

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

40. Christian Perseverance

"Faint, yet pursuing." Judges 8:4

The journey of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan affords an instructive history to the Christian pilgrim. The opposition, dangers, trials, and temptations, which beset his path; the unbelief, misgivings, fears, and rebellions of his own heart; the love, power, patience, and truth of his covenant God, are all set before him in this faithful record of the ancient church. He can read his history in that of Israel of old, and thus obtain a deeper view of his own corruption, and of God's everlasting love.

We read, that "the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the difficulty of the way." Canaan was indeed before them, but the way was rough and thorny. "We went," said Moses, "through all that great and terrible wilderness." "Do not forget that he led you through the great and terrifying wilderness with poisonous snakes and scorpions, where it was so hot and dry." But God was with them; the pillar of fire gave them light by night; and the cloudy pillar shaded them from the sultry heat of day. When they had passed over Jordan, their victories gave strength to their faith; but there remained yet very much land to be possessed, and their motto might be, "Faint, yet pursuing."

"Faint, yet pursuing," is truly descriptive of the wearied pilgrim anxious to reach his place of rest; and of the Christian warrior who fights, under much weakness, to obtain the crown. Though helpless in himself, he is strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man, and thus is enabled to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil; to persevere in his heavenly course; and to put his enemies to flight. Often does he realize the blessing of Israel to Joseph; "But his bow remained strong, and his arms were strengthened by the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel; even by the God of your father, who shall help you." He remembers the divine declaration, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." He knows that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, that no flesh should glory in his presence. Hence he renounces his own wisdom and strength, and relies on the power and grace of Jesus.

O! my soul, what is your aim, your great design? Though often faint, through manifold infirmities, are you still striving to enter into that rest which remains to the people of God. Are you fighting the good fight of faith, that you may lay hold on eternal life? Can you say with David, respecting your rebel-sins, "I chased my enemies and caught them; I did not stop until they were conquered. I struck them down so they could not get up; they fell beneath my feet. You have armed me with strength for the battle; you have subdued my enemies under my feet."

Have you experienced the promise of the Savior by his inspired Apostle? "Sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace." "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly." "We are more than conquerors, through him who loved us."

Alas! I feel my utter weakness, and total insufficiency even to think a good thought. I am faint by reason of indwelling sin, for when I would do good, evil is present with me. What a corrupt fountain is my heart. Lord cleanse this polluted spring. I long after absolute holiness, unspotted purity. I know that to be like my Savior is to be blessed. Oh! that I may have grace rightly to answer these important questions. "O Jerusalem! will you not be made clean? when shall it be?"

Lord, it is my heart's desire to be cleansed from all sin, through the precious blood of Jesus. "When shall it be?" O let it be now, this very moment, for "now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." I cannot be happy too soon, and if I have You for my portion, if I am transformed into Your image, I must, I shall be happy. "O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved; how long shall your vain thoughts lodge within you?"

Blessed Redeemer! wash me thoroughly from my sin in the fountain of your blood. Let me not be principally anxious about external washing, but may I seek above all things for internal purification. My words may be correct, when my heart is like a cage of unclean birds. My attendance at your house of prayer may be punctual, and yet I be "in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." The whited sepulcher appears fair and beautiful, though full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. I may outwardly appear righteous before men, while filled with hypocrisy and iniquity. Oh! grant that my heart may be washed from wickedness, and

then my outward walk and conversation will be according to godliness.

Preserve me, O Lord, from resting in the externals of religion. Allow me not to trust in ordinances, or any other means of grace, as if some inherent virtue were lodged in them, apart from the state of mind of those who use them. Give me true repentance and faith, that I may rightly receive the blessings which you have promised to impart, through the ordinances of your gospel. Impress upon my mind this truth, that they are only the channels, and not the source of grace. You, and You alone, are the fountain of all grace. From You, all good proceeds. Oh! keep me from the fatal error of the Church of Rome; and from every departure from the truth of the gospel.

Oh! "Lord of peace, give me peace always by all means," and "holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Let me not be satisfied with a name to live, with a reputation for piety, while dead in your sight. Impart unto me your Holy Spirit; enable me to tread in your footsteps, while passing through the trials and persecutions of the world. "How long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?" Oh! not for a moment. Too long, alas! has my foolish heart been a lodging-house for vain thoughts! Too long have I entertained these enemies to my peace, these traitors to my Savior. But, let the time past suffice to have wrought such madness. Lord drive out these hated inmates. Let them not remain a moment longer to defile your temple. Fill my soul with Yourself, as you did by your presence, fill the Temple of old with glory.

