

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

### **AN ACCOUNT OF THE PERSECUTIONS WHICH PAUL ENDURED FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOSPEL.**

When Daniel stood before Nebuchadnezzar to explain his dream, he shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God, however galling it might be to the ambition of this haughty conqueror. He told him of the fleeting nature of his own dominion; that empire would succeed empire, until the period of the fourth monarchy should arrive, when the God of Heaven would set up a kingdom which should never be destroyed; that it would break in pieces and consume all the former kingdoms, and that it should stand forever. This kingdom was represented to Nebuchadnezzar by a stone cut out without hands- to signify, that it would be established in the earth by an Almighty Power, and not through human skill. While other empires were to pass away, this stone was to increase, until it should become a great mountain, and fill the whole earth. In another vision, Daniel saw one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven; he came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given to him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all the people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away; and hit kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Jesus, the Prince of peace, the Lord of glory, is this Son of Man, this King of Zion. All who truly believe in him, are the subjects of this spiritual kingdom; for it was revealed to Daniel, that "the saints of the Most High should take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." In fulfillment of this glorious prophecy, Jesus said to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world." As his kingdom was to be erected upon the ruins of idolatry, and whatever exalts itself against the glory of God, the world would naturally oppose its establishment and enlargement. And so it was revealed to Daniel. He saw a persecuting power in his emblematical vision, which should make war with the saints, and prevail against them, until the Ancient of Days should come, and judgment be given to the saints of the Most High; and the time arrive, that the saints should possess the kingdom.

From this Prophecy, in connection with those contained in the Revelation of John, we are made acquainted with two important facts- the one is, that the Kingdom of Christ shall finally prevail, and become an universal Dominion, blessing the earth with peace and righteousness; the other, that the true Church of Christ will have to contend with the powers of darkness, and to endure persecution from an ungodly world, until the period shall arrive when Christ will tread the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, and break his enemies in pieces like a potter's vessel.

With these prophetic declarations before us, we need not be surprised at the multiplied trials of Paul, and those of true Christians in every age, who devote their lives to the service of Christ, and to the destruction of Satan's kingdom. But it will not be always so. The period of the Church's glory is rapidly advancing. The Lord will hasten it in his time.

To trace the various trials which the Apostle endured, his many privations, and never-ceasing cares, will, no doubt, be interesting as well as profitable. The view of his sufferings should shame us out of our slothfulness. Can we remain indifferent to the interests of Christ's kingdom, and the eternal happiness of mankind, when he underwent so much for the same Jesus, whom we profess to worship; and out of love to such perishing sinners, as now surround us; and who are continually passing into eternity, regardless of the torments which await them?

It is painful to think, how little our hearts are affected by the wickedness which overspreads the earth. There is an indolence on this subject, which indicates great lack of spiritual feeling. We are not sufficiently alive to the evil of sin, even in our best moments; but could we see, as God sees, we would be overwhelmed by the view of human depravity.

While Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Law, written with the finger of God on two tables of stone, the people were corrupting themselves, by making a golden calf and dancing round it with idolatrous worship. The Almighty acquainted Moses with this act of rebellion, and threatened to destroy them instantly. Anxious for the honor of God and the preservation of Israel, he interceded in their behalf, and prevailed. But no sooner did Moses descend from the mountain, and become himself a witness to their abominations, than his anger waxed hot against Aaron and the congregation. He cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the Mount; he ground the golden calf to powder; and in the name of the Lord God of Israel he commanded the sons of Levi to slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.

How far beyond our conception is the patience of God, who beholds, at one glance, all the evil which is perpetrated, yes, all the evil which is devised, by all the millions of human beings throughout their successive generations! Truly his mercy is infinite. He is God and not man, therefore we sons of men are not consumed. But the Lord is also a God of judgment, who will by no means clear the guilty; for he has declared by his prophet, that "the wicked shall be turned into hell and all the nations that forget God."

