

The Precious Trial of Faith

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, May 28, 1865

"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 1:6, 7

I intend, with God's help and blessing, that my discourse this evening shall form a sequel to my sermon this morning; and I shall therefore endeavour to establish a connection between them, both as regards the text and the subject. You will recollect that this morning I was endeavouring to bring before you "the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for those who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." In that discourse I attempted to describe, according to the ability which God gave me, the character of the heirs and legatees of that glorious inheritance. This evening, before I proceed to connect the two subjects, I shall throw in a few additional lines to fill up my sketch; for there is no part of the ministry more important than to describe clearly and correctly the features of living souls, both as a test for them to measure themselves by, and as a means, in preaching to a mixed congregation, of taking forth the precious from the vile. Nor do I think I can adopt a better plan in executing this intention than simply to take up the characters of the persons to whom the apostle addressed the epistle, as described by his own hand, for they, we know, were among the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance. This will surely be more safe and satisfactory than drawing any

picture of my own, which might be right or might be wrong. Let us keep close to the word, and then we shall not err in doctrine, experience, or practice.

Cast your eye, then, back on the beginning of the epistle, and read for yourself the characters to whom the apostle addresses it.

1. Their first mark is "*strangers, scattered* throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Scattered strangers, then, is one of the lineaments of the heirs and legatees of this incorruptible, undefiled inheritance. The apostle probably, in using the expression, had especial reference to the believing Jews who were locally scattered among the Gentile nations in these countries, for it is evident, not only from history but from an expression in the Gospel of John, that there were many Jews dispersed among the Gentiles: "The Jews said among themselves, Whither will he go that we shall not find him? Will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (John 7:35.) James, therefore, writing to the believing Jews, addresses his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." (James 1:1.) Of these dispersed Jews many had been converted to the faith of the gospel, and to them, therefore, Peter specially writes. But the Holy Ghost had doubtless in the expression a spiritual reference to the saints of God at all times and in all places, so as to make the words applicable to the people of God to the end of time. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4.) Scattered strangers is then a feature of the heirs of God, not merely locally, but spiritually and experimentally. For you will observe that both words carry with them a spiritual meaning. First, they are "strangers." What makes them so? The grace

of God which calls them out of this wretched world. Every man who carries the grace of God in his bosom is necessarily, as regards the world, a stranger in heart as well as in profession and life. As Abraham was a stranger in the land of Canaan; as Joseph was a stranger in the palace of Pharaoh; as Moses was a stranger in the land of Egypt; as Daniel was a stranger in the court of Babylon: so every child of God is separated by grace to be a stranger in this ungodly world. The character given us in the word of Abraham and Sarah, in whose steps we are to walk and to whom we are to look (Rom. 4:12; Isai. 51:2), was this: "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Heb. 11:13.) And if indeed we are to come out from it and to be separate, the world must be as much a strange place to us as we be strangers in it. In views, in thoughts, in desires, in prospects, in anticipations; in our daily walk and conversation; in mind, in spirit, in judgment, in affection; from its company, its maxims, its fashions, its spirit; in all things, inwardly and outwardly, there must be a thorough separation from the world; and it is this separation which makes us strangers in it. But observe also the word "scattered." Do we not see this as a daily fact? Two or three of these strangers in this village; half a score in that town; a larger number perhaps in this vast metropolis; but all scattered here and there; and scattered, too, not merely locally, bodily, but spiritually and experimentally, as having no union or communion with the world in which they dwell; and scattered, too, as having had so much of their old formal religion scattered and torn to pieces; besides their scattered hopes, scattered joys, scattered prospects, and scattered homes.

2. But take another feature, another lineament of the heir of God, as described by Peter's pen. He is "*elect*, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification

of the Spirit." Let us not be afraid of Bible language: Bible language best describes Bible truths. However harshly the word "elect" may sound in the ears of the Pharisee and the self-righteous, it is God's own word to convey God's own truth. May I never be ashamed of God's word! The scattered strangers are then "elect, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." But unto what? To live, as men would libel them, as they list? to walk in all manner of ungodliness and disobedience? God forbid. They are elect unto two things, which are ever closely connected both in doctrine and practice. They are elect, first, unto "obedience." The obedience of what? The obedience of the gospel; obedience to the faith of the gospel; obedience to the precepts of the gospel; obedience to every good word and every good work enjoined by the gospel; obedience to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake. God's people are not a lawless race who set at defiance the laws of God and man. They are loyal subjects, peaceful citizens; and, though dear lovers of civil and religious liberty, they are averse to party strife and political contentions; their chief desire being "to lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." (1 Tim. 2:2.) They are obedient children, because they carry the yoke of a meek Redeemer upon their neck, and it is this obedience which particularly distinguishes them as the people of God; for others say and do not; or if they practise what they profess it is from wrong principles, wrong motives, or wrong ends. "They are children in whom there is no faith" (Deut. 32:20); and they cannot therefore render "the obedience of faith," for which the gospel is made known. (Rom. 16:26.) This "obedience," therefore, includes obeying the gospel, as the apostle speaks: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel." (Rom. 10:16.) To obey the gospel is to believe the gospel, and thus obey the call of the gospel to faith and repentance. God may have refractory children amongst his family, but it will be found in the end that he has no

disobedient ones; for he will teach them all sooner or later to render to him the obedience of faith, and from this fertile root every gracious root will spring.

