort by clinging to the very

parent that chastened it, and ask for a loving, forgiving kiss, even so it is with the chastened child of God, he clings to God the more, the more he is made to smart. So the first thing Asaph did was he prayed. "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice."

Oh! sweet consolation of prayer! Would not some hearts be broken utterly if they could not pray! This is the sweet vent that we get for our fermented griefs. Our spirits are soon at rest when we can but pray. Let us pray. "Let not your hearts be troubled. Ye believe God; believe also in me." You see how he puts it twice, "I cried unto God with my voice—even unto God with my voice." He betook himself to prayer.

The next thing he did was, *he betook himself to meditation*. "I remembered God." (Fifth verse) "I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times." (Sixth verse) "I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with mine own heart, and my spirit made diligent search." He began to meditate—more, to meditate on his God—to meditate on what God had done for other saints—to meditate upon his own former joys and helps in times of trouble, and to meditate upon the sweet songs which he had then uttered when he himself had been in trial aforetime. Now this was a sweet way of gaining consolation.

Does the Lord smite me? Well, then, I will think of the day when He caressed me. Am I in trouble, and has He put me in it? Then I will think of the times when I was in troubles before, and He brought me out of them. He has been with me in six troubles, will He leave me in the seventh? I have gone through the waters—He was there with me, will He leave me now that He has brought me so far? Can it be that with so long a time of love, He will now desert His child? This gathers force.

Aged Christian, you are sixty or seventy. You expect to live another ten years, and God has preserved you for seventy, cannot you trust Him for the other ten? After so much kindness in the past, will He cease now? Oh! it is good to go over these things, and then to recollect when, in years gone by, you were in as bad a condition as you are now, and you sang all the while.

Ah! dear friend, you lost one you dearly loved, but you were supported. What, are you going to sink now? Why, the time was when you could play the man for Christ. Why, you ran the risk of losing all that you had for His name's sake, and are you going to throw down your weapons now? You are like the old navigator who had been round the world, and when he got into the Thames coming home the wind blew. "Oh!" he said, "Have I been round the world, and am I going to drown in a ditch? Not I."

And so I say to you. Have you passed through all these troubles and difficulties, and are you going to be lost, after all? Remember your song in the night, and begin to sing again. Let the new song be in your mouth. One who long loved music said, "Glory be to Thee for all the grace I have not tasted yet!" If you cannot sing of what you are tasting, think of what you are to taste in the glory land that is before you when you get there. Be of good comfort, meditation shall console you.

Then this man of prayer, after using prayer and meditation, *betook himself to these employments*. If you notice, he spent his time in self-examination, "In communion with mine own heart and my spirit, I made diligent search." Show me wherefore You contend with me. Lord if I am chastened, tell me why. If I have lost the light of Your countenance, why do You hide Yourself from me? What sin is it that You are rebuking me? What grace is it that You would strengthen in me? What idol is it that You would take away from me? What duty have I neglected, of which You would remind me? I commune with my own heart, and look within to see if there is the cause of the distress, and look up to God, my Father, and say, "Why do You leave me? Why have You forsaken me?" And then I repeat to my own self, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Why art thou disquieted within me?"

"Oh!" says one, "I don't care much about self-examination. Mark you, I do not think much of your religion." There are a great many people in the world in trade that do not like looking at their books, and when a man does not want to know the position of his trade, I think we can most of us make a pretty shrewd guess at where he is. And when a man is afraid of self-examination, when he is afraid of a heart-searching discourse or heart-searching providence, he may be pretty sure there is something rotten within. God deliver us from being unwilling to know the very worst of our position! May we be always

anxious to know the worst than for a moment to be flattered. Let us, then, if we would get comfort, get to self-examination.

And then, once again, in time of trouble this man of God *took to holy arguments and devout reasoning*. Here is the question, Will the Lord cast off forever? He may put His child aside for a moment, but can He quite forget? Can He quite leave? Can He ever cast off those that are His own beloved? Will He be favorable no more? He has said, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee," but will He make that small moment into forever? I know He turns a deaf ear to His people for a moment, but will He never hear prayer again? Has He not said that He is a God that hears prayer? Is His mercy clean gone forever?"

Oh! it is a grand thing when a man says that, "Can it be that God has left off being merciful? Is not His very name, 'Love'?" That is His very nature. He delights in mercy, and can it be true that God has left off His mercy? It cannot be. Is His mercy clean gone forever? Does His promise fail for evermore? Another question, Can it be that God won't keep His Word? Will His promise be broken? I know it may tarry awhile, but can it be that it shall fail, and fail for evermore? And then He puts it again, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious—got out of the habit of being gracious? He used to be always gracious to those who sought His face, has He forgotten it? Is it possible? Has He, in anger, shut up His tender mercy? Can it be? Can it be?"

Oh! beloved, if we were sometimes thus to school ourselves and cross-question our own unbelief, the Holy Spirit would give us comfort. "Can the woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." They that trust in the Lord shall not want any good thing. "Fear not, I am with thee. Be not dismayed, I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Is all this nothing? Are these promises, and ten thousand more, only so many words and so much chaff?

