

“THE GOD OF ALL GRACE”

In our study of this letter, we have seen a repeated emphasis upon the suffering that these Christians were experiencing. They were beginning to face persecution for their profession of faith in Jesus Christ. And we have noted that it is the lot of every Christian to suffer for the sake of Christ and his gospel. Of course, not everyone faces the threat of martyrdom or the extreme hardships that some Christians have to endure. Nevertheless, opposition is to be expected by everyone who follows Christ, because we live in the same world that rejected and crucified him.

And our experience of suffering extends beyond persecution to include other trials as well. As much as we try to avoid thinking about it, the fact of the matter is that there is no escape from suffering, sadness, and sorrow. Now, it is certainly true that we can and do have moments of great joy in this life. Our marriages, our children, our friendships, our accomplishments, our experiences: all of these things can bring us a great deal of happiness. They are gifts from God, gifts that he bestows on Christians and non-Christians alike, gifts of his common grace. However, the joy that we derive from these things does not last forever, and it is often tinged with sadness. Loved ones die, sickness intrudes into our lives, accomplishments fade and are forgotten, we face personal regrets, other people disappoint us, relationships are sometimes broken, loneliness confronts us. Despite all of the good things that we can experience in this life, we cannot escape the reality of suffering and sadness.

But for the Christian, the suffering and sadness of this life has a positive purpose. This was a constant theme in the writings of Samuel Rutherford, the 17th century Scottish minister, who bore his own share of suffering for the sake of the gospel. In one of his letters, Rutherford wrote these words to a Christian woman who had lost her two daughters in infancy:

“It is God’s mercy to you, Madam, that He giveth you your fill, even to loathing, of this bitter world, that ye may willingly leave it.” (*Letters*, no. 19)

It is indeed a mercy that the Lord does not allow us to get too comfortable in this world. Our sufferings serve to remind us that we are looking for a better country, a heavenly country, a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

And we have an inheritance in that kingdom only because of the grace of God. Peter refers to God as “the God of all grace” because of the gracious gifts that he bestows upon his children. Everything that we have from God, we have by his grace. Grace means that God is in no way obligated to love us and to help us. Grace is not leniency. It does not mean that God overlooks our sin. Instead, grace is God’s action to save miserable and unworthy sinners. It is his provision of a way by which we might be forgiven. J.I. Packer defines God’s grace as “love freely shown toward guilty sinners.” (*Knowing God*, p. 132)

There is nothing in this world that compares with the glorious splendor of the grace of God. And those of you who have experienced that grace know that this is true. You know that God's grace truly is amazing. You know that you do not deserve his love and his favor. You rejoice that he has lavished his grace and mercy upon a sinner such as you. You know what the psalmist meant when he wrote, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Ps. 32:1) You know that blessedness. You know what Jonathan Edwards was talking about when he described his own conversion in these words:

"From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption, and the glorious way of salvation by him. An inward, sweet sense of these things, at times, came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him." (Murray, pp. 35-6)

Is God's grace lovely to you? Have you tasted it? You need not have had a dramatic conversion experience to know God's grace. Perhaps you have. Or perhaps you have trusted in Christ for as long as you can remember. No matter. The important thing is that you know his grace personally. If you know the grace of God firsthand, then you know

that it is the sweetest thing that you will ever taste, and you want to taste it more and more, for all the days of your life and into eternity. Those who have experienced that grace cannot help but sing the praises of the God of all grace.

Peter says that this grace of God is exhibited in our lives by his calling us to eternal glory in Christ. Notice the power of God's grace. He only has to speak, and he brings his people into eternal glory. Obviously, Peter is talking about something more than the outward call that is made when the gospel is preached. This call to eternal glory is an effectual call. It is a divine summons, a call that cannot be resisted. It is what Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where he wrote, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Just as God spoke the creation into existence, he also speaks Christians into existence. It is only through the internal work of God's Holy Spirit that those who are dead in sin are made willing and able to answer the outward call of the gospel. This is God's work of effectual calling. The Puritan Thomas Watson gives three marks of a person who has been effectually called: he is humbled by his sin; he answers the gospel call to repent and believe on Christ; and he stops up his ears to the competing calls that would turn him away from Jesus Christ – he responds to God's call, and he rejects the call of the world and all of its pleasures.