But they are chosen also "*to the blood of sprinkling.*" They cannot, therefore, and will not die in their sins as unpardoned sinners, but will receive in and upon their conscience "the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel," that they may join in that glorious song, "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood." When, then, we preach the doctrine of election, we point out at the same time the two privileges to which the people of God are elect: to obedience and the blood of sprinkling. Are you obedient to the faith of the gospel and to the precepts of the gospel; and what do you know of the blood of sprinkling purging your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Having thus thrown in a few lines to complete my sketch of the heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance, I shall now proceed to connect my two discourses of this morning and evening. Let me once more read the words of our text, that you may join with me in understanding and establishing the connection: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:6, 7.)

Observe with me four prominent features in the words that I have read.

I.—*First, the joy*, or, to use the apostolic expression, the great rejoicing which the heirs and legatees of this

inheritance have in the salvation ready to be revealed.

II.—*Secondly, the heaviness of their spirit* "for a season, if need be, through manifold temptations."

III.—*Thirdly, the reason* why this heaviness is made to come upon their spirit through their manifold temptations. It is for the *trial of their faith*, "which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire."

IV.—*Fourthly, the eventual issue* of all their trials, "praise and honour," and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

I.—Now for the connection of our two subjects, morning and evening. The connection is between joy and sorrow: joy in the inheritance, and yet sorrow through the heaviness of spirit whereby their faith is tried before they possess it.

i. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." "Wherein:" there is in the original a little ambiguity here, and doubtless an intentional ambiguity which is well preserved in our translation.

"Wherein" may refer to the salvation, or to the Saviour from and through whom the salvation comes. We will take both meanings.

1. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." Take the word "wherein" first as referring to the Saviour, for he in all things must have the pre-eminence, and the Saviour surely must be greater than the salvation. We have three marks given to us in the word of the true circumcision, of which one is that they "Rejoice in Christ Jesus." "For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." (Phil. 3:3.) The apostle urges upon his believing brethren: "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 3:1); and repeats it, "Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, rejoice." (Phil. 4:4.) It is, therefore, an

especial mark of the saints of God, that as they are blessed with a living faith in the Lord of life and glory, they rejoice in him. How strong and decided is the language of Peter in the verse following our text: "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Pet. 1:8.) Observe the connection of faith and joy. It is when we believe in him that we rejoice; and if this faith be strong and clear, it is with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But why do they rejoice in him? Because he is the divine Author of all their salvation, for this is "the end of their faith," both in present enjoyment and in future fruition: "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:9.) When I say, however, that the saints of God rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, I will so far qualify my expression as to say that they will sooner or later do so, if they do not so now. The reason of their present want of joy is their want of faith: but as Christ is revealed unto them and is received by faith, and as their faith thus grows and is enlarged they will find that joy will come in proportion to their faith—a holy, heavenly joy, calm and peaceable, if it do not rise to any great height of ecstasy. But I must qualify my expression a little further still: I must say that if they cannot rejoice in Christ, they can rejoice in no one else and in nothing else. You are brought to this point: you have not perhaps the joy, and still less the great joy of which our text speaks. But can you not lay your hand upon your breast, and say you cannot rejoice in anything short of Jesus? that you cannot deliberately take your pleasure make your joy in anything, in any one but Jesus? Has not earth, have not the things of time and sense either become so embittered by sin and sorrow, or have so lost their former charm, that you cannot rejoice in them; or if for a little time you so far forget yourself as to be lost in some joyous dream, when you awake there is bitterness and remorse? How often it is with the child of grace as the prophet describes: "It shall

even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and, behold, he drinketh, but he awaketh, and, behold, he is faint, and his soul hath appetite." (Isai. 29:3.) There is, therefore, a measure of joy, a grain of joy, a seed of joy planted in your soul, even if you cannot rejoice in the Lord as you could wish. If you can look up to God who searches the heart, and can appeal to his penetrating eye that if you cannot rejoice, and still less rejoice greatly in Christ, there is none else and nothing else in whom or in which you wish to joy, be not dismayed as if you were totally destitute of one mark of the true circumcision. You may feel perhaps more able to lay hold of the other two marks that you "worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh;" but the third is not even now wanting in you, though it be but small, a very grain of mustard seed, that you "rejoice in Christ Jesus."

