

“THEY WERE TEMPTED”

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**A SERMON
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*“They...were tempted.”
Hebrews 11:37.*

LAST Lord’s-day I tried to draw the fair portrait of a believing man, putting his feet into God’s steps, and keeping God’s way even unto the end. This morning we shall show in what circumstances such men were produced. We shall discover that they were not nursed upon the lap of ease, but were born, and reared, and perfected amid storms of opposition. We shall again see “the lily among thorns.” The gracious characters of which we read in Scripture were not created by favorable circumstances, they owed nothing to their position, or age, their character was formed from within. Their faith was not produced by the tenderness of providence, they were not put into a conservatory like fair flowers which cannot endure the frost, rather might we say that they were helped to their robustness by the rough winter blasts which swept over them.

They were warriors of peace, pilgrims who traveled armed to the teeth, making no holiday march, but contending with giants and dragons. Whoever else may find life a sport, the saints have found it to be real and earnest, their path has been no mere parade, but grim and grisly dangers have beset them, “They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain with the sword.” One form of the opposition which they encountered is the subject of this morning’s meditation—“They were tempted.”

Do not forget that the leading principle of a godly man is faith, and according to this chapter faith is the force by which brave deeds are done, and great sufferings are endured. All the world appears to be in arms against the man of faith. Ishmael, the child of human strength, mocks Isaac, who is born by the power of faith according to promise. Yet faith is able to bear all attacks, and to flourish under them, even as the Israelites in Egypt multiplied the more as their oppressions were increased.

The sufferings of believers, which are mentioned by Paul, are very varied and exceedingly intense, and this is one of them, “They were tempted.” The speedy weapon of stone, or sword, or saw, gratified the malice which sought their death, but tempting them satisfied a more subtle hate, which stabbed at their character and their faith. In temptation there is for the soul all the deadliness which the slaughter weapon brings to the body. It is blessed to observe that the faithful survived this danger also. A torrent roared against them and they stemmed it with resolute confidence, they did not drift with the current, nor drown in its floods.

Dealing with this one form of opposition, “they were tempted,” I shall be able to say a great many more practical things than if I were preaching upon “they were stoned,” or “they were sawn asunder,” for those things happen but now and then, but this record that “they were tempted” is repeated in us all, and especially in you who have lately set out on the heavenly pilgrimage. You have got far enough to discover that you are not to be allowed to go to heaven if Satan can prevent it, nor suffered to remain a Christian if by any means the men of this world can cast you down. You are being tempted: may the practical word I shall be able to speak be applied with power by the Holy Spirit to your comfort and help.

I. First I will call attention to THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH OF THE STATEMENT now before us.

It is not true that all the saints were scourged, nor all imprisoned, neither were all stoned, nor all slain with the sword, but it is true of the whole cloud of witnesses that they were all tempted. The word

“tempted” bears two meanings, first of all, that of being tried or afflicted, and secondly, that of being persuaded or enticed to sin.

In the first aspect of it God did tempt Abraham, that is, He tried him, and this He does with all His people. God had one Son without sin, but He never had a son without trial. “What son is there whom the Father chastened not?” “Whereof you are all partakers,” says Paul, when he speaks of chastening. “For whom the LORD loves, He corrects, even as a father the son in whom he delights.” His own elect are made to feel His refining fires, for He declares of each one “I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction.” All the sheep of Christ bear His private mark, He sets the cross of affliction upon them all. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” “In the world you shall have tribulation.”

Before you shall find me a man who has never known trouble I think you will have ridden many a horse lame and searched far and wide, for “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward,” but I will guarantee that this wonderful untried person is as much a stranger to God as he is to affliction. Within the sacred enclosure of the elect of God you shall not be able to discover one whom the Lord has not in some way or at some time afflicted in love.

Count it not therefore a strange thing, my dear brother, that you should have a cross to carry. Do not begin to kick against the pricks as though some unusual suffering were laid upon you when the Lord touches you with the goad of sorrow. You are one among many, and among the many there are worthy ones who bear heavier loads than yours. Envy none, but feel a brotherhood with all the faithful, for they too “were tempted.”

