

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

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“The trial of your faith.”—1 Peter i. 7.

It is a great thing if any man can truthfully speak to you, my brother, about “*your faith*,” for all men have not faith, and wherever faith is found, it is the token of divine favour. True faith is, in every case, of the operation of the Spirit of God. Its nature is purifying, elevating, heavenly. It is, of all things that can be cultivated in the human breast, one of the most precious. It is called, “like precious faith,” and it is styled “the faith of God’s elect.” Wherever faith is found, it is the sure mark of eternal election, the sign of a blessed condition, the forecast of a heavenly destiny. It is the eye of the renewed soul, the hand of the regenerated mind, the mouth of the new-born spirit. It is the evidence of spiritual life: it is the mainspring of holiness: it is the foundation of delight: it is the prophecy of glory: it is the dawn of endless knowledge. If thou hast faith, thou hast infinitely more than he who has all the world, and yet is destitute of faith. To him that believeth it is said, “All things are yours.” Faith is the assurance of sonship, the pledge of inheritance, the grasp of boundless possession, the perception of the invisible. Within thy faith there lies glory, even as the oak sleeps within the acorn. If thou hast faith, thou needest not ask for much more, save that thy faith may grow exceedingly, and that all the promises which are made to it may be known and grasped by thee. Time would fail me to tell of the powers, the privileges, the possessions, and the prospects of faith. He that hath it is blessed; for he pleases God, he is justified before the throne of holiness, he hath full access to the throne of grace, and he has the preparation for reigning with Christ for ever.

So far everything is delightful. But then comes in this word, which somewhat startles, and, if we are cowardly, may also frighten—“*The trial of your faith*.” See you the thorn which grows with this rose! You cannot gather the fragrant flower without its rough

companion. You cannot possess the faith without experiencing the trial; nor eat the lamb without the bitter herbs. These two things are put together—faith and trial; and it is of that trial of your faith that I am going to speak at this time, as God shall help me. It may be, my brother, that words said at this good hour shall comfort you while you undergo the sorer trial of your faith. May the Holy Spirit, who nurtures faith, and preserves and perfects it under its trial, help our thoughts at this hour!

I. And, first, let me say of it, YOUR FAITH WILL BE TRIED SURELY. You may rest assured of that. A man may have faith, and be for the present without trial; but no man ever had faith, and was all his life without trial. That could not—must not be; for *faith, in the very nature of it, implies a degree of trial*. I believe the promise of God. So far my faith is tried in believing the promise, in waiting for the fulfilment of the promise, in holding on to an assurance of that promise while it is delayed, and in continuing to expect the promise, and to act upon it until it is in all points fulfilled to me. I do not see how that can be faith at all which is not tried by its own exercise. Take the very happiest and smoothest lives; there must, at any rate, be the trial of faith in taking the promise and pleading it before God in prayer, and expecting the fulfilment of it. Be not mistaken. God never gave us faith to play with. It is a sword, but it was not made for presentation on a gala day, nor to be worn on state occasions only, nor to be exhibited upon a parade ground. It is a sword that was meant to cut and wound and slay; and he that has it girt about him may expect, between here and heaven, that he shall know what battle means. Faith is a sound sea-going vessel, and was not meant to lie in dock and perish of dry rot. To whom God has given faith, it is as though one gave a lantern to his friend because he expected it to be dark on his way home. The very gift of faith is a hint to you that you will want it; that at certain points and places you will especially require it, and that, at all points, and in every place, you will really need it. You cannot live without faith: for again and again we are told—“the just shall live by faith.” Believing is our living, and we, therefore, need it always. And if God give thee great faith, my dear brother, thou must expect great trials; for, in proportion as thy faith shall grow, thou wilt have to do more, and endure more. Little boats may keep close to shore, as becomes little boats; but if God make thee a great vessel, and load thee with a rich freight, he means that thou shouldst know what great billows are, and should feel their fury till thou seest “his wonders in the deep.” That God, who has made nothing in vain, especially makes nothing in the spiritual kingdom in vain; and if he makes faith, it is with the design that it should be used to the utmost and exercised to the full.