ii. But now take the other meaning of the expression "wherein." Understand it as referring to the salvation. Literally, naturally the heir of a large property looks forward with joyous anticipation to the day when it will be his by possession. As he stands upon some lofty hill which commands a view of his father's wide-spread lands, a feeling, perhaps not a very innocent feeling, springs up in his breast, anticipating the day when he will be able to call them all his own. But how much more innocently, how much more happily can the heir of God look forward to the possession of his inheritance beyond the skies. Such was the longing desire of the saints of old. Nor does God reject their desire: "But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." (Heb. 11:16.) This, then, is one peculiar feature of the heir of heaven, that he has an eye to his inheritance; a longing for the enjoyment of it. Have

you not tasted and felt a sweetness at times in the contemplation of this inheritance; at least of the salvation revealed in and by it, which has dropped a holy joy into your bosom to inflame your desires after it; so that you can truly say, if ever you have felt the movements of joy in your breast, it has been from a sense of your interest in it? There is, therefore, a joy in the salvation as well as in the Saviour. And there are certain blessings in this salvation which make it a well-spring of joy, if we are but privileged to drink at this river of pleasures.

1. *First, its suitability.* Has that never caused any springing up of joy in your soul? Have you never rejoiced in a sense or sight of this glorious truth, that there has been provided a salvation so suitable to your case—so suitable to you, a poor condemned sinner; you, a guilty criminal at God's bar; you, whose conscience has registered and still registers a long, black list of sins and crimes that fill your heart with shame and confusion? The suitability of a salvation flowing through the love and blood of the Lord the Lamb—a salvation all of free grace, a salvation blotting out all sin and reaching down to every want and desire of the soul—as the fulness and greatness and exceeding glory of such a salvation have been opened from time to time to your view and dropped with some measure of life and power into your spirit, has not the thorough suitability of so full and complete a salvation stimulated every desire of your heart, and drawn out your faith upon it and in it as so adapted in every way to your deplorable case?

2. But now take another feature of this salvation which make the hearts of God's people so greatly to rejoice in it: its *fulness*. See how this salvation takes in all your sins; how it embraces you just as you are in all your nakedness, filth, and shame, and gives you a plunge in the fountain opened for all

sin and for all uncleanness. See how it is not half a salvation which you are called upon to complete, but a salvation full, yea, full to overflowing with a fulness inconceivable by human heart, unutterable by human tongue: a salvation from all sin, from all the consequences which we have brought upon ourselves through sin open or secret, past or present, from everything we have reason to dread, and everything for which we have reason to blush. Do we not read that "where sin abounded grace did much more abound; that as sin hath reigned unto death even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord?" What fulness is here? What glorious high tides of grace rising above and drowning every sin!

3. But now take another feature of this salvation: its *freeness*. Without money and without price, it comes to us as free as the light of the sun, as the rain of heaven, as the rain of the sky, unbought, unpurchased, unearned, undeserved by any words or works of ours; freely given out of the fulness of Christ to the objects of his redeeming blood and love. Do you doubt this? Does not the apostle say, "Being justified *freely* by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus?" The word "freely" means literally as a gift or gratuitously, "all free, gratis." So also runs the invitation, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17.) Let us never think that God gives his grace grudgingly. Our Lord said to his disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matt. 10:8.) The ancient promise still stands, "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely" (Hosea 14:4); and so testifies Jesus now from heaven: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the water of life freely." Let us not measure the Lord by ourselves; nor shall we do so if we are rightly taught, for "we have received not the spirit of the

world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are *freely* given to us of God." (1 Cor. 2:12.)

4. But take another feature of this salvation: its *certainty*; that in it there is no "if," nor "but," nor "perhaps," nor "peradventure." It is a salvation as certain as God's own eternal throne; for the work is finished, salvation accomplished, sin put away, every attribute of God harmonised and reconciled; and in the bloodshedding, sacrifice, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, salvation stands upon a basis that never can be moved. It is, therefore, called "an everlasting salvation:" "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation;" and similarly Jesus is said to have "become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb. 5:9.)

5. But now take another feature, the last that I shall name, the *glorious issue*: that this salvation not only takes you as you are, with all your sins and all your aggravated enormities, plunges you into the fountain opened in the Redeemer's hands and feet and side, and thus washes you from all your iniquity in his atoning blood, and clothes you with a robe of righteousness, but it takes you safe to glory. I showed you this morning from my text how the inheritance was "reserved in heaven" for the heirs of salvation; and that therefore nothing could keep them out of it. When Christ's glory shall be revealed, what amends it will make for all suffering.