As for the other sense of the word “tempt,” the bad and hard one, in that sense also the statement is universally true. All the people of God have been tempted to sin. *Satan* no sooner perceives a child of God renewed in heart and cleansed from defilement than he endeavors if he can to mar the work of the Holy Spirit, to ruin the happiness of the believer, and to weaken his usefulness by leading him into sin. The prince of the power of the air, though he cannot be everywhere himself, manages with his host of underlings to be so nearly omnipresent that he tempts us all in turns, and some of us very fiercely.

Woe unto the man who is beset by the arch enemy himself, if he is not abiding in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. If the Lord be away from the believer it will go hard with him when Apollyon himself meets him in deadly duel. The fiend is stronger and craftier than we are, and unless the Lord cover our head in the day of battle we shall find his fiery darts too terrible. This, however, is some comfort, that every believer now with God has crossed swords with the devil, He has not suffered one to pass unmolested—“they were tempted.”

Nor is it Satan alone who tempts the saints. *The world* is always tempting God’s people, and there is no position in life which is free from peril. A man sick of the fever dreams that if he can be placed in another bed he shall feel better, it is but a dream. He turns and tosses to and fro upon his pillow, but as Watts well says,

***“It is a poor relief we gain
To shift the place but keep the pain.”***

In this mortal life we may change our position, but we shall never get away from temptation. Temptations are with kings upon their thrones, and with peasants at the plow, they come of plenty and they come of poverty, they are born of success and they are born of defeat. Whether our path is rough or smooth, we are liable to be tripped up unless an unseen hand shall hold us up. This is true of all who have gone before us—“They were tempted.”

At times providence permits *those who are in authority* to exercise great power of temptation. So it was with the saints of old, those who were in power accounted them as sheep for the slaughter. The rulers of the synagogues, and then the magistrates, rulers, and emperors set themselves against God and against His Christ, and those who held the reins of government were determined that they would put down the reign of Christ, and utterly destroy His people. Princes and potentates became the willing

servitors of Satan, threatening and bribing those who had espoused the faith. So far as open, legalized persecution by the State is concerned, we are happily free from it, but of those who in the martyr days bore high the banner of the cross it may be said with emphasis—“they were tempted.”

But, brethren, if there were no devil and if there were no wicked world it would still be true that the saints are tempted, for every man is tempted when he is “drawn away by his own lust, and enticed,” and there is that within the best of men which might make them into the worst of men if the grace of God did not prevent it. O child of God, you are on one side fair as an angel, and the grace of God gleams upon you, and makes you bright as your transfigured Master, and yet on the other side of you, you are black as a devil, and if the grace of God were taken from you, you would as much dishonor the name and cross of Christ as ever did the false apostate who took the thirty pieces of silver.

Every good man is two men, he finds an I fighting against his real I, the old man, according to its corruptions and lusts, daily warring with the new-born man within him, which cannot sin because it is born of God. Now it is true, not only of you and me, but it has been true of all the people of God, that they have had inward conflicts and spiritual contests within themselves of the most painful kind.

The saints were tempted, they were persuaded to sin by Satan, by the world, and by the propensities of their nature, and of all the blood-redeemed host it must be said, “They were tempted.”

Ought not this fact to restrain every man from a self-indulgent despair. Do you know what I mean? I mean this, a man says, “Well, I cannot help it, I am in such a place of temptation that if I give way I may well be excused.” Not so, sir, “They were tempted,” and yet they did not fall, but held fast their integrity. They who today are waving the palm of victory were tempted even as you are, and it is idle for you to say that victory is impossible, seeing they have proved the reverse. Using the same weapons, and helped by the same Spirit, your temptations, which are the same as theirs, will be overcome by you, even as theirs were vanquished by them. Up and fight like men, dream no longer of impossibilities which might excuse you, what has been done by one by the help of God can be done by another.

This leaves us without any excuse for yielding to temptation. I know we commonly think that if we can prove that we are tempted there is not much blame attached to us, but it is not so. It is most true that those who tempt others are guilty of the greater sin, but the sin of those who are tempted, and yield to the temptation is great enough—great enough to crush them into eternal destruction unless they repent of it. Other people have been tempted as you have been, and yet they have resisted the temptation, and have remained in obedience to God, and therefore if you yield to the evil influence you are without excuse. The multitude of holy men and women who are now before the throne of God are all witnesses against you, for they show what can be done, and what can be done in you too, the grace of God being with you.