O! that I were wholly freed from every, the least unhallowed desire! The fullness of this blessedness is reserved for your heavenly kingdom, where nothing can enter that defiles. Yet, blessed Lord, in your strength, may I lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset me, looking unto you continually, until freed from the burden of the flesh.

Here I resemble the troops of Gideon, "faint, yet pursuing." I must wrestle, and fight, and pray, and persevere in the strength of Jesus, the Captain of my Salvation. The enemy of souls has an alarming power, a mysterious access to the mind, imagination, and desires. He can cast his fiery darts into the citadel of the heart, and set the soul on fire. Oh! what burnings of fleshly lusts, what covetous desires, what hard thoughts of God are created by the powers of darkness. Nothing but the blood of Christ, applied by faith, can quench these raging fires. Lord! undertake for me. Save me, a helpless worm, from the malice of my spiritual foes! Your grace is Sufficient for me. Through your strength I shall prevail.

We cannot prevent the intrusion of vain thoughts. They may be presented to our minds in a moment, at a time when we wish, and are laboring to fix our hearts on God. Then it is, that Satan will try to disturb our peace, to distract our thoughts, to distress our hearts. His aim is to hinder spiritual meditations, to drive us from the mercy-seat. To stop the current of holy aspirations, he will bring old sins to remembrance, or something more recently transacted, to fill the soul with shame, and to suggest the doubt— Am I indeed a child of God? This arch enemy will leave nothing untried, that may check the spirituality of the mind, or draw us back again into his snares. His object is the destruction of the soul. But, oh! my Savior, You who were tempted in the wilderness, and who know what temptations mean, arm me by your power to resist the devil, that he may flee from me.

Oh! what agonizing pains does the believer feel, when an evil thought fastens itself for days and weeks upon his mind. How does he pray, and grieve, and weep, as if he were standing on the brink of despair. But, when darkness covers his soul, light springs up. The Spirit of the Lord lifts up his standard, and sighs are turned into songs of praise.

A truly pious, but poor disciple of the blessed Jesus, rich in experience and Christian love, once said, "what strugglings have I had with evil thoughts. Nobody can tell my griefs on this account. But the Lord has delivered me. Once they were inmates, but now, blessed be God, they are only like people passing by my window; they do not lodge within me." She then spoke of the great help which she got through the Spirit, by setting the Lord always before her; by living, as seeing Him who is invisible; by realizing the presence of God, as Hagar did when she exclaimed, "You God, see me." She said, that whenever any evil thought was suggested to her mind, she betook herself instantly to prayer, and wrestled with her Savior, like Jacob of old, until she obtained the mastery over the temptation. She would often say, "It is good to be a wrestling Jacob." This is truly living a life of faith; it is bringing into action the principles of godliness; and the end of such a life is peace. She died with a triumphant song of victory.

Oh! that like this aged saint, I may never cease to pray, until prayer is turned into praise; the conflict ends in conquest; and the cross is exchanged for the crown. My Savior cheers me onward, for he says, "Do not be afraid, only believe." "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you a crown of life." He who has promised, is the

Faithful and True Witness, the Alpha and Omega, the Lamb of God, the King of saints, the Lord of glory. O for faith, a strong and vigorous faith, to lay hold upon the promise, to cleave to the Promiser, whose word shall abide, when every earthly refuge has passed away.

"Blessed is the man that trusts in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." Rejoice, O my soul, in your God and Savior, for he has said, and his word cannot be broken, "Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." Rejoice, yes, again rejoice, for Jesus has declared, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

O! my soul, do you believe this? "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." Increase my faith in your unchanging word. Let me daily hear your voice, and follow you. Though often faint, through the weakness of faith, allow me not to shrink from the cross. May I, like Israel of old, though faint, still pursue, contending with my foes, until I vanquish the hellish legion. Like the mariner, homeward bound, may I pursue my onward course, fearless of storms, until I reach the wished-for port. Yes, like the Christian pilgrim, may I brave the toils and dangers of the road, knowing that heaven is the Christian's home, his Father's house, his Paradise of rest!

The Lord he is good,
My spirits to cheer;
In all my distress,
My Jesus is near;
His love and his promise
Forever shall stand,
Through storms, and through tempests
He'll bring me to land.
Then why should I fear
The wild foaming wave,
When Jesus has promised
His servant to save?
His arm is extended
To give me relief;
His love is proclaimed
To banish my grief.
Though Satan may rage,
And earth may combine
To ruin my soul,
Yet, still I am thine,
Your favor, bless'd Jesus,
My portion shall be;
In death and in danger,
I'll triumph in thee.