Now has your soul never been lifted up with holy the contemplation of a salvation like this? Did your poor tempest-tossed soul ever anchor here? Did any word ever drop as it were from God's own mouth into your heart, and raise up a blessed hope in your bosom, if it went no further than a hope, that you are interested in this great and glorious

salvation? Then, there is reason that you should greatly rejoice—"leap for joy," as it means in the original—bless and praise God with heart and tongue, that there is such a salvation, and that you have some testimony of a manifested interest in it.

II.—But I pass on to my second point, which is, the heaviness which rests upon the spirit of the heirs of salvation for a season, *"if need be, through manifold temptations."*

In every gracious bosom there is a mixture of joy and sorrow; and usually, the greater the joy the greater the sorrow; the stronger the faith, the heavier the affliction; the deeper the work, the more painful and the more powerful the manifold temptations which assail it. But there is "a needs be" for these things. They would not have been appointed except through the infinite wisdom and love of God. We could not do without them: they are needful to ballast the vessel that it may sail safely over the sea of time. It is needful that holy joy should be tempered, softened, and balanced with much heaviness, and occasionally many deep sorrows, that it may be solid and steady. But before I show this more fully in detail, I will drop a few words upon "the manifold temptations" which the saints of God are called upon to pass through, and which often bring them under such heaviness.

i. The word "temptations" embraces trials also; and the word "manifold" implies not only that these trials and temptations are varied in nature, but abundant in number. Take, then, the expression of the apostle to the full stretch of its meaning; it signifies many trials and many temptations, and these of a very varied and multiform character. The word "manifold" is a very good rendering as signifying the multiplicity of these trials and temptations, comparing them, as it were, to a long piece of cloth or a bale of goods packed

up in many folds, which become gradually drawn out one after another to their whole length. But the word perhaps signifies not so much numerous folds as a variety of colours, like those of a rainbow, or Joseph's coat, or the varying hues of a pigeon's breast. Thus it embraces all the multiplied and various trials and temptations which at different points, from different quarters, and by different means assail and press upon the heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ. I have thought it best to explain the word; for such is the fulness and significancy of the word of God, that one expression will sometimes hold in its bosom a depth and copiousness of meaning in order to adapt it to the comfort and instruction of the church of God for all time. The expression, therefore, embraces every *providential* trial that you may be called upon to pass through; for God has so linked things together in the dispensation of the kingdom of heaven, that providential trials often open a way for the display, not only of the mighty power of Jesus as holding the reins of government below, but for a manifestation of the riches of his grace above. Our Lord, therefore, said to his disciples after his resurrection, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth"—not only in heaven thence to display the power of his grace, but in earth there to manifest the rule of his providence. "All things are put under his feet;" and "he must reign, until he hath put all enemies under his feet." (1 Cor. 15:25-27.) It may be that at this moment you are under some very heavy providential trials, and these trials may assail you from such various quarters, and open such doors for present difficulties and future perplexities, that, in the language of our text, you are in heaviness through them. Body, mind, and circumstances; custom, business, trade, and prospects, are all alike depressed either really or apparently so, that like Pharaoh's chariot wheels, you travel heavily through the sands of Providence; and it seems at times as if fairly or foully you would stick fast in these sands,

and there live and die without hope or prospect of any deliverance more than Pharaoh and his host. This is your peculiar trial, and one of which you have had a long and deep experience.

2. But now take a trial of a different kind, such as many of the dear saints of God have to drink very deeply of—*affliction of body*. How depressing to the mind, how saddening to the spirit, what heavy loads and burdens, ill health, with all its long train of pain, weakness, weariness, and various expenses lays upon our shoulders. How many of God's choicest saints drag their life heavily on through long days and sleepless nights, crying out with Job, "Wearisome nights are appointed unto me. When I lie down, I say, When shall I arise, and the night be gone? And I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day." (Job 7:3, 4.) What an inlet, too, does bodily weakness often afford to temptation, Satan taking cruel occasion through the weakness of the body and shattered state of the nerves to harass and depress the mind.

3. Or take *family afflictions*, for as the trials in the words of our text are "manifold," the word embraces these quite as much as those which may be of a very different character. Heavy *family* trials! How saddening to the mind, how depressing to the spirit when death enters the house and calls away a beloved member. And are there not family trials which may be said to be worse than death when things transpire in the family, such as misconduct or criminality, against which no precautions can guard, which cover it with inward grief and open shame? But enough of trials so termed.