O you wicked unbelief! the virgin daughter of Zion has shaken her head at you, and laughed, because you have not a foot to stand upon—no argument to defend yourself. Away with you, you lie, you child of hell! Away with you, I must believe in my God. I will fall back into His arms, I will confide again in His eternal faithfulness. Is He a God, and can His love grow weary of saving? He is not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Ay, He will do it, and to the last jot and tittle shall His Word be fulfilled, and His promises shall be kept, for they are yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us. God grant us grace thus to battle with unbelief. And now, in the third place, as we have seen the man in his condition, and what he does, let us now consider—

III. SOME OF THOSE COMFORTABLE THINGS WHICH MAY HELP US OUT OF THAT POSITION, or help us not to fall into it.

First, observe that the great source of comfort to the tried believer—any believer—is *to be found of God*. All those questions were about his God. "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings." If you get to meditating on your own works, you won't get much comfort out of them, and if you get talking of your own doings you are brewing for yourself bitter drinks.

But when the soul looks at God, at God's mercy, God's grace, and Christ the incarnate God, and the finished work of Christ—at His merits—then it is that the soul is comforted. All that there is in us that may be seen in a time of depression is of man. We must look right away to Him in whom our hope lies. I will not lift up mine eyes to anything else. Whence cometh my help? My help cometh from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth. Child of God, store your mind with His knowledge and His glory. Seek to know the Lord Jesus. Ask to be instructed in the knowledge of Him, for then in the times of difficulty you will have a store ready to your hand—great reasons for consolation which will be comfortable to your spirit.

But do you notice how *he dwells upon the works of God and the power of God?* “Thou art the God that doest wonders; thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Lord, You can help me. My case is difficult, but You are strong enough. You are able to help me.” Oh, this is the way to get comfort—to know the power of God, which is past finding out. One thing especially the psalmist dwelt upon, and that is redemption—“Thou hast with your arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph.” When there is no light anywhere else, there is at Calvary. Look there to the Paschal Lamb and to the going out of Egypt by blood, and to the ransoming of His people.

Do you think that Christ bought you with blood that you should lie in hell and perish? Do you believe in redemption of that kind which does not redeem? Have you a Savior that came to save those whom He never will save? Do you believe in such a Savior? then I marvel not at your doubts and fears, but if you have reliance upon the mighty God, in whose hands the pleasure of the Lord must prosper, and who shall see His seed and rejoice in the travail of His soul, then, leaning on Him whose hand was stretched to the nail for you, you have good ground for joy, and confidence, and peace. Study the atonement, study the redemption, study the cross, and you will be readily comforted.

At the close of the Psalm, Asaph, after his usual wont, takes himself away to the Red Sea, and suggests as a ground for comfort what God did there. There were His people slaves, and in bondage, and He brought them out. He will bring you out. Pharaoh was very strong, and he said, “I fear not the LORD, neither will I let the people go.” But God was stronger than Pharaoh, and He will be stronger than the devil and all your enemies.

Then they came out, and there was the Red Sea before them, and how could they get through the sea? “The waters saw thee, O God; the waters saw thee, they were afraid.” You have many troubles and many sins, they will fly before the presence of God. Then they came into the wilderness, how could they ever traverse that? Then the Lord was pleased to send them their bread each morning, and to give them their water continually. Whereas their clothes could not be very speedily replenished, their garments waxed not old, so to speak. They had no guide, no one with them that could well conduct them through the wilderness, but the fiery, cloudy pillar went before them. They never went a step awry, for that fiery, cloudy pillar led them all the way.

Now your condition is the same as theirs, you shall have the same supplies. Be not cast down. Rejoice in the Lord and go forward. “He led his people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron”—so the psalm closes—and He will lead you and lead you safely. They set out to go to the land of Canaan, and to the land of Canaan they came, and if you are resting upon the blood of Christ, and depending upon His eternal merit, He shall surely bring you in, and you shall stand in your lot in the end of the days. Wherefore comfort one another with these words, and be of good cheer.

But as for those who have no Savior, I know of no comfort for them in the time of trouble. Unbeliever, you shall live without consolation, you shall die without consolation, and live forever after without consolation. May you turn. “Turn ye, turn ye! Why will ye die?” May the Lord bring you to see that in Christ alone is your help found. Get Him to be your comfort from this day forth and forever. Amen, amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ACTS 26:1-28

Three times we have in Holy Writ a graphic report of the conversion of Paul. This may be accounted for partly from its being one of the most remarkable events of early sacred history, Paul having had a greater effect upon the Christian church than any other living man. At the same time I think it teaches us that the Holy Spirit sets especial store by the facts connected with this very remarkable conversion. If He gives it three times in the sacred volume, we ought to give it a triple attention, and see if we cannot learn therefrom.

Verses 1-3. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

With what courtesy does he speak! Paul is bold, but see how he is all things to all men! And he begins an address for his life with great adroitness and skill, teaching us that we are to use all the courtesies of life to those to whom they belong, and never to cause needless irritation. There is enough offense in the Cross of itself, without our being offensive when uplifting it.

4-7. *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.*

For the Pharisees did hold very firmly the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, and Paul often instances this, as being the very thing, though no longer a Pharisee, to which he was glad to give witness.

8-11. *Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.*

He had the courage of his convictions. Believing a thing, he did not let it lie idle. He regarded the Christians as a pestilent sect, and therefore, he hunted them down. He abhorred the name of Jesus of Nazareth as that of an imposter, and therefore, he determined that no stone should be left unturned to overthrow His power.

12-14. *Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

Not "It is hard for me to bear it," but "It is hard for thee," as if, though conscious of being persecuted, our Lord, in that divine unselfishness which is so natural to Him, forgot the kicks that were given to Him, and only thought of the injury which Saul was doing to himself, when, like an ox that strikes out against the goad, he injured himself.

15-28. *And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles. And as he thus*

spoke for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.