This fact that all the saints have been tempted should put an end to all murmuring upon that score. Somebody says, “Mine is a hard lot, I have to follow Christ under great disadvantages. My foes are those of my own household.” Yes, your lot may be hard, but if you could just peep within the pearly gates and see that brilliant company, who are the peers of the realm of heaven, you would see none but those who once were tempted. Dave you demand a better lot than theirs? Remember your Master was tempted, and shall the disciple wish to be above his Master, or the servant above his Lord? Is there to be some easy by-road to heaven made for you, turfed from end to end, and rolled every morning?

*“Must you be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease;
While others fought to win the prize,
And sail’d through bloody seas?”*

You must not expect it, you must fight if you would reign, you must carry the cross as others carried it, if you are like them, to wear the crown. The temptations which were endured by saints in all ages must forever prevent our complaining if hooks are baited for us and snares laid for our destruction.

One sweet thought arises here, since the best of saints were tempted this prevents our conceiving that to be tempted is in itself a sin. I have known feeble-minded Christians bemoan themselves and cry, “If I were not exceedingly sinful I should not have these hideous thoughts and dreadful suggestions, if my heart were not full of evil I should not have these blasphemous ideas forced into my poor unwilling brain.”

Beloved, it is not so. If your heart were wholly the devil’s he might not care to worry you, and indeed you would not be worried, but would love sin. It is because you are not his, because you are desperately struggling towards holiness and virtue that therefore he tempts you. It is no sin to be tempted, the sin is in yielding to temptation. Your Lord was tempted, and yet in Him was no sin. Thrice did Satan assail our Lord, three evil courses did he plausibly suggest, but he found nothing in Him to work upon, there was no tinder for his sparks to light upon.

Be therefore greatly comforted, you who find evil thoughts rushing through your minds like a torrent. You try to fight against these temptations, and yet they return again and again till your heart is well-nigh broken with them, do not therefore condemn yourself for them so long as you abhor them. You are not a castaway because you are tempted, for all the saints in glory were tempted too.

Yea, I think, dear friends, if any of us here present meet with great trials in life, and with very strong temptations to turn back to the world, if God gives us grace to keep towards the New Jerusalem, we may even glory in these trials. We ought to pray, “Lead us not into temptation,” for temptation is not to be sought for but to be looked upon as an evil, seeing that flesh is frail, but when it assumes the form of persecution, and our Lord helps us to endure it, steadfast in the faith, we may even rejoice and leap for joy.

If your name is slandered, or you become a loser in wage, or in estate, or in comfort for Christ’s sake, you may greatly rejoice, for now you have fellowship with Jesus and His suffering followers. You are entering the confederacy of the bravest of the brave. Now shall you share in “that lordlier chivalry” which belongs not to mailed knights, but to spirits purified and ennobled by the Holy Ghost. These are the blessed ones who endure temptation, who when they are tried shall receive the crown of life which fades not away.

Forget not, then, the universal truth of the statement before us—“They were tempted.”

II. Secondly, let us consider THE UNLIMITED BREADTH OF THE STATEMENT.

“They were tempted,” it does not say how. If one form of temptation had been mentioned, we should have surmised that they did not suffer in other ways, but when the statement is, “They were tempted,” we shall not be wrong in concluding that they were tried in any and every form. Whatever form temptation may take, in some or in all the saints, that temptation has been endured. We may say of Christ’s mystical body as we may say of Christ’s self—“tempted in all points like as we are.”

Brethren, the saints who are in heaven were tempted in all ways. They were tempted by threats, but they were equally tempted by promises. They were put into prison or they were banished. They were deprived of their goods and of their good names, but they stood fast and firm, and would not yield up Christ, threaten as men might. Then they were tried by bribes, if they would forsake Christ and turn from the truth they would be rich and honorable, they should be restored to their families, they should have in some cases every indulgence which the monarch could grant. They were equally deaf to either form of solicitation, they could not be driven, and they could not be drawn, however the net might be spread they could not be taken in it.

Standing at the stake, with the flames kindling, and the sticks beginning to burn, the tempting monk has held up the crucifix, and said, “Kiss it, kiss it, and your life shall be given you, and you shall have great honors,” but they put away the idol from them, and would not dishonor God by worshipping any material substance, whatever it might be.

