

THE HALLOWING OF OUR BURDEN

J.R. Miller:

We miss much, by not giving heed to the marginal readings in our reference Bibles. Ofttimes a new light falls upon a verse or a word, when we have noted the alternative rendering which is thus given. These marginal readings give us other shades of meaning in the original words, and ofttimes suggest a hidden sense which is very beautiful.

Take a single example. Few Bible verses are more frequently quoted, than that in one of the Psalms, which says, "Cast your burden upon the Lord" and He shall sustain you." Psalm 55:21. The privilege is a very precious one. We all have our burden. No matter how happy anyone is he is bearing some weight of care, or sorrow, or responsibility. Continually we find our load too heavy for our own unaided strength. We feel that we cannot carry it without help. Human love comes up close beside us, willing, if it were possible, to take the burden from our shoulder, and carry it for us. But this is not possible. "Every man must bear his own burden." Most of life's loads are not transferable.

Take pain, for instance. No tenderest, truest love can bear our pain for us, or even bear any smallest part of it. Or take sorrow. As close as human friendship may come to us when our heart is breaking with grief it cannot take from us any least portion of the anguish we suffer as we meet bereavement. Or take struggle with temptation. We can get no human help in it, and must pass through the struggle alone.

Life has this peculiarity that its experiences are its own, without any possibility of transference to any other, or even of sharing in any actual way by another. This is one of the mysteries of being. Each must live his life alone. Help can come to us only at a few points and there only in matters that are external. Our friends may send fuel for our fire, or bread for our hunger, or give us money to pay our debts; but the burdens of life's deep personal experiences, of whatever sort they may be no one can carry for us, or even really share with us.

It will be noticed, too, that God himself does not promise to bear our burden for us. So much is it an essential and inseparable part of our life that even the divine love cannot relieve us of its weight. Or if we say it must be possible, God being omnipotent, for Him to take our load off our shoulders if He would we may say at least that this is not the way of divine love.

The teaching from all this, is that we cannot hope to have our life-burden lifted off. Help cannot come to us, in the way of relief. The prayer to be freed from the load, cannot be answered. The assurance is not that the Lord will take away our burden when we cast it upon Him, lifting it away from our shoulder. It is, instead, a promise that while we bear our burden, whatever it may be, the Lord will sustain us. "Cast your burden upon the Lord" and He shall sustain you." He will give us strength to continue faithful, to go on with our doing of His will, unimpeded, unhindered, by the pressure of the load we must carry.

Here it is, that the light breaks upon this divine word from the margin. Glancing at the reference we see that the word "gift" is set down as an alternative reading. "Cast your gift upon the Lord." Thus we get the teaching, that our burden is a gift of God to us. At once the thing, which a moment ago seemed so oppressive in its weight, so unlovely in its form is hallowed and transformed. We had thought it an evil, whose effect upon us could be only hurtful, hindering our growth, marring our happiness. But now we see that it is another of God's blessings, not evil but good, designed not to hurt us, nor to impede our progress but to help us onward. The whole aspect of our burden is changed, as we see it in the new light that shines from the margin.

A gift from a human friend bears love. It is a token and pledge of their love for us. In like manner, God sent this gift to us because He loves us. It is a memento of divine affection. It may be hard for us to understand this. It may be a burden of pain, and pain seems so opposed to comfort that we cannot see how it can be a gift of love. It may be sorrow; and sorrow never for the present seems to be joyous but always grievous. It may be loss the stripping from us of life's pleasant things, leaving emptiness and desolation. How such burdens as these, can be tokens of divine affection, God's gift of love it is hard for us to conceive. Yet we know that God is our Father, and that His love for us never fails. Whatever comes from His hand to us must be sent in love.

If our burden is a gift of love, it must have good in it for us, some blessing. No doubt this is true of everything God sends to us. Susan Coolidge writes of the messenger who comes in the name of the Lord:

Who is this that comes in the Lord's dear name?
Wan and drooping on his road, very faint and lame;
Pale brow overshadowed, eyes all quenched and dim

Is it PAIN who comes? Did the Lord send him?

Who is this that comes in the Lord's dear name?

Meeting never praises, only tears and blame;

Mourning veil to hide him, eyes which tears o'erbrim"

Is it GRIEF who comes? Did the Lord send him?

Who is this that comes in the Lord's dear name?

In his strange and searching gaze burns a pallid flame;

Mournful flowers crown his head, terrible and grim"

Is it DEATH who comes? Did the Lord send him?

Never messenger shall come"if he be not sent;

We will welcome one and all, since the Lord so meant;

Welcome Pain or Grief or Death, saying with glad acclaim,

"Blessed be all who come to us in the Lord's dear name!"

The world offers attractive things"pleasures, gains, promises of honor and delight. To the eye of sense, these appear to be life's best things. But too often they enfold bitterness and hurt, the fruit of evil. At the bottom of the cup, are dregs of poison. On the other hand, the things that God gives, appear sometimes unattractive, undesirable, even repulsive! We shrink from accepting them. But they enfold, in their severe and unpromising form"the blessings of divine love.

We know how true this is of life's pains and sorrows. Though grievous to sense, they leave in the heart which receives them with faith and trust"the fruits of divine blessing. Whatever our burden may be, it is God's gift, and brings to us some precious thing, from the treasury of divine love. This fact makes it sacred to us. Not to accept it"is to thrust away from us, a blessing sent from heaven.

We need, therefore, to treat most reverently"the things in our life which we call burdens. We cherish the gift of a friend. We do not thrust it from us, or fling it away. If we were to find today, lying in the street, trampled under foot, something which we had given a dear one yesterday, a gift of our love, we would be sorely hurt by the dishonor thus put upon us! Shall we treat our heavenly Father's gift to us, with a disregard we would not show to a human friend's gift? Shall we weary of it? Shall we consider it an evil, something we would be rid of? If it brings present pain or trial, or comes in the form of a heavy cross"shall we complain of its weight? Shall we not rather look upon it with love, and cherish it with gladness, as a mark of honor bestowed upon us?

Here is a quotation from a distinguished preacher which illustrates the esteem in which all true men hold gifts of love: "I have in my house a beautiful half-bust, a figure of myself, sculptured from the purest marble, by one who, though not well known as such, is no common artist. It was a gift to me, from the sculptor; but I value it all the more because it was fashioned by the soft fingers of my own daughter, chiseled with her own hands, and wrought out as an expression of an abiding love, when I was thousands of miles away from home for a long stretch of time. Coming to me on my return home as a gift from her, that bit of marble, the work of my own child's fingers, and the fruit of her genius and love, was more precious to me than if Michael Angelo had risen from the dead from Greece"to have wrought that portrait for me."

Similarly, we should regard all the gifts of God to us"with affection. This is easy for us so long as these gifts come to us in pleasant form"things that give joy to us. But with no less love and gratitude should we receive and cherish God's gifts, which come in forbidding form. It is the same divine love which sends the one"and also the other. The one is no less good"than the other. There is blessing as truly in the gift of pain or loss or trial"as in the gift of song and gain and gladness. Whatever God sends we should receive therefore, in confidence, as a gift of his love.

Thus it is that our burden, whatever it may be, is hallowed. It may not always be easy to carry it, for even love sometimes lays heavy burdens on the shoulders of its beloved. A wise father does not seek always to make life easy for his child. Nothing could be more unkind. He would have his child grow strong"and, therefore, he refuses to take away the hard task. God is too loving and kind, too true a father"to give us only easy things. He makes the burden heavy"that we may become strong in bearing it. But He is always near; and He gives us the help we need, that we may never faint beneath it. Thus we may always know, that our burden is our Father's gift to us!