ii. Take then another view of the subject: look at "temptations," properly so called, by which we usually

understand those peculiar snares laid for our feet by sin or Satan, the object of which is to entangle the unwary feet. Our Lord bade his disciples pray, "Lead us not into temptation" (Matt. 6:13); and especially charged his three disciples in the garden: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41.) By these temptations, as distinct from trials, Job, Jeremiah, Jonah, Heman, Asaph, Peter, and many other saints of God, as recorded in the word, were beset. Nor must we expect to be exempt from them. "Ye are they," said the Lord to his disciples, "which have continued with me in my temptations." (Luke 22:28.) Unbelief, infidelity, suggestions from our cruel, inveterate foe to suicide, blasphemy, or despair, how many are and have been tempted by Satan to these things! Nor have we less powerful temptations from within. The sudden breakings forth of temper; the ebullitions of our carnal mind in peevishness, fretfulness, discontent, and rebellion; the workings of the deep corruption of our fallen nature in its grosser and more sensual lusts and propensities; the unlooked for starting up of dreadful thoughts and imaginations: all these in the hands of Satan, and as usually managed by him to entangle our feet, form a part of the "manifold temptations" of our text, their effect being to produce heaviness of spirit, and by grieving and distressing the mind to press it down into the very dust, as a load and burden upon the shoulders, so as to prevent us moving cheerily and happily forward in the things of God. It will not be denied, I think, by any who have painfully experienced them, that the effects of trials and temptations is to sadden the spirit, depress the mind, and fill the heart with grief and sorrow. And though people, hard, unfeeling, unexercised people for the most part, may tell us that we ought not to give way to trouble, but manfully resist or patiently bear it; those who are in the furnace of affliction will say to such advisers: "I have heard many such things;

miserable comforters are ye all." (Job 16:2.)

iii. And yet there is a *needs be* for these trials and temptations, or God would not have appointed you to walk in such a path. If there was nothing before your eyes but the inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, and you were looking forward to be put into the peaceable possession of it at death, without any intermediate trouble or sorrow, you would not be walking in the path of tribulation through which, and through which alone, it is declared that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. You would not be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, which you must be, if you are to be a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. You would have, therefore, no "fellowship of his sufferings;" no being "made comformable unto his death;" "no bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus," nor "being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in your mortal flesh." (Phil. 3:10; 2 Cor. 4:10, 11.) Besides which, you would be no companion for the poor afflicted family of God; you would have few errands to the throne of grace; few openings up of the Scripture to your mind, few applications of the promises to your heart; few discoveries of the pity and compassion of him who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and little sympathy with the Man of sorrows. Your smooth, even, easy path would set you far away from the choicest saints of God, and from the best part of living experience. You would stand, as many think they stand, upon some lofty mountain top—far away from all the clouds of the valley, the smoke and mist that darken the lower grounds of the earth. But to stand there is to stand not upon Mount Hermon, but upon Mount Gilboa; not upon the mountain in which is "made a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25:6); but a dark mountain on which your feet would stumble. (Jer.

13:16.) God deals differently with the heirs of promise, and brings them down from this mountain of pride, if ever they get upon it, into the vale of humility. He sees it needful for them to be in heaviness through manifold temptations. They travel thereby more slowly, but they travel more safely: for if the vale has fewer heights, it has fewer precipices; and mud and mire is more safe walking than amidst rolling stones and beetling rocks. Their path is more dark, and yet gives more occasion for light to be cast upon it. Many crooked things beset them, and yet these crooked things make a way for God's power to set them straight. Many temptations distress them, but they open a path for God's gracious deliverances. Many foes and fears harass their mind, but they make a way for clearer manifestations of the love, blood, and power of Christ. Thus there is a needs be for these manifold trials and temptations. We pray to be humble, teachable, dependent, to know more of the grace, spirit, and presence of Christ; to have more fellowship and communion with him; to be more conformed to his image and example, walk more in his footsteps, and more to know and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. But we cannot have these desires granted except through trial and affliction; for it is in these trials and afflictions that Christ manifests and makes himself known and precious. If then in the divine wisdom there is a needs be for a path of tribulation, happy are we if we are, through God's teaching, in this path; and highly favoured, indeed, we are, if his grace has put us in it, if his grace is keeping us in it, if his grace is supporting us in it. Be assured also that you have that very trial which is most adapted to your particular case and state; for the "needs be" extends not only to trials generally, but to trials particularly and personally. You think sometimes that you could bear any trial but that which is laid upon you. But depend upon it, God has selected out of the variety of manifold trials and temptations that very trial which shall most suit your state and

circumstances. He has, as it were, a boundless treasury of trials, all ready for use; and he has taken out of it that peculiar trial which shall most suit your case. He has selected that yoke which shall fit most closely upon your neck, and fastened that burden upon your shoulders which is most for your good and his glory that you shall carry, even though you bear it down to the gates of death.