Or else the martyr, on his way to die, has been confronted by his wife and children, kneeling down and praying their father to have pity upon *them*, if none upon himself, and not to die and leave a widow and fatherless children. But though natural love struggled in their hearts, they overleaped that

temptation, for they loved Christ better than their dearest relatives. They have been tempted in subtlest fashion, reason and rhetoric, threat and scorn, bribe and blandishment, have all been used, and used in vain. Against them the enemy has sent forth the arrow which flies by day, and the pestilence which walks in darkness, but the Lord has kept their soul alive, and they have glorified His name. Yet very sorely “They were tempted.”

They were tempted both with trials peculiar to themselves, and with trials common to us all. We are apt sometimes to say that this age is not congenial to the strength of grace, and I think there is truth in the remark. We are a set of dwarfs, and it seems hard to grow to the stature of a man in Christ Jesus in the atmosphere which daily surrounds us. We have fallen upon an evil age, in which principle is treated like a football in the streets, and bluster rules the hour, but then the ages in which saints lived long ago had their peculiar temptations too, and they were tempted.

Every period since the world began has had its own form of spiritual danger, as weapons of war have changed so have temptations, but the old enmity remains. Not always does the swordsman make his cut at the head, sometimes he stabs at the heart or at another time he drives at the feet, always aiming to wound, but not always aiming at the same part of the man. One age is dark, and ignorance would chill the heart, another is philosophical, and by its false wisdom would overlay the gospel. The points from which the wind blows may differ, but it always blows against the servants of God who are voyaging to heaven. Say not therefore, O child of God, that others who lived before you were not tempted as you are, for they endured temptations which to them were as keen and as powerful as any which have fallen to your share.

They had also special temptations arising out of their individual constitutions. We have every one of us some weak point. One man is not readily made angry, but he is too cold; another is sensitive, but he is too speedily wrathful. One man is full of love and affection, but he lacks decision; another is resolute, but fails in tenderness. Side by side with the special excellence of any character we usually discover a remarkable weakness, calling for great watchfulness, and of all those who are now in heaven it may be said they were tempted, tempted in some characteristic point, and with some besetting sin. Beloved, if you have to endure the same, mark well that you follow a well-trodden path.

As they had their peculiar temptations so they had the common trials of the most ordinary life. Look at Abraham, not only does he stand alone in the sacrifice of Isaac, but he stands with us in our common afflictions. He is tried in his relatives, his nephew Lot is ungrateful to him and leaves him; tried in his servants, the family is set by the ears by Hagar; tried in his wife, for she complains against him wrongfully; tried in his children, for Ishmael mocks Isaac. His dwelling in tents brought with it quite as much discomfort and trial as our dwelling in houses.

Flocks and herds involve as much care as shops and workrooms. Just such domestic troubles as you and I experience were known to Jacob and David. One man is very like another, and nothing can be more unwise than to set up saintly men who lived ages ago upon a sort of shelf, as if they were unapproachable and inimitable, and belonged to a different race. These heroes are our brothers, their battles are our battles, their victory shall be ours.

Our divine Master Himself when He was assailed by the devil in the wilderness, was attacked by those same temptations which have been used against us—we too have been tempted to use wrong means to supply our pressing needs, to presume upon the providence of God, and to commit idolatry in order to gratify ambition. These are arrows which have rattled on the harness of many soldiers of the cross. Our Lord Jesus, the captain of our salvation, bore the brunt of the battle, and in the matter of temptation He condescended to fight upon the same level with ourselves. “He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.” So that the text stands good in all its length and breadth that all those who have won the everlasting victory were tempted, even as we are now.

III. Thirdly, let us notice THE SPECIAL POINT OF THE TRIAL.

All these temptations, according to the connection of our text, were aimed at the faith of these holy men. Paul is writing of the victories and sufferings of faith, and therefore we are sure that these

temptings were a test and trial of their faith. It is wonderful how God takes care that the victories of faith shall somehow or other be kept in mind. There was a period after the prophets had ceased to prophesy, and before Christ came, in which the Israelite church had to contend against antichrist and other enemies.

In the Apocrypha you have the account of some few of the martyrdoms of those who held fast to God and to His truth. They are not put in canonical Scripture, they neither belong to the Old Testament nor to the New, but here Paul immortalizes them, for the Lord will have them remembered. Those who were stoned and sawn asunder for the truth's sake shall not be forgotten. If the details be not given, they shall yet be recorded in the gross, on the sacred pages.