Peter says that we are called to "eternal glory." Notice the contrast between this and our suffering. We suffer for "a little while," but our glory is eternal. Nothing in this life,

neither its pleasures nor its pain, will last, but the hope to which we have been called is one that cannot fade away.

Fading is the worldling's pleasure, all his boasted pomp and show;

Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.

This is further emphasized in the last part of verse 10, where Peter uses four verbs in the future tense to convey the promise that God's grace to us in Jesus Christ is a grace that causes us to persevere through life's trials. God will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. God will complete the work of grace that he begins in the lives of his people. He will ensure that we are brought safely into the eternal glory to which he has called us.

On the Rock of Ages founded, what can shake thy sure repose?

With salvation's walls surrounded, thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

What a glorious promise! What great comfort! But how can we be certain of this? How can we know that God will perfect us and establish us? We know it because of Jesus Christ. As Peter says, we have been called to eternal glory "in Christ." The basis of our hope of glory is not any feeling of our own. It is not even the strength of our faith. Instead, the basis of our hope is the One in whom we place our faith. It is the completed work of Christ, and the fact that he is already seated at God's right hand in glory. Christ

has already entered into the glory that is being kept for us in heaven. He has all dominion, all rule, all power, all authority. As Calvin writes,

“[O]ur happiness belongs to the heavenly life... Thus it is that we may patiently pass through this life with its misery, hunger, cold, contempt, reproaches, and other troubles – content with this one thing: that our King will never leave us destitute, but will provide for our needs until, our warfare ended, we are called to triumph. Such is the nature of his rule, that he shares with us all that he has received from the Father.” (*Institutes*, 2.15.4)

What a thought! Christ shares with us all that he has received from his Father; including his glory! The only reason why glorious things are spoken of Zion, of the church, is because God has formed her for his own abode. The glory of Zion is the glory of Christ. That is the glory to which we have been called. That is the glory that I want for myself and for you. And I want you to know that, if you are a Christian, your hope of eternal glory is rock solid, because it is founded upon the glory of Jesus Christ himself. Fix your eyes upon him. Meditate upon his glory. Do not let your mind be cluttered up with earthly things. Be stirred up to a greater longing for the enjoyment of Christ in eternal glory.

Our time on this earth quickly passes by. I have been reading a biography of Abraham Lincoln, and one thought that has repeatedly passed through my mind is the fact that

Lincoln was alive on this earth less than one hundred and fifty years ago. That is not very much time. Some of you live in houses that are older than that. Some of you have known people who were alive when Lincoln was alive. And yet, within this short span of time, just think of all the people who have been born, lived their lives, and died.

Generations have come, and generations have gone, several times over, all in the span of just one and a half centuries. Your time here really is short. In fact, if you think of your lifespan as the sands contained in an hourglass, you realize that there is less and less sand with each passing day. And this can be a source of great comfort, or it can be a sober warning. For those who are living only for this world, it is a warning that they should use the little time that they have left to prepare for eternity. But for those who know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, for those who have been called to eternal glory, for those who are looking for a better country, for us it is a great comfort to know that our time of pilgrimage here will not last forever. And it is our deepest consolation to know that, by God's grace, we have an inheritance in the land of endless glory. As I conclude, listen to a description of that glory in the words of this hymn drawn from the writings of Samuel Rutherford:

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks,

The summer morn I've sighed for, the fair sweet morn awakes;

Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,

And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

The King there in his beauty without a veil is seen;
It were a well-spent journey though sev'n deaths lay between:
The Lamb with his fair army doth on Mount Zion stand,
And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

O Christ, he is the fountain, the deep sweet well of love!
The streams on earth I've tasted more deep I'll drink above:
There to an ocean fullness his mercy doth expand,
And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace;
Not at the crown he gifteth, but on his pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.

Amen.