

THROUGH NIGHT TO MORNING

by

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SERMON NINETEEN -

COMFORT FOR SHUT-INS

"The things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel." (Philippians 1:12)

"THE things which happened" unto Paul in this connection refer to his imprisonment.

He is in a Roman gaol, chained to a soldier. He calls them his "bonds," and what he means to say is this, "All that I have lost in this imprisonment - loss of liberty, loss of apparent opportunity, loss of comfort - is gain." There is gain in loss, under all circumstances, to men like the Apostle Paul.

Then he proceeds to enumerate the things in which loss is real gain.

First of all, he tells us that there is a gain of widening influence:

"So that my bonds became manifest in Christ" throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest. "My limitation became expansion, my imprisonment was my introduction, my bonds were the ticket of admission to the guard of Caesar's palace, and but for my bonds I would not have had the opportunity of preaching the Gospel as I have."

Paul knew that under other conditions his bonds gave him the opportunity of preaching to Agrippa, until he said, **"Almost thou persuadest me to become a Christian."**

His bonds gave him the opportunity of preaching to Felix, who trembled as he heard of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come.

His bonds gave him the opportunity of preaching on board the ship, when the captain and the crew needed his words of good cheer.

His bonds gave him the opportunity of going to Rome, for if he had been at liberty he might not have gone to Rome quite so soon.

It was the bonds that took him to the place where, above all others, he desired to preach the Gospel.

So, also, our limitations may become our opportunities.

John Bunyan's imprisonment liberated his mind, and gave us *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*, and *Grace Abounding*. All down the years he has been speaking for CHRIST, and will continue to do so until the Lord comes. But for the imprisonment in Bedford Gaol, John Bunyan would have been too busy to have written *The Pilgrim's Progress* as well as he did; I think it would have shown some marks of haste.

He would have been far too busy to have written *The Holy War*, better in some respects than *The Pilgrim's Progress*; too busy to write *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. So that the bonds at Bedford Gaol liberated John Bunyan and gave him to the world.

Several years ago a friend in New York said to me, "Have you ever visited Bella Cook?" I said I had not, but I had read her book, *Rifted Clouds*, and my heart had been comforted. "Well," he said, "let us go and see her."

We went into one of the most thickly populated portions of that great, busy city; we went through a public-house into a rear garden, and there in the midst of that space was a little one-story brick building, which looked out of place. It was not built with reference to anything surrounding it; everything surrounding it had been built in reference to it. I went into the room, and there lay upon a bed of suffering a calm, quiet, beautiful face.

Bella Cook had not been outside that room for over forty years. The City of New York had built around her little brick cottage out in the field. The radiance of Heaven was on her face, the music of Heaven was in her voice, as she told us of the love of CHRIST, the sweet fellowship she had with Him every day; and from that afflicted saint in the little brick cottage have gone out streams of blessing to all the world.

The poor come to her. She gives away a hundred and seventy-five turkeys at Christmas.

People of means delight to give her the funds with which to bless the poor, and she is very careful about the investment. As I went back through the public-house, somehow I felt as if I were going out of Heaven through hell to get back to the street.

There was a little bit of Heaven's territory in that brick cottage. I asked her if she had prayed to get well. "Yes," she said, "telling GOD to do as He pleased about it. A man who believes in faith healing came around to tell me that I was committing sin by not getting well. I told him that he - could talk that out with GOD, for I had left it all with Him; and if He wants me to keep in this little brick cottage until I go into the glory, I am perfectly willing." Her limitation was the expansion of her influence.

There are some birds that sing beautifully in the cage, and there are other birds that just beat out their lives against the bars of the cage; they cannot understand the limitation.

When GOD in His providence puts us in the cage, let us learn to sing. It is better for the birds in the cage, and better for the birds outside, and better for the people who look into the cage, that we should sing rather than beat against the bars; and the singing will open the door more readily than beating the bars.

Joseph's imprisonment was his enlargement.

Richard Baxter did more for CHRIST in his invalid chamber than in the pulpit, for it was in the invalid chamber that Baxter's [i]Saint's Everlasting Rest[/i] was written and sent out to bless the world.

Our bonds may be for the furtherance of the Gospel; and if you realize that you are in bonds - limitations that you would like to break, things that seem to contract your influence - look up to GOD and ask Him to adjust you to the bonds, if need be.

Rejoice in the bonds, if they come from Him; and if you love Him you can be certain that they do, by permission or direct intervention. But always believe that what we call limitation may be our greatest opportunity for service.

Again, there is great gain through this loss in the encouragement of those who are too diffident and tearful to speak out. Read verse :

"And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." Some of us are only tremblingly bold, but they were "more abundantly bold" through the bonds of Paul. "Why," they said, "if Paul is brave enough to be true, and go to gaol, and be happy in prison, we will stand for CHRIST, we will proclaim the truth, we will be faithful, inspired by his faithfulness."

You remember how the king, walking on the outside of the fiery furnace, looked in and saw with the three Hebrew princes One like unto the Son of Man walking with them in the midst of the fire; and when people on the outside can look and see the Son of Man walking with us in the fire, they will take knowledge of us that we are with JESUS.

Paul was in the fire; his bonds made a sort of fire to his soul, and those tempted, diffident Christians on the outside were made abundantly bold to speak without fear.

But for the encouragement that came through Paul's bonds, they might have been faithful, but fearful at the same time. Now there came an abundance of courage that took away their tremor and gave their voices steadiness, emphasis and power as they spoke for their Master.

