

The Believer's Path to Glory

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the believer's journey through tribulation towards eternal glory, highlighting God's guidance and the importance of faith and humility amidst trials.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:2, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 119:67, John 10:27, Acts 14:22, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 1:6, Hebrews 12:6, 1 Peter 1:6, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Godly Suffering"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the believer's path to glory, emphasizing the necessity of going through trials to enter the kingdom of God. He reflects on the importance of being guided by God, who knows what is best for us and promises to work all things for our good. Reade highlights the need for humility, thankfulness, contentment, and dependence on God, as well as the significance of learning from past experiences and looking forward with faith and hope. He encourages believers to trust in God's chastisements, which aim to mold our hearts into submission and holiness, ultimately leading us on the path to glory through faith, love, and obedience.

Transcript

37. THE BELIEVER'S PATH TO GLORY

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

When I consider how short-sighted we are, and that all which lies before us is "a dark unknown," it is our happiness, as well as our safety, to be guided by One who cannot err, who sees the end from the beginning, who knows what is best for us, and who has promised, if we love him, to make all things work together for our good. Yet, alas! how unwilling we are to acquiesce in his will. How much we want the completion of our own wishes, as if every disappointment was necessarily a discomfort.

With what tender forbearance does our heavenly Father treat his wayward children. If he crosses their inclinations, it is for their good, that he may subdue their rebellious wills to himself. Oh! that mine may be subdued unto him.

We are journeying to the place of which the Lord has said He will give to us. At every stage of our journey we should erect our Ebenezer; our grateful monument of praise. "Hitherto has the Lord helped us," must be the inscription; "I will never leave you, nor forsake you," our traveling promise for support.

The Christian pilgrim is commanded to look backward; "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not." And, also to look forward; "Behold, I send an Angel before you, to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared."

It is important thus to retrace our steps, that, reviewing the Lord's dealings with us, we may be filled with humiliation and thankfulness; and to look heavenward, that our faith and hope may be strengthened. We are too apt to forget our sins, as well as our mercies; and to neglect our preparation for the future, in the midst of present occupations, trials, or enjoyments. It is good to be humble, thankful, contented, resigned, and dependent. The more we sit loose to the world, and the more we shall enjoy its lawful blessings. But, the more we idolize it, and the more it will be made our cross. These lessons we learn in the school of Christian Experience.

We naturally shrink from trouble, though born to it as the sparks fly upward. Trouble is both penal and medicinal. Evil pursues sinners; but, though "many be the afflictions of the righteous, the Lord delivers them out of them all." How gracious is the voice of covenant love; "You shall consider in your heart, that, as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him."

This is the end and design of the Lord's chastisements. He does not willingly afflict nor grieve the children of men. It is not for his pleasure, as if he delighted in our pain; but for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. Oh! that my heart may be molded into the will of God. Nothing but almighty grace can subdue our rebellious wills, and bring them into a state of child-like submission. David knew this well by happy experience; "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept your word. It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn your statutes."

How often do our affections, like silly, wandering sheep, stray from the Good Shepherd. And as it is said of sheep, that when they once lose their way, they cannot retrace their steps, so is it with our foolish hearts. When once we leave the fold we would never return, if left to ourselves; therefore David in his pastoral Psalm, says; "He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." And in the 119 Psalm; "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant; for I do not forget your commandments." Our blessed Lord, who is himself the "Good Shepherd," has described his love to us by the parable of the lost sheep; and the joy of angels over our salvation. What a kind, compassionate, faithful Shepherd is Jesus, who gave his life for the sheep, and has declared "that they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of his hand." O that I may love him more and more.

When afflictions are sanctified to us, they are indeed good. "The Lord gives medicine to heal our sickness." His precious declaration is; "I am the Lord that heals you." "He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds." "Bless the Lord, O my soul who heals all your diseases." While walking in this consecrated way to glory, our hearts can sing in unison with that of David; "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."

It does, at first sight, seem surprising, that mercies should not lead us to God as powerfully as judgments. But perhaps the reason may be, that afflictions tend to embitter the world to us, whereas prosperity gilds it with a brighter line. Being naturally prone to love the world, and tasting, in seasons of prosperity, some of these many blessings which sweeten life, we are apt to rest at the cistern, and to forsake the fountain. This state of heart forms one of the plainest indications of the Fall.