We live in a day of rebuke and blasphemy; in a day when the judgments of God are abroad in the earth; a day in which the enemies of Christ are awake and active. Infidelity is unfurling its standard, and spreading its poison. Satan is mustering his forces against the saints of the Most High. If ever the people of God were called upon by the voice of Providence to be up and doing, it is now. This is not the time to slumber, when the foe is in the breach; it is not the season for rest, when the Lord calls his soldiers to the spiritual combat. The weapons of our warfare, though despised by the world, are mighty, through God, to destroy the empire of Satan and to establish the kingdom of Christ upon earth.

O that the Spirit of love may descend upon us from on high. Then will ministers and people, like the early Christians, labor for the conversion of sinners; cultivate personal holiness; sit loosely to the world; and gladly suffer the loss of all things for Jesus' sake.

What the great Apostle of the Gentiles cheerfully endured, out of love to the souls of men and for the sake of his Redeemer, would daunt the stoutest heart, if destitute of Gospel principles. Nothing but Divine Love, shed abroad in the heart, could have produced such astonishing acts of patience and self-denial; such cheerfulness in suffering; such preparedness for death.

When writing to the Corinthians, he says, "But sometimes I think God has put us apostles on display, like prisoners of war at the end of a victor's parade, condemned to die. We have become a spectacle to the entire world—to people and angels alike. Our dedication to Christ makes us look like fools, but you are so wise! We are weak, but you are so powerful! You are well thought of, but we are laughed at. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, without enough clothes to keep us warm. We have endured many beatings, and we have no homes of our own. We have worked wearily with our own hands to earn our living. We bless those who curse us. We are patient with those who abuse us. We respond gently when evil things are said about us. Yet we are treated like the world's garbage, like everybody's trash—right up to the present moment."

Where is the worldling who would endure such accumulated sufferings and contempt, for any promises of good beyond the grave? Worldly men will bear many privations, connected with some earthly advantage, which they hope before long to enjoy; it is the true Christian only, who can suffer for eternal glory. Much consolation was mixed with the Apostle's tribulations, he could therefore say, "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."

Following the steps of his Divine Master, who endured the cross, despising the shame, he told the Corinthians, "In everything we do we try to show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. We have been beaten, been put in jail, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. We have proved ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, our sincere love, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We have faithfully preached the truth. God's power has been working in us. We have righteousness as our weapon, both to attack and to defend ourselves. We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. We are well known, but we are treated as unknown. We live close to death, but here we are, still alive. We have been beaten within an inch of our lives. Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything."

As if this weight of suffering were insufficient to manifest the strength of his faith and patience, there were teachers in the church of Corinth, who, through envy, sought to undermine his usefulness, by insinuating doubts respecting the validity of his claim to the office of an Apostle. This aspersion excited a holy indignation in the breast of Paul; for nothing could be more abhorrent to a heart hating pretension, than such a false assumption of character. With peculiar energy, he thus writes to the Corinthian church, "Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord with my own eyes? Isn't it because of my hard work that you are in the Lord? Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you, for you are living proof that I am the Lord's apostle." What a striking instance is this, of self-abasement. While he was compelled to magnify his apostolic office, he beautifully invests it with the robe of humility. Then he adds, "Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you, in patience, in signs, in wonders, and mighty deeds."

Referring to his traducers, he says; "They say they serve Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in jail more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled many weary miles. I have faced danger from flooded rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the stormy seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be Christians but are not. I have lived with weariness and pain and sleepless nights. Often I have been hungry and thirsty and have gone without food. Often I have shivered with cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm. Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of how the churches are getting along."

With a heart supremely fixed on heaven, and despising the coveted things of the world, he makes this Christian declaration; "If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong." O! how wonderful is the grace of God in its operations on the human heart. How softening- how subduing. No worldly motive could have effected such a change in the mind of this once bigoted Jew. What had he to gain from the world by embracing Christianity? Nothing, but a series of sufferings, and a bitter death.