I would like you to give my compliments to all the invalid Christians you know, who cannot come to the great congregation, and who think that they are very useless, if not worthless, because shut up in their rooms of suffering.

I wish you would tell them that they can be the most useful Christians in the world.

First, useful in dealing with GOD. Paul in prison dealt with GOD, and as he dealt with GOD he touched the people about him, and made them courageous. These invalid Christians are the real priests of the Church. There is but one High Priest, the Lord JESUS CHRIST, and He intercedes for us continually, but we have many intercessors on earth, and these Christians who are kept within doors, tied by their bonds in fellowship with the Lord, intercede for the pastor, for the Church and for the people.

To them GOD listens, and they move the community, and move the world, because they move GOD by prayer.

A pastor went round visiting his flock after a great revival that had shaken the community, in which scores and hundreds had been converted. It came - so suddenly, that he said, "This is a breath from Heaven; this is the act of a sovereign GOD, and we thank Him for it."

But in the course of his visits, as he stood by the side of one of his invalid members, he noticed on the bed a crumpled, soiled piece of paper, with a list of names, and marks opposite the names. He wondered what it meant, and she explained it. She said, "Pastor, for years I have had a list of the unsaved people I know, and as I can do nothing else, I have just spent the time praying GOD to save them; and when the revival broke out, and friends came in and told me that So-and-So was saved, I just checked the name off. And, pastor, there is scarcely one left; they are nearly all checked off."

There was the place of power, in the bonds, in the prison of infirmity, dealing with GOD, and GOD working in answer to her prayer, encouraging the pastor and everybody else, making them bolder through her ministry of intercession.

There is gain also, through this loss, in safety.

Read the 19th verse: "**I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.**" Notice that little phrase, "the supply of the Spirit."

Through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of JESUS CHRIST I am safe for time and for eternity. My bonds make me safer. The Roman gaol means that I can be executed to-morrow. My head might fall by the sword, but your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of JESUS CHRIST gives me safety."

I am sure the word "salvation" here has the full meaning of "safety" without doing violence to it - safety for eternity, safety in body, and spiritual safety. All this comes through prayer and "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." That is, we will have safety to stand for GOD wherever we are in this world until the day that GOD decides to call us home! And then our work will be finished, so what need we remain here a day longer?

What we need for any sort of bonds is the supply of the Spirit of JESUS CHRIST. If we have the Spirit of JESUS CHRIST that rejoices in suffering for others, that rejoices in opportunities of bearing burdens, that is willing to take the Cross and be nailed to it for the salvation of a lost world, we are ready for any bonds that may come, and we are safe - no safety more complete.

I see here, again, the gain of a greater CHRIST.

Note the 0th verse: "**As always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death.**"

How can CHRIST be magnified? The word "magnified" means to make greater. Is He not as

great as He can be? Is there any power by which the CHRIST we love and worship can be magnified? I am certain that I have a greater CHRIST to-day than I had in the little country meetinghouse when I first got the vision of the Sinbearer. I am certain that CHRIST is greater to my heart and soul than He was five years ago. CHRIST becomes greater as the vision grows brighter.

I have been through the British Museum many times, and I have looked at this statue and that relic from Syria, Babylon and Nineveh, but I never really saw them till a few months ago, when I went with an expert who has published a book on the subject; and as I stood before the pieces of statuary that I thought I knew, I found in five minutes that I scarcely knew anything.

That piece of statuary grew in my mind to something greater; it meant more. That picture meant more. So it is through the bonds, many a time, that CHRIST becomes greater to me. A Saviour? Yes, and the great Saviour has become greater as a Sympathizer, a Friend Who can whisper to you in the quiet when it is dark, and make you strong. Paul through his bonds had a greater CHRIST because of a clearer vision.

The gain which Paul had above every other gain in his loss of liberty, and in the experience that came to him, was that he was completely surrendered to the living CHRIST. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

"No matter whether I live or die, if I have life in CHRIST. If I live in the Roman prison, it is a greater CHRIST; if I die, it is greater still. I am not simply living for CHRIST; I am living CHRIST. Take CHRIST out of my life and you have taken life. There is no life to me without CHRIST."

It is in a damp, dark dungeon that Paul is speaking, and I have seen the place. That one spot I was certain about, that Mamertine prison in Rome, near the forum of Augustus. The solid granite floor, with the circular aperture in the centre, through which evidently the Apostle was lowered into the dungeon beneath. Not a window, not an aperture for light or ventilation! There, down in the third story beneath the ground, without a ray of light from the sun in the heavens, Paul was living.

"**For me to live is Christ,**" he said; and there in the limitations of that dark, damp dungeon, truly he was living.

- Living is not walking about;
- living is not preaching;
- living is not making money;
- living is not doing what you please;
- living is CHRIST.

- living is CHRIST!
- living is CHRIST!!
- living is CHRIST!!!

"I would like to depart and be with Christ, which is far better," he said, "but it is more needful

for you, just now, that I stay; so, whatever GOD wills, is my will.

This dark dungeon is GOD's will, and I am happy. I can sing in the dark, and my soul is flooded with light while I sing. I have no choice; I have no will. I have come to the place where GOD's desires are my desires, GOD's purpose is my purpose, GOD's plan my plan; and whatever He wants me to do, to live or to die, I am ready."

That was the Apostle Paul. May we be like him, and then CHRIST will be magnified in us, whether by life or death.

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