

But for a Moment

E. Al Stahl (1926–2011)

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. ... But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal [eonian] weight of glory (II Corinthians 4:7-10, 16-17).

Paul states in his writings what many Christians over the succeeding centuries have mused upon, some with consternation and puzzlement, and others with understanding and rejoicing. He speaks of “glory in tribulation” (Romans 5:3). Is such an experience even possible? Is it possible to take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in persecutions, in painful distresses? It must be possible – it is so often mentioned.

Paul writes,

And He said to me, “My grace – My favor and loving kindness and mercy – are enough for you, (that is, sufficient against any danger and to enable you to bear the trouble manfully); for My strength and power are made perfect – fulfilled and completed and show themselves most effective – in your weakness.” Therefore I will all the more gladly glory in my weakness and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ, the Messiah, may rest – yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell – upon me. So for the sake of Christ, I am well pleased and take pleasure in infirmities, insults, hardships, persecutions, perplexities and distresses; for when I am weak (in human strength), then am I truly strong – able, powerful, in divine strength (II Corinthians 12:9-10; Amplified).

Peter writes,

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (I Peter 4:12-13).

Paul also writes,

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God (Romans 8:13-19).

As we read on in Romans we are reminded that all of God's creation was subjected to vanity – not willingly, but by reason of Him who has subjected the same in hope – because the creature itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. So, though we suffer and are sorely and painfully tried along the way, we know all things work together toward a divinely predestined end, and as in Weymouth's version,

Those whom He has foreknown He has also predestined to share the likeness of His Son, that He might be the Eldest in a vast family of brothers; and those whom He has predestined He has also called; and those whom He has called He has also acquitted; and those whom He has acquitted He has also glorified. ... What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He Who did not withhold even His Own Son, but gave Him up for all of us, will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who shall impeach those whom God has chosen? Will God Who acquits them? Who is there to condemn them? Will Christ Jesus, Who died, or rather rose to life again, Who is also at the right hand of God, Who moreover is interceding for us? Who shall separate us from Christ's love? Shall affliction or distress, persecution or hunger, nakedness or danger or the sword? As it is written, "For Thy sake are we being killed all day long. We are counted as sheep for slaughter" ... Yet in all this we are more than conquerors through Him Who has loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor sovereignties, nor things present nor things future, nor powers nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:29-39).

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth (Romans 8:33).

He always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus (II Corinthians 2:14).

Our sonship in Christ is a divine revelation. Multitudes of Christians have not the spirit of sonship that comes by divine calling and revelation. The calling of the Lord is a great mystery wrapped within the mystery of His plan of the ages. He that overcomes on the narrow way to sonship will come to see and understand with wonder and divine discernment that ultimate sonship is the hope of God's entire creation and is dear to the heart of God's ultimate and final intention from before the foundation of the world.

The path that leads to sonship is the path of suffering, but "*these light afflictions are but for a mo-*

ment, and they work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (II Corinthians 4:17). There will be times of pain and sorrow, and lonely separation, and even times of bewilderment and abandonment of near and dear. Friends and trusted companions may become fewer and less sympathetic – it is inevitable as you approach your Gethsemane and stand alone before your cross; except for Christ Who is now your only sure companion.

“*Let this mind be in you*” (Philippians 2:5). That is the beginning of our “*glory to glory*” journey into His ultimate plan for us, beginning with the inevitable Gethsemane encounter, the cup that we must stop and drink as the battle rages; and the “*not my will but Thine be done*” [faith]. How long the dark night of the Gethsemane phase will take is in His hands. It will be a lonely, long time (in our estimation), and the fire may burn fiercely; but the end result is glorious, and as we look back we can say, “It was **but for a moment** and has worked for me an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

We can truthfully “*rejoice in tribulation*” knowing that the grand prize of all, His Mind and His Will, is ours, and that we truly are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

Spiritual growth always entails a Gethsemane encounter. In Genesis 32:24-31, Jacob’s journeys led him to his Gethsemane at a place called Peniel where he, alone, wrestled with a man until the breaking of day; and when he did not prevail against Jacob he touched the hollow of his thigh and said to Jacob, “*Let me go, for the day breaketh,*” and Jacob said, “*I will not let thee go except thou bless me.*” When asked, “*What is thy name?*” he said, “*Jacob*” (meaning crook, supplanter) and the man said, “*Your name shall be no more Jacob but Israel, for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men and hast prevailed.*”

Jacob called the place Peniel, “*for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved.*” Afterwards, for the rest of his life Jacob halted on his thigh (a type of the flesh). This encounter with God cost him dearly, but for the better in the long run, and completely changed his life.

As we move on through our journey from Gethsemane to the betrayal, abandonment, crucifixion, burial and resurrection, we glory in the truth and in the fact of the resurrection Life, His Life, and our total abandonment to His Will. As we seek sonship the old ways dog us as we shake off old rituals, unscriptural doctrines, traditions, and all of the ways that are waxing old and ready to vanish away. We seek to lay down our lives at His feet, He Who is our Head. We need to learn to stop *doing*, and lay all things down and wait for His direction.

The suffering of the saints has long been a mystery, and the Lord’s people have been given varying reasons by their well-meaning teachers, many of whom have been blind leaders of the blind. “Why do the righteous suffer?” has been an enigma that has stumbled many a Christian. The naïve and childish teaching that the Christian life should be without problems, and that all Christians have been promised the best of all good things that the world affords, has been a poison and a stumbling block put out there by the televangelists of the visible church system as they troll for “prayer partners and titers” to help them build their little kingdoms.