Expect trial, also, because *trial is the very element of faith*. Faith is a salamander that lives in the fire, a star which moves in a lofty sphere, a diamond which bores its way through the rock. Faith without trial is like a diamond uncut, the brilliance of which has never been seen. Untried faith is such little faith that some have thought it no faith at all. What a fish would be without water, or a bird without air, that would be faith without trial. If thou hast faith,

thou mayest surely expect that thy faith will be tested: the great Keeper of the treasures admits no coin to his coffers without testing. It is so in the nature of faith, and so in the order of its living: it thrives not, save in such weather as might seem to threaten its death.

Indeed, *it is the honour of faith to be tried*. Shall any man say, "I have faith, but I have never had to believe under difficulties"? Who knows whether thou hast any faith? Shall a man say, "I have great faith in God, but I have never had to use it in anything more than the ordinary affairs of life, where I could probably have done without it as well as with it"? Is this to the honour and praise of thy faith? Dost thou think that such a faith as this will bring any great glory to God, or bring to thee any great reward? If so, thou art mightily mistaken. He that has tested God, and whom God has tested, is the man that shall have it said of him, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." Had Abraham stopped in Ur of the Chaldees with his friends, and rested there, and enjoyed himself, where had been his faith? He had God's command to quit his country to go to a land which he had never seen, to sojourn there with God as a stranger, dwelling in tents; and in his obedience to that call his faith began to be illustrious. Where had been the glory of his faith, if it had not been called to brave and self-denying deeds? Would he ever have risen to that supreme height, to be "the Father of the faithful," if he had not grown old, and his body dead, and yet he had believed that God would give him seed of his aged wife Sarah, according to the promise? It was blessed faith that made him feel that nothing was impossible to God. If Isaac had been born to him in the days of his strength, where had been his faith? And when it came to that severer test, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of"—when he rose up early, and clave the wood, and took his son, and went three days' journey, setting his face like a flint to obey the command of God; and when at last he drew the knife, in faithful obedience to the divine command, then was his faith confessed, commended, and crowned. Then the Lord said, "Now I know"; as if, even to God, the best evidence of Abraham's faith had then been displayed, when he staggered not at the promise through unbelief, reckoning that God could restore Isaac from the dead if need be, but that it was his to obey the supreme command, and trust all consequences with God, who could not lie. Herein his faith won great renown, and he became "the Father of the faithful," because he was the most tried of believers, and yet surpassed them all in childlike belief in his God. If God, then, has given to any one of us a faith which is honourable and precious, it has full surely been submitted to its own due measure of trial; and if it is to be still more precious, it has yet more trials to endure.

We remember also two reasons for the trial of faith. The trial of your faith is sent to *prove its sincerity*. If it will not stand trial, what is the good of it? That gold which dissolves in the furnace, and disappears amid the flame, is not the gold which shall be current with the merchant; and that faith of thine, which is no sooner tried than straightway it evaporates, art thou not well rid of it? Of what use

would it be to thee in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment? No; thou canst not be sure that thy faith is true faith till it is tried faith. Thou canst not be certain that it is worth having till it has been fitly tested, and brought to the touchstone of trial.

It must also be tested *to prove its strength*. We sometimes fancy that we have strong faith when, indeed, our faith is very weak; and how are we to know whether it be weak or strong till it be tried? A man that should lie in bed week after week, and perhaps get the idle whim into his head that he was very strong, would be pretty certain to be mistaken. It is only when he sets about work requiring muscular strength that he will discover how strong or how weak he is. God would not have us form a wrong estimate of ourselves. He loves not that we should say that we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, when we are the reverse; and therefore he sends to us the trial of our faith that we may understand how strong or how weak it is.