When God in mercy opens our eyes to see our real condition, then we find that our cistern is broken, and that He only can impart the Living Water. There is, alas! much selfishness in thus coming to God, only that he may heal us. While he smiles upon us by his bounteous Providence, we remain contented with the creature. How dishonoring to our gracious Benefactor!

Oh! how patient is our compassionate God and Savior! There is something most elevating and ingenuous in David's experience; "There is forgiveness with you, that you may be feared." To fear God because he is ready to pardon, manifests a highly spiritual frame of mind. Nature is rebellious, but grace is submissive. To justify God in all his dealings is the very essence of genuine piety. "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right." But the carnal mind complains. We are naturally murmurers and complainers. The natural man is ever ready to find fault with the divine proceedings, and especially if they affect himself. How different was the state of David's mind, who could add, "I know, O Lord, that you in faithfulness have afflicted me;" afflicted me according to covenant love, covenant promise, and covenant truth. Happy state, indeed!

Such assurance as this, enabled a dear servant of Christ to say, when about to leave this world "My pleasures are all to come." To produce such blessedness, the Gospel must be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. Nothing human can impart such peace and joy, at a time when nature is sinking into the arms of death. Oh! that I may never rest, until I obtain this blessed assurance of faith and hope, which is the sweet attendant on the Christian pilgrim as he journeys towards the heavenly Zion.

If the desire of grace, is for more grace, for it is from God alone, that "all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works, do proceed;" I humbly hope I have some evidence of being in the way to glory. But when I look at the matured Christian, as exhibited in the word of God, and contrast this picture with my own infantile state, I have abundant cause for deep humiliation, but none for despondency. All praise to sovereign grace. There is treasured up in Jesus such a fullness of mercy and power, and such a freeness of will to bestow, that I am encouraged to come relying on his faithful word, and to feel assured that I shall not be sent empty away. O what a privilege to be thus invited and encouraged to cast myself simply upon the covenant mercies of God my Savior. Jesus never said to the seed of Jacob; "Seek me in vain."

It is one of the Lord's dealings with his beloved children, to make them feel their weakness and his power; their pollution and his holiness; their nothingness and his all-sufficiency. The more we are brought under the teachings of the Holy Spirit, the more we shall find the truth of this remark. It is the great design of God in the Gospel dispensation, to humble our naturally proud hearts, to bring down our naturally self-righteous spirit, to root out our naturally idolatrous affections. And while He does this through his almighty power, he clothes us with humility, he covers us with the Savior's righteousness, he implants in us a supreme love to Himself, thus destroying the old man of sin, and raising up in us the new man, which is renewed in knowledge and true holiness.

While journeying through this wilderness, we must expect vicissitudes. Many things may occur to repress our spiritual exhilaration. At one time, "Jesus wept." At another, He "rejoiced in spirit." At one time he could say, "Father, I thank you." At another, "Why have you forsaken me?"

If we are founded on the Rock, Christ Jesus; if we have His Spirit dwelling within us; then we may, and ought, to cultivate that peace which the world cannot take away, and which can only be really shaken by willfully allowed transgression. Oh! that I may have a firm hold on the promises. They are in Christ yes, and in Him, Amen, to the glory of God. We change as the wind, in the state of our feelings; sometimes high, sometimes low, now on the mount, now in the valley, but our Divine Redeemer is ever the same. His

love is infinite, his mercy is everlasting on those who fear him. In Him we may safely confide. However rough the waves which dash against our fragile bark; however boisterous the winds which oppose our passage heavenward; Jesus can speak the word- "Peace, be still," and all is hushed into a calm. How often has He to say to my trembling heart- "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

If it be asked; Has the believer no seasons of dejection except what arise from the weakness of his faith? He has. In the spirit of Christian sympathy, he can weep with those who weep; and mourn over the sins of others. How touching is the compassion of the Almighty as recorded in the tenth chapter of Judges; "The children of Israel said unto the Lord, We have sinned, and his soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." A different kind of grief was manifested by our Lord respecting the hypocritical Pharisees; "He looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."

