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First Baptist Pulpit

Faith on the Crucible

A Sermon

Delivered by
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at the First Baptist Church, Parker, Texas
Delivered on Lord's-Day morning, July 2, 1995

Faith on the Crucible
I Peter 1:1-7

"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 honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ;" (1 Peter 1:7)

As two of my fellow Christians and I sat in an I.C.U. waiting room recently, the comment arose that faith, as it is propagated by modern heretics, is too easy. It is a faith which says that every rough highway will be smooth, that every tragedy will be turned into a triumph, and that every disease or misfortune comes from Satan. This idea of faith is that all disease can be healed; that every difficulty we face in life can be resolved by faith, whether it is a financial difficulty, a circumstantial difficulty regarding our employment or our family relationships, a physical difficulty, or an emotional difficulty. But it seems to me that a greater faith is that faith which is anchored solidly, even if difficulties are not resolved.

Is not the greater faith that which perseveres, trusting in Christ, though difficulties come, though diseases are not healed, though distresses are not relieved, though death does not remove its shadow? To suggest that faith is merely decisional, merely mental and volitional assent to Christ, makes faith a kind of magical wish. This erroneous faith takes the passage "By His stripes, we are healed" and then asserts that the atonement of Christ has provided our healing if only we have enough faith to appropriate the atonement to heal every disease.

I am thoroughly convinced that much of the "healing" we see on the Christian TV media is either the result of psychosomatic suggestion, which medical doctors tell us occurs almost every day, or it is demonic phenomena. Healing in and of itself is no verification of the activity of the Spirit of God. Let me repeat. . . the phenomenon of healing, in and of itself, (just because it occurs) - proves nothing about the work of the Spirit of God. Even Christ Himself said, ". . . there shall arise false christs and false prophets showing great signs and wonders insomuch that if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect." So just because someone can demonstrate apparently miraculous gifts does not verify that individual or the "miracle" as being from God. He could be, she could be, from Satan. So let us proceed with a slightly fuller discussion of healing in relation to faith, and more broadly than that, faith on the crucible.

Have we forgotten the words of the Apostle Paul who said in Philippians 1:29, "Unto you it is given in behalf of Christ not only to believe on him but also to suffer?" According to some, suffering is never in the will of God. Yet the Apostle Paul says that suffering certainly is "given" to all Christians that we "may know Him and power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

Even Jesus Christ prayed, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not My will, but thine." If the cup of suffering did not pass from Jesus Christ, the Son of God, except He drink it to its most bitter dreg, and if we are predestined to be conformed unto His image inclusive of suffering; who are we to claim a faith that makes the road to Jerusalem downhill, laden with roses, instead of steep, rocky, hard places ridden with thorns? May God forgive us for unbiblical views of faith.

Biblical faith is faith on a crucible. The crucible, as you know, is a cross - a place where one is nailed. And thus, being nailed, one is helpless to do anything but suffer. This "doctrine of helplessness," whether it is the helplessness of the person who is on the crucible or the helplessness of others who stand around to look at them as the disciples stood around, helplessly, to look upon Christ, or the helplessness of the prophet whose words have no power in such difficult circumstances; such a doctrine of helplessness is critical to a proper understanding of faith. Who of us would not fly immediately to a sick child if we could not heal that child? Who of us would not hasten to as many places as we could to heal as many people as we could for the sake and glory of Christ? But not even Jesus Christ healed every leper or every blind man.

There are multiple crucibles to which Christians are nailed; the crucible of doubt; the crucibles of difficulty, disease, despair; and even the crucible of death. The sovereign providence of God nails us upon life's crucibles so that we might bear in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ. Unto us it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer.

Peter says, "In order that the trial of your faith, being tried like gold by fire, yet may be found more precious." Peter's poetic metaphor is one of gold put into a refiner's fire, the best gold being that gold which is most purified by greatest heat. The longer and hotter the process of purification, the purer the gold. Thus also it is with faith. The longer and hotter the trial, the harder the nail, the more helpless we are in adverse circumstances, the more precious is our faith. Some believe that the greatest faith resolves all disease, suffering, distress, and death, but Peter says the faith which is purest, even purer than the purest gold, is the faith tried in the hottest fire and thus made purer than purest gold, to the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom not beholding, we love; in whom now, though not beholding, we believe, with joy inexpressible and glorified, receiving the end of our faith -- our healing? No! Receiving the end of our faith, the solving of our financial problems? No! Receiving the end of our faith, the working out of our difficulties on the job? No! Receiving the end of our faith - two of you agreeing on anything upon earth and having it come to pass? Nay! Ten thousand times, Nay! "Receiving the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls"(1 Peter 1:9). The primary and ultimate purpose of faith is believing to the salvation of the soul even as we are conformed to Christ's image by suffering.

Peter exhorts Christians not to think that anything unusual has happened to us if we suffer. But the modern misconception of faith says that, if we suffer, then we are out of God's will. The modern misconception of faith says that, if we suffer, we somehow have violated God's will by sins of omission (not doing what God wants you to do) and therefore God is punishing us; or sins of commission (doing those things which God forbids) and therefore affliction comes upon us. No, to the contrary! It is the norm for Christians to suffer. We should remember when we are faced with difficulties in life, that those difficulties are with a purpose of refinement. Adversity is the fire of refinement whereby God tests and purifies our faith. And in testing us, His desire is to purify us. Suffering for the Church is healthier than health. Financial adversity, for the Church, particularly the American church, is healthier than wealth. Tribulation for the contemporary Church is better for her than a rapture. We need suffering more than we need external, temporal, and physical healings.

But "Don't think it strange concerning the fiery trial," Peter says, "as though some strange incident

had occurred, but rejoice even as you are partakers (or participants) in the sufferings of Christ." Notice Peter's theological understanding of suffering, identical to Paul's, that suffering for the Christian is inevitable because it is a means whereby he or she is conformed to image of Christ. Don't think it strange when you are challenged with adversity, for in this you are partakers of Christ's sufferings.

"Rejoice in as much as you are partakers of the sufferings of Christ in order that, at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice in exultation. If you are defamed in the name of Christ, be happy, because the glory of God and the Spirit of God have come to rest upon you." When was the Lord Jesus Christ most glorious? Was it in the high glory of His birth when the stars of heaven sang and the sons of God shouted for joy? Was it in the triumph of His temptation when the angels came and ministered to Him, having triumphed over Satan? Was the highest glory and great power of Christ manifested in the Mount of Transfiguration where His radiance became white as light and Elijah and Moses stood beside Him? Was the highest glory and power of Christ most manifested when He healed the blind, cleansed the leper, or raised the dead? Or was the glory of Christ at its highest when, bowed low in Gethsemane, He wept, pleading with Almighty God that the cup of suffering might pass from Him? Yea, the highest glory of Christ and the Spirit of God rested upon the thorn-pierced brow of the Son of God, upon the nail-pierced hands and feet, and upon the sword-pierced side. God forbid that we should glory save but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. A faith that has been refined by the fire of Almighty God on the crucible of testing is the most excellent, healthiest, and purest faith revealed in the Word of God.

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