The truth is, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33).

The great plan of the ages is God's ultimate mystery,

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:26-27; see also Rom.16:25-26).

It is said of the Ultimate Son,

But we see Jesus Who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became Him, for Whom are all things, and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering (Hebrews 2:9-10).

The sons of His choosing and His making will one day fulfill the words of the Psalmist David,

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; what is man that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him? For Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor (Psalm 8:3-5).

It is not to angels that God has assigned the sovereignty of that coming world of which we speak. But, as we know, a Psalmist has exclaimed, "How poor a creature is man, and yet Thou dost remember him, and a son of man, and yet Thou dost come to him! Thou hast made him only a little lower than the angels: with glory and honor thou hast crowned him, and hast set him over the works of Thy hands. Thou hast put everything in subjection under his feet. For this subjecting of the universe to man implies the leaving nothing not subject to him." But do we see Him Who was made a little lower than the angels – even Jesus – because of His suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by God's grace He might taste death for every man (Hebrews 2:5-9; Weymouth).

Sonship is understood only by revelation of God. He reveals to the sons of God His grand plan and intention to occupy, restore and make all things new. His sons, who will through trial and suffering come into the image of Jesus Christ, will rule and reign with righteousness and with justice until every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

George Hawtin¹ succinctly puts it this way:

Good works, giving of alms, preaching, signs, miracles, healings, and all the rest have nothing whatever to do with sonship. We can have all these things and yet never live a day as a son of God. There are far too many people in the world who have the mistaken idea that their mighty works are their proof of their sonship. Actually, these works are proof of nothing. The works may be good; they may be commendable; they may be beneficent; they may be worthy of reward, but they are not proof of sonship, and never will be. Surely Jesus made this fact abundantly plain when He said,

1. Author of *The Restitution of All Things*, which can be ordered from StudyShelf.com (Item #5175).

Many will say in that day “Lord, Lord have we not prophesied in Thy Name and Thy Name cast out devils and in Thy Name done many wonderful works?” Then will I profess unto them, “I never knew you; depart from Me, ye that work iniquity.” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Let us consider again for a moment Paul’s statement in Colossians 1:26-27.

Even the mystery which hath been hidden from ages and from generations, but is now manifest to His saints ... which is Christ in you the hope of glory.

The glory spoken of here is *not* heaven as has been generally supposed, but sonship. That is the highest and most glorious glory God has ever given or ever will give.

Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called, and whom He called He also justified, and whom He justified He glorified (Romans 8:29-30).

This is glory, this is glorification, and this is sonship. Christ in you the hope of glory.

As many as are led of the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.

Sonship is not what I am, but what He is; what He is in me.

When a son of God sees these truths, he/she no longer asks “Why?” Some may draw back in the heat of trial thinking the price to pay is too dear. The athletes of this world strive towards the mark for the ultimate prize of a medal or an honorarium; and to obtain this brief fading moment of exaltation they sacrifice life and limb and endure pain and agonizing preparation, and in the end it only satisfies the flesh for but a brief moment just to obtain a corruptible crown. We, on the other hand, do it to obtain an incorruptible crown! (See I Corinthians 9:25).

Do we truly understand the plan of God and the ultimate “incorruptible crown” that awaits us when He finishes His creative and redemptive work in us and we stand before Him, clothed in the light of His resurrection life? The ultimate prize is worth it all!

For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in the spirit and by the Spirit of God, and exult the glory and pride ourselves in Jesus Christ, and put no confidence or dependence (on what we are) in the flesh and on outward privileges and physical advantages and external appearances. Though for myself I have (at least grounds) to rely on the flesh. If any other man considers that he has or seems to have reason to rely on the flesh and his physical and outward advantages, still more have I. ... but whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as (one combined) loss for Christ’s sake. Yes, furthermore I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege – the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth and supreme advantage – of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (again)

Christ, the Anointed One ... For my determined purpose is that I may know Him – that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding (the wonders of His Person) more strongly and more clearly. And that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection (which it exerts over believers); and that I may share His sufferings as to be continually transformed (in spirit into His likeness) even to His death, (in the hope) that if possible I may attain to the spiritual and moral resurrection that lifts me out from among the dead, even while in the body (Philippians 3:3-11; Amplified).

May we, by the power of His Spirit, be led to see beyond the veil, and beyond our light afflictions which are **but for a moment**, and understand our divine connection with Christ and identify ourselves with His sufferings, His death, His burial, His resurrection. Everything we were in Adam, and had in Adam, died with Him, was buried with Him, and remained in the grave, and we now walk with Him in newness of life – His risen Life. May God give us spiritual sight.

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. ... Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. ... Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:4-5, 8, 11).

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Sufferings, afflictions and trials, are all part of the son of God's calling and heritage in this age. It is a necessary calling, as He trains and prepares us for His service. God is, in fact, the author of the "evil" that betimes comes against us.

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses. In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned. ... By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live: as chastened, and not killed. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing, as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (II Corinthians 6:4-10).

This why Job said,

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this did not Job sin with his lips (Job 2:10).

To which Paul agreed,

And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given us the ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18).

As did Peter,

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 honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ; 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 (I Peter 1:7-8).

Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator ... But the God of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you (I Peter 4:12-13, 19; 5:10; cf. II Peter 4:12-13).

So did the author of the book of Hebrews,

Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His Own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come. ... Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13:12-21).

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