iv. But take another word of the apostle to encourage you under your trials and temptations and every depressing weight upon your mind caused by them. They are but *"for a season."* God in mercy every now and then takes our trials away, or supports us under them. Life is not one continuous scene of trial and affliction. There are merciful intermissions. If our path in providence is sometimes dark, it is at others so lighted up with blessed gleams of the goodness of God, that we can bless and praise his holy name for the way by which he has led us. If fears heavily prevail, and unbelief be strong, relief comes at various times and in various ways from the pressure of those fears, and faith is strengthened to fight against unbelief, and even gain a victory over it. It is not all sorrow, all depression, all complaint, all sadness and heaviness with the saints of God. Like an April day, there is sun and shower. There are changes and alterations: for those who have no changes fear not God. (Psa. 55:19.) By these things men live; and in all these things is the life of their spirit. But we could not live under constant trials, especially if they were very severe. They would break our spirit; they might even, so to speak, break our brain, shatter our faculties, crush our nerves, drive us into a madhouse. God, therefore, has mercifully arranged, as regards many of the severe trials with which he visits his family, that they should be but for a season. You will bear in mind that there is a distinction between heavy trials and a daily cross. Heavy trials are but for a season; a daily cross is for life. Severe

temptations are usually not lasting; tribulation is more or less enduring. But even assume that your heavy trials should last the whole of your life; let you go out of one furnace into another, out of one trial into a second, out of one temptation into a third, and each hotter and heavier than the others. It is, after all, even then, but for a season; there will come an end. There is an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven; and when taken up into the enjoyment of it, there will be an end of all this gloomy scene. Stretch then the cord through the length of life; be like the Lord, a man of affliction all your days; drink the cup of Job; sit with Jeremiah in his low dungeon; say with Heman, "Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps; thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" (Psa. 88:6, 7); and let them last through the whole extent of your life, the end will come, and a joyous end for the heirs of promise. Look your trials then firmly and manfully in the face; and as you look them in the face, raise your eyes a little higher, look at the inscription which the hand of God has traced over them, and read it as written for you, "*If need be.*" Now say, "If, then, there is a needs be, my soul acknowledges the truth of it. I feel the necessity of these manifold temptations; I bow to the sovereignty of God in sending them; I acknowledge his wisdom in the choice of the trial, and I admire his grace in supporting me under it." But now look at the other part of the inscription which stands side by side with it, written as if in letters of light: "*For a season.*" It will not last long; the cloud will soon be over, the thunderstorm soon pass away. Lightnings may flash, thunders may peal; it is but the harbinger of copious rain. The clouds will clear, the thunders disperse, the lightnings cease to play, the sun will once more shine, and a glorious sunset follow.

III.—Now for our third point, the *reason why* these manifold

temptations are sent, with their attendant heaviness: "That *the trial* of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory." Have you a grain of faith in your breast? Look and see; for it is well worth searching after. Can you find any movement of faith in your bosom? If it be a faith worth having, it will be a tried faith. God gives no other. "Buy of me," said the Lord to the Laodicean church, "gold tried in the fire;" that is, a tried faith. And thus these manifold temptations which cast down the souls of God's people into such heaviness are for the trial of their faith.

i. But *how* do they try faith?

1. *First*, they try *its very existence*. Faith sometimes in your breast, at least in mine, sinks to a very low ebb. It hides its face and cannot be seen. We almost doubt and fear whether we ever had a grain of faith of God's gift; for we know well that no other is of any avail. All other has been tried and found wanting; and the only faith we value, the only faith we want, is that faith which is a grace of the Spirit and the gift of God. Now this "faith of God's elect"—therefore, peculiar to them—this living faith is not at every man's beck and call. As it is not given by human power, so it is not drawn out by human exertion, nor does it listen to the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. When it withdraws itself, it is like its divine Author: it cannot be seen. "When he hideth his face, who can behold him?" (Job 34:29.) It was a sense of this which made David cry: "Why hidest thou thy face in time of trouble?" (Psa. 10:1) and made the prophet declare: "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." (Isa. 45:15.) Now the effect of trials and temptations in the hand of God is to manifest the existence of this living faith; for there is nothing but faith which can support the soul under powerful trials and temptations.

Everything else gives way. You see how some through temptations plunge into sin, and others into suicide. They have no faith to keep them either from evil or desperation. But the saint of God, who is blessed with a living faith, has a principle in him of which the existence is manifested by trials and temptations; for they, not indeed in themselves, but instrumentally by the over-ruling power of God, draw out that faith which God has planted in his breast. Take the case of Abraham. Abraham, like ourselves, was not always strong in faith; we know that, on more than one occasion, he manifested great weakness of faith, both in denying Sarah to be his wife in Egypt and at the court of Abimelech, and in the case of taking Hagar to wife. But when God "tempted" Abraham, that is, brought upon him a severe trial, for God did not otherwise tempt him, then faith at once sprang up in his breast; for no sooner did God say to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Gen. 22:2), than Abraham's faith sprang up to hear God's word, and what God bade, he did. You neither know your faith nor the strength of your faith until the trial comes. But the inward support that you feel under your trial; the cries of God that come out of your heart through your trial, and the shining in of God's face upon your soul through faith to bless you in your trial; these manifest and prove its existence in your bosom. And they draw it forth. As the sun draws up the vapours from the ground, so the Sun of righteousness draws up the faith in our soul which he has given us to hang upon him, to look to him, to trust his word, to cleave to him with purpose of heart, and embrace him as our only hope and help.

