

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

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CHAPTER 2

THE FAMILY LIFE

THEY LIVE by faith. Thus they began and thus they are to end. **"We walk by faith, not by sight."** Their whole life is a life of faith. Their daily actions are all of faith. This forms one of the main elements of their character. It marks them out as a peculiar people. None live as they do.

Their faith is to them **"the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** It is a sort of Substitute for sight and possession. It so brings them into contact with the unseen world that they feel as if they were already conversant with, and living among, the things unseen. It makes the future, the distant, the impalpable, appear as the present, the near, the real.

It removes all intervening time; it annihilates all interposing space; it transplants the soul at once into the world above. That which we know is to be hereafter is felt as if already in being. Hence, the coming of the Lord is always spoken of as at hand. Nay, more than this, the saints are represented as having their **"conversation... in heaven,"** as being already seated with Christ **"in heavenly places"** (Ephesians 2:6), as having **"come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect"** (Hebrews 12:22).

The things amid which they are to move hereafter are so realized by faith as to appear the things amid which they are at present moving. They sit in **"heavenly places"** and look down upon the earth, with all its clouds and storms, as lying immeasurably far beneath their feet. And what is a **"present evil world"** to those who are already above all its vicissitudes and breathing a purer atmosphere?

Such is the power of faith. It throws back into the far distance the things of earth, the things that men call near and real; and it brings forward into vital contact with the soul the things which men call invisible and distant. It discloses to us the heavenly mansions, their passing splendor, their glorious purity, their blessed peace. It shows us the happy courts, the harmonious company, the adoring multitudes. It opens our ears also, so that when beholding these great sights we seem to hear the heavenly melody and to catch the very words of the new song they sing, **"Thou art worthy . . . for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth"** (Revelation 5:9-10).

It, moreover, points our eye forward to what is yet to come: the coming of the Lord, the

judgment of the great day, the restitution of all things, the kingdom that cannot be moved, the city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is GOD. While thus it gives to things invisible a body and a form which before they possessed not in our eyes, on the other hand, it divests things visible of that semblance of excellence and reality with which they were formerly clothed.

It strips the world of its false but bewildering glow, and enables us to penetrate the thin disguise that hides its poverty and meanness. It not only sweeps away the cloud which hung above us, obstructing our view of heavenly excellence, but it places that cloud beneath us to counteract the fallacious brightness and unreal beauty which the world has thrown over itself to mask its inward deformity.

Thus it is that faith enables us to realize our true position of pilgrims and strangers upon earth, looking for the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is GOD.

It is into this that we are introduced by faith at our conversion. For what is our conversion but a turning of our back upon the world and bidding farewell to all that the heart had hitherto been entwined around? It is then that like Abraham we forsake all and go out not knowing whither. Old ties are broken, although sometimes hard to sever. New ones are formed, although not of earth.

We begin to look around us and find all things new. We feel that we are strangers - strangers in that very spot where we have been so long at home. But this is our joy. We have left our father's house, but we are hastening on to a more enduring home. We have taken leave of the world - but we have become heirs of the eternal kingdom, sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.

We have left Egypt, but Canaan is in view. We are in the wilderness, but we are free. Ours is a pathless waste, but we move forward under the shadow of the guardian cloud. Sorrowful, we yet rejoice; poor, we make many rich; having nothing, yet we possess all things. We have a rich inheritance in reversion and a long eternity in which to enjoy it without fear of loss, or change, or end.

Walking thus by faith and not by sight, what should move us? What should mar our joy? Does it not come from that which is within the veil? And what storm of the desert can find entrance there?

Our rejoicing is in the Lord, and He is without variableness or shadow of turning. We know that this is not our rest; neither do we wish it were so, for it is polluted; but our joy is this, that Jehovah is our GOD, and His promised glory is our inheritance forever. Our morning and our evening song is this, **"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage"** (Psalm 16:5-6),

Why should we, then, into whose hands the cup of gladness shall ere long be put, shrink from the vinegar and the gall? Why should we, who have dearer friends above, better bonds that cannot be dissolved, be disconsolate at the severance of an earthly tie? Our homes may be empty, our firesides may be thinned, and our hearts may bleed: but these are not enduring things; and why

should we feel desolate as if all gladness had departed?