The tender-hearted Paul was often pained by the insincerity of some, and the unbelief of others. He could weep over the falls of professors, and the obstinate rejection of Christ by the Jews; "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears," was his language to the Corinthians.

Bodily infirmity will depress, the spirits. From bodily weakness our spirits may be weak; but this feeling of depression, as it arises, not from spiritual, but natural causes, forms no ground for our writing bitter things against ourselves. The Lord "knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." Jesus did not say, He that rejoices shall be saved, but, " He that believes shall be saved." If, then, we truly believe with the heart unto righteousness; if we love the Savior with a supreme affection; if we desire and endeavor to do the will of God from the heart, we may possess our souls in peace, though, from much bodily sickness, we cannot realize the ecstatic triumphs and joys of faith. This spiritual elevation is delightful, but not indispensable to our safety.

Some have a naturally optimistic temperament, and can rise above the lowering effects of disease. Others, from nervous affections, are soon cast down, and see every thing through a gloomy medium. But, in all these cases, God looks at the heart. He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He will, at all times, speak peace to his people; and enable them to glorify him in the fires, either by a song of thanksgiving, or by a calm and childlike resignation to His will.

Here, then, is solid ground on which to stand. Our salvation does not rest on feeling, but on faith; not on our works, but on sovereign grace. The tried believer longs to die, and to be with Christ. It has, however, been asked- Is it right to indulge anxious desires to depart and to be with Christ, when so many duties require our stay? If this desire arise from a mere wish to escape the troubles of life, it is not a Christian desire. The longing desire after heaven which the believer feels, must always be subservient to the Divine Will. Ready to depart, yet willing to stay, is the proper position of a child of God- willing to stay and do the work, however arduous, assigned to him by Infinite Wisdom; and yet, ready to depart from dearest, tenderest friends, when the Lord calls him to his kingdom of glory. O ! what a blessed preparation of soul is this. How much should we seek after it. It is a compound of faith, love, spiritual-mindedness, hope, resignation, obedience, and joy.

"We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." This must be true, whether it arise from the "thorn in the flesh;" the malice of Satan, the enmity of the ungodly, or the remainders of sin in our heart. Here lies our comfort, that chastisement is the expression of our heavenly Father's love; that every affliction is administered by the hand of parental affection. What can be more soothing than to recognize a Father's hand in every infliction of his providence? There is no mixture of wrath in the cup prepared by a

loving parent. It may be bitter, but it is medicinal. Its effects may be painful, but they are not penal. This assurance reconciles the mind, and enables the obedient child to say- "The cup which my heavenly Father gives me, shall I not drink it?" "Father, not my will, but your be done." Such a spirit as this is most pleasing to God. It is the product of his own grace. The more we possess of it, the more we resemble the divine Jesus, who has left us an example, that we should follow his steps.

Blessed Jesus! enable me to glorify you by bearing your cross along the consecrated path to glory. Give me a holy courage in your cause; a fearless determination to confess you before men; a cheerful resignation to your will under every tribulation. Save me from lukewarmness. Keep me from embracing error, however adorned, or by whomsoever sanctioned. Enable me to discern the chaff from the wheat; to distinguish between the doctrines of men, and the truths of your own word. Preserve me from a temporizing spirit, from a wish to please men at the expense of principle. At all times, and in all places, may I boldly declare my trust in you, my love to you, and my zeal for you. In seasons of national defection, may I be found faithful; and at last, when death shall shake his dart over me, enable me, in the fullness of faith, to exclaim, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How happy the saint of the Lord,
Whose heart to the Savior is given,
While crossing the valley below,
His treasure and hope are in heaven.
He feels the sad burden of sin,
And longs to depart and be free;
he knows where true rest can be found,
My Jesus! 'tis only in thee.
Oh! may I with longing desire,
Pursue the bright path to your throne;
And leaving all idols behind,
Be sealed, by You, as your own.
Whom have I in heaven, but Thee?
And on earth, what, with you, can compare;
Oh! when this frail body shall fail,
Let me rise all your glories to share.
Your word has pronounced the bliss;
When shall I this blessedness see?

"Where I am enthroned in light,
There, my servants enthroned shall be."

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