2. Trials also sometimes prove that there is *a depth and a strength* in our faith of which we were not before aware. A

trial comes: it would blow us down unless there were something deeply planted by the hand of God in our soul which stands the storm. There is a springing up of the life of God; a hanging upon the promises of God; a reliance upon the word of God; a going forth of the grace of faith, which throws its believing arms round the Lord, and will not let him go until he bless us. Here we prove not only that our faith is God's gift and work, but that there is a root to it, and a strong root too.

3. But again, these temptations and trials are so *many furnaces* which burn up false faith. What a deal of false faith we have had, it may be in days past, how much false zeal, false confidence, vain boasting, and setting that down for living faith which God never really raised up in our heart. The furnace has burnt it up. The trials, the temptations, the difficulties, the perplexities, the doubts, the fears, the suggestions of Satan, have all been so many hot furnaces which have burnt up our dead faith, and left nothing behind but that living faith which is the gift and work of God.

ii. Here, then, is "*the trial of faith*;" and this trial is more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, for it is not so much the faith itself as the trial of it which is precious. Gold perisheth; the flame of the furnace can melt it; and like all other mere instruments of earthly maintenance, it perishes in the using. The gold you have in your pocket today will be gone tomorrow to pay some bill, or meet some expense: it perishes as you spend it; or if hoarded, perishes as to any practical use and enjoyment. Or say that you invest your gold and thus put it out to profitable use, it will perish, as far as you are concerned, when death snaps the thread of life. But the faith of which I have been speaking never perishes like gold. The hottest flame cannot destroy it; nor does it perish by use, for the more it is used

the stronger it is; nor does it perish at death, though then it is turned into sight. It is an imperishable grace; for it is lodged by a divine hand in the new man, and lives because Jesus lives at the right hand of God, as its Author and Finisher: "Because I live ye shall live also." The Lord therefore said to Peter, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not" (Luke 22:31, 32). If faith could fail, then all must fail: for the life which we now live in the flesh, we live by the faith of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20); so could the faith fail the life would fail also; and the loss of life would be the loss of the soul. By faith we come to God, by faith we believe his promises, receive his truth, embrace his salvation in and by the Son of his love. By faith we stand, by faith we walk, by faith we fight, by faith we overcome; so that if faith could fail, there would be no standing in the truth, no walking with God, no fighting the good fight, and in the end no victory. We see then how needful it is firmly to maintain and contend for the unfailing, imperishable nature of faith, for so much depends upon it.

The trial, therefore, of faith is "precious," because it stands the hottest furnace, without loss or injury. But it is "precious" in two senses. First, it is precious in the sight of God as being his own especial gift. As a grace of the Holy Spirit, it is of exceeding value in the eyes of its divine Giver. It is precious in its origin, precious in its nature, and precious in its end. As making Christ precious, as giving a manifest interest in his Person and work, as cementing a spiritual union with him, and leading into fellowship and communion with him, it is precious as a means. And when it endures the fiery trial which is sent to try it, it is precious as a proof, for it is then clearly proved to be the work of God, and thus brings more glory to him. But, secondly, it is precious in the eyes of its favoured possessor. Would you part with the faith which God

has bestowed upon you for any earthly consideration, especially if it has been well tried, and passed through the trial without loss or injury? Would house or land or any offer that men might make induce you to part with that little grain of faith which God has deposited in your breast? Would you not reject the whole, as our Lord rejected Satan's offer when he said, "All this will I give unto thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me?" "Get thee behind me, Satan," would be your reply; "I would not part with my faith, small though it be, tried though it be, assaulted though it be, for a thousand worlds; for could I part with my faith, I should part with my hope of eternal life, as well as of all the comfort of my present life, and thus spend the remnant of my days a poor, miserable, despairing outcast from God and man." We rarely know the value of a thing till we have lost it, or are called upon to part with it. You may seem at times to have but little faith, and to hold it with but a slack hand; but put you upon your trial as to losing it, or parting with it, and you soon find how precious it is, and with what a firm, tenacious grasp you hold it. Nay, your very trials are made precious by it; for you can look back upon them and see how through faith they have been made blessings. But it is chiefly when we look to the glorious inheritance to which a living faith will bring us, that we may call it precious by the testimony of God and man.