Why should we, who shall wear a crown and inherit all things, sigh or fret because of a few years' poverty and shame? Earth's dream will soon be done; and then comes the day of "**songs and everlasting joy**" - the long reality of bliss!

JESUS will soon be here; and "when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory."

- Shall trial shake us? Nay, in all this we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

- Shall sorrow move us? Faith tells us of a land where sorrow is unknown.

- Shall the death of saints move us? Faith tells us not to sorrow as those who have no hope, for if we believe that JESUS died and rose again, them also that sleep in JESUS will GOD bring with Him.

- Shall the pains and weariness of this frail body move us? Faith tells us of a time at hand when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

- Shall privation move us? Faith tells us of a day when the poverty of our exile shall be forgotten in the abundance of our peaceful, plenteous home, where we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.

- Shall the disquieting bustle of this restless life annoy us? Faith tells us of the rest that remaineth for the people of GOD - the sea of glass like unto crystal on which the ransomed saints shall stand - no tempest, no tumult, no shipwreck there.

- Shall the lack of this world's honors move us? Faith tells us of the exceeding and eternal weight of glory in reserve.

Have we no place to lay our head? Faith tells us that we have a home, though not in Caesar's house, a dwelling, though not in any city of earth. Are we fearful as we look around upon the disorder and wretchedness of this misgoverned earth? Faith tells us that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Do thoughts of death alarm us? Faith tells us that "**to die is gain**," and whispers to us, "What, are you afraid of becoming immortal, afraid of passing from this state of death, which men call life, to that which alone truly deserves the name!"

Such is the family life - a life of faith. We live upon things unseen. Our life is hid with CHRIST in GOD that when He who is our life shall appear, we may appear with Him in glory. This mode of life is not that of the world at all but the very opposite. Nevertheless, it has been that of the saints from the beginning.

This is the way in which they have walked, going up through the wilderness leaning on their Beloved. And such is to be the walk of the saints till the Lord comes. Oh, how much is there in these thoughts concerning it, not only to reconcile us to it, but to make us rejoice in it, and to say, I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory

which shall be revealed in us! For all things are ours, whether life or death, things present or things to come, all are ours; for we are CHRIST's, and CHRIST is GOD's. Yea, we are heirs of GOD, and joint-heirs with JESUS CHRIST. **"This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord"** (Isaiah 54:17).

We know not a better type or specimen of the family life than Abraham or Israel in their desert wanderings. Look at Abraham. He quits all at the command of the GOD of glory. This begins his life of faith. Then he journeys onward not knowing whither. Then he sojourns as a stranger in the land which GOD had given him. Then he offers up Isaac. Then he buys for himself a tomb where he may lay his dust till the day of resurrection. All is faith. He lives and acts as a stranger. He has no home. He has his altar and his tent, but that is all - the one he builds wherever he goes, in the peaceful consciousness of sin forgiven and acceptance found; the other he pitches from day to day in token of his being a pilgrim and a stranger upon earth. And what more does any member of the family need below, but his altar and his tent - a Saviour for a sinful soul, and a shelter for a frail body until journeying days are done?

Or look at Israel. They quit Egypt. There the life of faith begins. Then they cross the Red Sea. Then they take up their abode in the desert. They have no city to dwell in now. They have no fleshpots now - nothing but the daily manna for food. They have no river of Egypt now - nothing but a rock to yield them water. All is waste around. All is to be of faith, not of sight.

They are alone with GOD, and the whole world is afar off. They rear their altar, they pitch their tents, as did Abraham, with this only difference: above their heads there floats a wondrous cloud, which, like a heavenly canopy, stretches itself out over their dwellings when they rest, or like an angel-guide, it takes wing before them when GOD summons them to strike their tents that it may lead them in the way. Nay, and as if to mark more vividly the pilgrim condition of the family, GOD Himself, when coming down into the midst of them, chooses a tent to dwell in. It is called **"the tabernacle of the Lord,"** or more literally "Jehovah's tent." Jehovah pitches His tent side by side with Israel's tents, as if He were a stranger too, a wanderer like themselves!

This is our life. We are to be strangers with GOD as all our fathers were. It is the life of the desert, not of the city. But what of that? All is well. Jehovah is our GOD, and we shall soon be in His **"many mansions."** Meanwhile, we have the tent, the altar, and the cloud. We need no more below. The rest is secured for us in Heaven, **"ready to be revealed in the last time."**

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