Since that time, dear friends, as if Paul had been writing prophecy rather than history, the people of God have had to pass through sufferings which if I were to repeat them now would break your hearts with grief because of the horrors of cruelty which human ingenuity has invented. Man has seemed to turn into a devil, and sink below a fiend in the barbarities which he has perpetrated against the servants of God. All this has been aimed at the destruction of faith.

The Jews were tempted to worship idols, they must offer incense to a false God, but they would not. In after years Christians must pay homage to the image of the emperor, this they would not do, they would die a thousand deaths sooner than worship a false God. By and by they were called upon to deny the deity of Christ, and by tens of thousands they perished sooner than deny that fact. In later years it came to this—that they must submit to superstition, they must assert that they believed in transubstantiation, which they could not believe in, nor thus insult their God. They must submit themselves to men who said they were priests and could forgive their sins, which they felt was a forsaking of the great High Priest to think of doing, and so they died rather than deny the faith. The story of the lives of these heroes is recorded in such half-inspired books as Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," and the like. Read it, and let your children read it, till both they and you have learned fidelity to Christ.

The main point of the adversary's attack was always their faith, therefore let us learn where to set our guard. Let us see to it that we become strong in faith, for that is true strength. Feed your faith well. Know the truth, and know it thoroughly. Read the Scriptures, and understand them. Make sure of the eternal verities. Live much upon the promises of future bliss. A sight of the unfading crown will make you cheerfully forego the withering flowers of earth. The sorrows of the way will grow light as the eternal weight of glory is revealed. You will think less of the commendation or censure of men if your ear already hears the great Master saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

IV. I cannot dwell long on this point, though I had wished to do so, but must now call your attention, in the fourth place, to THE INTENSITY OF THIS TRIAL.

That I gather from the position of our text, which is very strange. "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, *were tempted*, were slain with sword." It has seemed to commentators to be so singular that to be "tempted" should be as it were sandwiched in between "sawn asunder" and being "slain with the sword," that they have thought there must be an error in the text. Certainly at the first blush the words look rather out of place, but they are not so. Some learned men have imagined another Greek word to be the correct one, since it involves a very slight alteration, and then the passage would run—"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were burnt, they were slain with the sword." I do not see any reason for desiring an alteration, it seems to me to be plain that the original is, "They were tempted," and what is written must stand.

The more we think of it, the more we shall see that being tempted is worthy to be put side by side with being sawn asunder, and being slain with the sword, for many of those who are daily tormented with temptations will tell you that it is as painful to bear as any form of death. If you live in a place where you hear little else but blasphemy from morning to night you will soon say, "I think I should prefer being in a prison to this. The cut of a whip or the wound of a sword would scarcely cause more pain than to hear the name of Jesus Christ profaned, and to see every holy and precious thing trampled on."

When the ungodly persecute cruelly, as they can do even now without violating the law of man, they can tease and worry your very soul, they can embitter every morsel that you eat, make home to be a torture-chamber, and the workroom an inquisition. They will maliciously track you in all your steps with jests, and jeers, and slanders, and hard speeches, and make you live like Marcus Arethus, among the bees, which at last stung him to death.

Believe me, some of God’s people have found that to be tempted in that sense has been as bad as to be stoned or to be slain with a sword, in fact, there are times when they have said, “If we could be taken out, and our heads could be smitten off at one stroke with a sword, it would be a happy release from this life-long agony.” Alas for gentle, timid, loving spirits who have to endure such temptation.

I think Paul did well to put this here, not only because of the painfulness of it, but because of the danger of it, for it is certain that under temptation of the more insidious kind more professed Christians have been led away than ever were frightened from the faith by racks, or torments, or fear of death. It is a very sad fact that when Queen Mary died there were persons lying in prison condemned for heresy, who had some of them been great sufferers for the faith, and bold confessors of it, and yet when released they did not abide in their steadfastness.

Queen Mary died and Elizabeth ascended the throne, and they obtained their liberty, and alas, some of them, returning to the comforts of home, became altogether worldly persons, and forsook the faith for which once they would have even dared to die. I have known some unhappy cases of the same kind, where persons have been persecuted by their families for following Christ, and have stood up for Him right manfully, so that I have felt great admiration for them for their consistent courage. I have lived to see these very individuals delivered from the yoke of bondage, able to start in life for themselves and to do exactly as they pleased, and alas, soon after persecution ceased they have grown cold and have forsaken the ways of God.