IV.—This brings us to our last point, *the glorious issue of the whole*. Will not that make ample amends for all? The trial of this faith is to be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

What a glorious day for the saints of God will be the appearing of Jesus Christ, when he shall come and all his saints with him (Zech. 14:5); "when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that

believe." (2 Thess. 1:10.) But what a solemn day for all others when "he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." To this second coming of the Lord the Scriptures of the New Testament are continually pointing. It was a truth preached by the apostles almost as much as his first coming; and God's people are represented in the epistles as "loving his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8), as "waiting for him from heaven" (1 Thess. 1:10), as "looking for him" (Heb. 9:29), and as solacing and comforting themselves in the prospect. (1 Thess. 4:18.) Nor was this dry, barren, unprofitable doctrine, for the apostle, pointing out its practical influence on the heart, says, "Our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." (Phil. 3:20.) Now at this glorious appearing of the Son of God a second time without sin unto salvation, our faith, if indeed it be the gift and grace of God, and is a faith which has stood every storm, borne every trial, and passed uninjured through every furnace, "will be found unto praise and honour and glory."

And it will be so in two senses. 1. First, it will be found unto the praise of God. You will bless and praise, adore and thank his holy name, that ever he should have had mercy upon your soul; that ever he should have planted his fear in your heart; that ever he should have made you a partaker of the faith of God's elect. O what "praise" will burst from your lips when "Christ, who is our life, shall appear," and ye shall appear with him in glory. Then it is that the heirs of God will be put into possession of the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, which is now reserved in heaven for them. O what praise and blessing will then fall from the lips of the redeemed! And what "honour" will they give unto their God. The honour of salvation will be wholly

his. Upon his brow they will gladly fix their crown, and to him will they ascribe all the honour of saving their souls from the depths of hell. God has already crowned his dear Son "with glory and honour." (Heb. 2:9.) The psalmist therefore says, "His glory is great in thy salvation; honour and majesty has thou laid upon him." (Psa. 21:5.) And what is the song of the redeemed but, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power?" (Rev. 4:11.) For glory and honour go together. Our text therefore adds, and "glory." What heavenly glory will surround his Person when he descends from heaven in the full blaze and majesty of his Deity shining through his glorified humanity! What glorious angels will go before him; what glorious saints will follow in his train; and how, in the twinkling of an eye, he will change the living and raise the dead; and, as he conforms them in a moment unto his own glorious body, what glory will shine forth in the souls and bodies of all. O what an issue to the trials, the temptations, the heaviness, and the sorrows of God's saints here below, when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." Well then may we bear all the afflictions of the present life, and, with the apostle, "reckon that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18.)

2. Take another sense of the word. God himself shall praise, honour, and glorify his own work upon the soul. Praise shall be given by him to it, honour conferred by him on it, and glory set by him upon it; so that there will be not only praise and honour and glory given unto God by the heirs when they succeed to their glorious inheritance, but praise and honour and glory will be accorded to them by their heavenly Donor. This could not be if they gained the inheritance by their own

merits or exertions; but God will praise the accomplishment of his own eternal counsels, Christ will honour his own work on the cross by casting upon it the lustre of his own glory, and the Holy Spirit will glorify that grace in the heart by which he made the heirs meet for their eternal inheritance. And thus the trial of their faith, which is more precious than of gold that perisheth, will be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

What can we want more if we have any testimony of being heirs and legatees of this noble inheritance? What more can we desire; I may well add, what more can God give? He has given himself: "I am their inheritance." He has given himself in all his glorious perfections, in all his heavenly blessedness, to be their portion for evermore. The great, and glorious self-existent I AM, in his Trinity of persons and Unity of essence, the very God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has made himself over to them. How beautifully is this unfolded in the prayer of our great High Priest: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" and again, "That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they maybe made perfect in one." (John 17:21-23.) O what a oneness is here set forth between the Father, the Son, and the Church. In this oneness will consist the blessedness and enjoyment of this inheritance. For as such it must exist to all eternity: no end, loss, or diminution of this union or of this happiness can be sustained through countless ages of endless bliss.

Is not all this fully set forth or implied in the words, "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away?" If it be incorruptible, and undefiled, and unfading, it must be so for ever and ever, or corruption, defilement, and decay could invade and be found in the courts of heaven. Surely it must be for ever and ever, for it is even now

reserved in heaven for them, that they may be put into full and eternal possession of all that ever was in the mind of God to conceive, or in the power of the hand of God to accomplish.

If then, this inheritance be reserved for us, shall we not struggle on until put into possession of it? Is there not a glorious crown in view, and shall we not press towards the mark for this prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus? Is it not far better for you to be a poor, despised, afflicted, tempted saint of God, with the faith of God's elect in your heart, and the kingdom of God in your breast, pressing and struggling on through a sea of difficulties to reach the heavenly shore and to take possession of this glorious inheritance, than enjoy all that the world could lay at your feet? O how far richer does such a faith make us than if worlds were ours! Broad lands, ample fields, beautiful gardens, noble houses, and a splendid income, all that money can give or that heart can desire, what are they all compared with this glorious inheritance, and any testimony however feeble, if it be but real, of a manifest interest in it?