Like Moses, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the world; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. The true Christian, like the lowly-minded Apostle, must be contented to have his good evil spoken of. His labors of love, undertaken with the purest intention, may be attributed to some mercenary motive; and his very sufferings, patiently endured for the Truth's sake, may be ascribed to the vainglorious desire of getting himself a name.

Let us cease from man. Our eye must be simply fixed upon God; his Will must be our Law; and his Glory the end of our actions; for not he that commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends. While doing his will in the simplicity of faith, and in a spirit of love, we must bear with patience the oppositions of sinners, the uncharitable aspersions of religious professors, and even the unkind surmises of Christian friends.

The admonitions of Peter are very important to the tried believer in Jesus. "For God is pleased with you when, for the sake of your conscience, you patiently endure unfair treatment. Of course, you get no credit for being patient if you are beaten for doing wrong. But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you. This suffering is all part of what God has called you to. Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps. He never sinned, and he never deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted. When he suffered, he did not threaten to get even. He left his case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly."

Can we thus return good for evil? Under every species of trial, can we patiently endure, as seeing Him who is invisible. To do so, is practical Christianity; it is being imitators of Him who was meek and lowly in heart; and who has commanded us to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and follow him. "If any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." Do we then study the character of our blessed Lord as revealed in the gospel; and pray without ceasing, that our souls may be transformed into his holy image? The more we drink into the spirit of Jesus, the more we shall experience peace and rest in our souls.

Suffering is the lot of all, but the afflictions of the righteous are sanctified afflictions; they conduce to their growth in grace, and mark out the way to the heavenly kingdom. Paul knew this well; for Jesus had told him, what great things he must suffer for his name's sake. In the midst of the furnace, his Savior stood near him, giving him the blessed assurance, that if he suffered with him, he should also reign with him. Hence, soaring on the wings of faith and love above this darkened scene, he could exclaim with holy triumph, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

When Jesus drew near to the time of his crucifixion, how sweetly did he comfort his little flock, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Peace is the legacy which Jesus left to his Church; a precious gift, more valuable than the wealth of the Indies. It is the fruit of his Spirit, the portion of his saints; whose peace, flowing like a river, widens as it approaches the ocean of eternity. In the midst of trouble, they are kept in perfect peace, because

their minds are stayed on Him; resting with unshaking faith upon his atonement, righteousness, and intercession, they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Are they called to endure affliction? They can praise their Savior in the fires. The flame which loosens the earthly cord, like a fiery chariot, bears their unfettered spirits to the realms of bliss. None are exempt from trials; all must prepare to meet them; come they will, in one shape or other. There are trials peculiar to a state of poverty, and to a state of wealth. Some have family burdens, with the blessing of health; others are free from domestic cares, but are oppressed with sickness; some enjoy the blessedness of personal piety, while their immediate relatives are far from God; others are laboring to benefit their fellow sinners, but meet with little else than ingratitude and opposition. The poor man is tempted to think harshly of God; the rich man to forget him. Even the believer finds a constant need for watchfulness and prayer, by reason of the sin which dwells in him.

Thus each one has to bear his own burden; and oh! how often does our merciful God, "stay his rough wind, in the day of the East wind," that his people may be able to carry their cross with comparative ease, through the sustaining power of his Holy Spirit, until they all meet around his throne, wearing the crown of glory, and ascribing all their salvation to Him who washed them from their sins in his own blood, and made them Kings and Priests unto God.

"He that has made his refuge God,  
Shall find a most secure abode  
Shall walk all day beneath his shade,  
And there, at night, shall rest his head.  
Just as a hen protects her brood  
From birds of prey that seek their blood,  
Under her feathers; so the Lord  
Makes his own arm his people's guard.  
But if the fire, or plague, or sword,  
Receive commission from the Lord  
To strike his saints among the rest,  
Their very pains, and deaths are blest.  
The sword, the pestilence, or fire,  
Shall but fulfill their best desire,  
From sins and sorrows set them free,  
And bring your children, Lord, to thee."