What a strange creature is man! Lord, what a deceitful heart I have! O that You would search it and try it, lest it be so that I follow You in stormy weather, but leave You when the south wind blows. I think the apostle put in this clause just where we find it because more deadly to the church have been the blandishments of the world’s wealth than all the ragings of her cruelty. Her stakes, her racks, her gallows have never injured the church so much as her witcheries, her smiles, her fashions, and her patronage. Yet this was borne by saints of old, for “They were tempted.”

“Well,” says one, “you describe these Christian people as having had very hard times of it, for they were tempted, and tempted very severely too.” Yes, it is true, but we do not pity one of them. If you saw those gallant men who wear the Victoria Cross for valor, and you were told of their perils and sufferings, you would not pity them. They could not have worn the coveted cross given them by their Queen if they had not bravely endured hardship and peril. We do not pity men who have performed daring exploits, nor may we pity those servants of God who suffered the utmost cruelties, but now rest from their labors, and wear their honors in heaven.

The question is—Can you aspire to take a place among them? To be a true Christian is no small thing, and before you pretend to be a follower of Jesus count the cost. Are you willing to endure temptation without yielding? Can you scorn the world’s bribe and defy its threat? Will you set your face like a flint for Christ and holiness? Has grace made you a lion-like man? Have you a strong determination wrought in you by the Holy Ghost? If not, you may run well for a time, but you will turn back, and prove an apostate. I pray God that you may be of that noble stock which the Lord has chosen, and may have in you that noble nature which the Holy Spirit alone can impart, so that, though you shall be tempted, you shall hold out till life’s latest hour, invincible through the grace of God.

I want, in conclusion, to answer the question which naturally arises—*Why then does God permit His people to encounter so much temptation?* Why is the road to heaven so beset with foes? I answer that there are a great many replies to that question, for the Lord answers many designs at one and the same time.

First, persecution and temptation are a sort of sieve, to sift the church of God. As it is, we have enough hypocrites among us, and if the way to heaven were strewn all along with loaves and fishes, we should have the devil himself going on pilgrimage. There must be these fiery persecutions so that the drossy hypocrites may be purged out. I warrant you there were not many hypocrites in the catacombs of Rome, when to be a Christian involved almost certain death. They crept into their assemblies at the dead of night, and there gathered to sing hymns to the name of Jesus, and few were the traitors' tongues which joined in the singing.

When in our own country any man who had a Bible must die for it, and therefore men hid their Bibles behind the wainscot, or under the floor-boards, few were very eager for Bible-reading. The mocking, the jesting, the jeering which goes on in the world is the sieve constantly moving to shake off the chaff and let the good wheat remain. If we could stop that winnowing fan we should hardly wish to do so. I am sure if I could give some of you new converts a pass from here to heaven, so that nobody should ever laugh at you, and you should never suffer anything for Christ, I would not do it. I feel I should be doing you a serious injury if I could secure you against every trial.

Think of a soldier when he enlists. Suppose he should say to the sergeant, “Sergeant, will you give me a guarantee that I shall never fight?” I think the officer would reply, “You had better not enlist.” Even so I say to you, we cannot guarantee you that you shall not be tempted, and if you want such a guarantee as that you are not the kind of man we want, you are not the sort of man that is ever likely to win the crown unfading.

Trial and temptation also discover the reality of conversion. Look at this. Here is a man ridiculed for his religion and for his sobriety. He will not touch a drop of the drink which formerly cast him down to his destruction, and therefore his fellow workmen laugh at him. All sorts of epithets are hurled at him while he is at work. He goes to a place of worship on Sunday, and for this he must be jeered at to the last degree. Who is this man that bears this so patiently? Why, the very man who twelve months ago could drink as much as any of them, and used to jeer at others; the very man who for twenty years before never entered the house of God.

Now, the fact that he can stand against temptation is one of the very best evidences that he is born again and made a new creature in Christ Jesus, and those who see such a change confess that this is the finger of God. What else could have changed him so completely as to make him stand against the very thing which he himself took part in so short a time ago? We may thank God for the temptation, since it helps to evidence the reality of the conversion.

Again, it is by this that men are left without excuse, inasmuch as they refuse the light. I sometimes wonder why ungodly men cannot let Christian people alone. We do not interfere with you. Have we not as much right to do as we like as you have to do what *you* like? But no, the moment a Christian appears among working men, they are all upon him as though they were so many dogs worrying a hare. What does this show but that they know the truth and hate it? They know the light, but would fain quench it, and therefore they put from them the candle which God sends to them. They treat His blessing as if it were a curse.

Did you ever read in the Scriptures of God's thinking better of men than they deserved? “No,” say you, “that cannot be.” Yes, but there is a case, a parabolical case, of course, where the Lord is represented as judging men too easily. “Last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son.” But they did not reverence him, they took the heir and slew him and cast him out of the vineyard.

There are people of God who are naturally so amiable, kind, and good that you feel sure all must love and esteem them, and yet because of their religion even such must be persecuted. The beloved brother cannot escape without sarcasm, the dear sister that was everything before must now be made the subject of jeers, and the husband or the wife however much beloved is not spared. This leaves the ungodly altogether without excuse, it is God's purpose that it should do so.

Meanwhile, it does saints good, for painful as it is to them, it drives them to prayer. Many a man lives near to God in prayer who would not have done so if he had enjoyed an easier position. His prayerfulness strengthens him, his having to summon divine aid to sustain him under trial makes him grow in faith and in every grace, and he becomes a better Christian.

I believe that persecution is overruled by God for displaying the work of the divine Spirit. Men see in Christian patience, in Christian fortitude, in Christian courage, and in Christian zeal what the Holy Ghost can work even in such poor raw material as our human nature is. God is magnified by the successful struggling of His people out of love to His name.

Moreover, brethren, the life of the church is the life of Christ extended and drawn out in His people. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners,” yet He “endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself,” and if we keep close to Christ we must expect to share His lot. Ours should be the prolonged echoes of the music of Christ’s life, “linked sweetness long drawn out.” Oh that God would help us till Christ Himself shall come to keep up the blessed strain!

It seems to me the trials and the temptations of this life are all making us fit for the life to come—building up a character for eternity. You have been in a piano factory; did you ever go there for the sake of music? Go into the tuning room, and you will say, “My dear sir, this is a dreadful place to be in, I cannot bear it, I thought you made music here.” They say, “No, we do not produce music here, we make the instruments, and tune them here, and in the process much discord is forthcoming.”

Such is the church of God on earth. The Lord makes the instruments down here, and tunes them, and a great deal of discord is easily perceptible, but it is all necessary to prepare us for the everlasting harmonies up yonder. Have you thought what a wonderful creature a man is—a perfect man, made fit to dwell in heaven—he is the last product of divine wisdom, the noblest work of God.

There is an angel, he is perfectly holy, but he never knew what sin was, and there is little wonder that he clings to that which has been his nature these many centuries, besides, He is not encumbered by a body of dust, full of passions and appetites, which are the inlets of sin. But here is a being with a soul encumbered with materialism, and it has known sin, known it terribly, and yet it is forever bound to do right beyond fear of turning aside. How is this to be achieved? Take away its free agency, says one. No, that would spoil it, it would be no longer a man if free agency were destroyed.

This being is perfectly free to do whatever he pleases throughout eternity, and yet he will never wish to do a wrong thing again. It is a wonderful work for God to fashion such a creature. He begins to do it in regeneration, and continues the work in sanctification, and all the endurance of trial, and all the patience manifested by the tried ones, work together to prepare a character which can endure the strain of everlasting bliss, and perform the holy service incident thereto.

I speak for every Christian man here, I am to stand one day so near to God that between Him and me there will be but one person, and that person the Lord Jesus Christ, my Lord and Mediator. I am in Christ to have dominion over all the works of God’s hands, and to be crowned with glory and honor. Angels are to be my servants and heaven my inheritance. Shall I never grow proud? Shall no self-exaltation creep in? No, the character will be fixed for holiness as though graven in eternal brass, and yet the man will be free. It may be that all the afflictions and temptations which God permits to pass over us here below are forming us for eternal bliss. Thus is the corn ripening for the garner, the fruit mellowing for the basket. Here the graving tool and the hammer bring out the beauties which shall shine in the courts of the Lord forever, when of us also the record will be written, “They were tempted.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 11

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMNS BOOK”—176, 674, 852

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