And besides that, dear friends, *the trial of our faith is necessary to remove its dross*. There are many accretions of sordid matter about our purest graces. We are apt ourselves to add to the bulk of our graces without adding to the real value of them. We mistake quantity for quality; and a great deal of what we think we have of Christian experience, and Christian knowledge, and Christian zeal, and Christian patience, is only the supposition that we have these graces, and not the real possession of them. So the fire grows fiercer, and the mass grows smaller than it was before. Is there any loss therein? I trow not. The gold loses nothing by the removal of its dross, and our faith loses nothing by the dissipation of its apparent force. Faith may apparently lose, but it actually gains. It may seem to be diminished, but it is not truly diminished. All is there that was worth having. "Why, a week ago," says one, "I used to sing, and think that I had the full assurance of faith; and now I can scarcely tell whether I am one of God's people or not." Now, you know how much faith you really possess. You can now tell how much was solid, and how much was sham; for had that which has failed you been real faith, it would not have been consumed by any trial through which it has passed. You have lost the froth from the top of the cup, but all that was really worth having is still there. It must be so, for as faith is not born of earthly things, neither can earthly things kill it, nor even take from it one true particle.

Understand, then, dear friends, that for many necessary purposes there is a needs be for trial. Peter says here, "If need be" that there should be a trial of your faith. You will get that trial, because God, in his wisdom, will give faith what faith needs. Do not be anxious to enter into trial. Do not fret if temptation does not come just now. You will have it time enough. Between the day of our new birth and the day of our entering into our inheritance, we shall have quite sufficient trial of our faith. We need not be uneasy if for a while we are at ease, for there are months enough left to the year to give winter its full measure of frosts and storms.

II. Now, secondly, **YOUR FAITH WILL BE TRIED VARIOUSLY**. The trial of our faith does not come to all persons in the same way. *There*

are some whose faith is tried each day in their communion with God. They pray this prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting." That prayer is heard constantly; the visitations of the Lord are granted to them, and as the Lord comes, he tries them; for, believe me, there is no surer trial of our souls than the drawing near of God to our souls. Apart from any outward affliction, that searching thought, that inward feeling, which is somewhat more than thought; that holy, secret trembling, which comes upon our spirit when God draws near, is God's constant trial of our graces. If you walk away from God, and live without fellowship with him, you may retain in your heart much falsehood, and fancy that you are full of spiritual gifts and graces; but if you draw near to God, and walk with him, you will not be able to retain a false opinion of yourself. Remember what the Lord is. Our God is a consuming fire. I have often reminded you of the way in which people try to improve upon the Scripture when they say, "God out of Christ is a consuming fire." The Bible does not so speak. It says, "For our God is a consuming fire." That is, God in Christ, who is our God, is a consuming fire; and when his people live in him, the very presence of God consumes in them their love of sin and all their pretentious graces, and fictitious attainments, so that the false disappears, and only the true survives. The presence of perfect holiness is killing to empty boastings and hollow pretences. You need not ask for any of those various forms of trial which God sends in the order of providence: you may rest quite satisfied with his presence, as the most effectual purgation; for "his fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor." Whenever Jesus abides with us, "he shall sit as a refiner." Whoever he may leave alone in their defilement, "he will purify the sons of Levi." It is the Lord himself that will be as a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap. Who may abide the day of his coming? Who that loves holiness would wish to escape it? Our prayer should be—

"Refining fire go through my soul."

Ay, let the devouring flame go through me, and through me yet again, till this earthly grossness shall begin to disappear. As Moses soon put his shoes off from his feet when he beheld God at the burning bush, so shall we put off the superfluities of our supposed spiritual experience, and come to the real, naked foot of truth, if we are permitted to stand before God in accepted sincerity. Thus you see there is a constant trial of our faith, even in that which is its greatest joy and glory, namely its power to make us see the Lord.

But the Lord uses other methods with his servants. I believe that *he frequently tries us by the blessings which he sends us*. This is a fact which is too much overlooked. When a man is permitted to grow rich, what a trial of faith is hidden away in that condition! It is one of the severest of providential tests! Where I have known one man fail through poverty, I have known fifty men fail through riches. When our friends get on in the world, and have a long stretch of prosperity, they should invite their brethren to offer special prayer for them, that they may be preserved: for the thick clay is heavy stuff to

walk upon, and when the feet slip into it, and it adheres to you, it makes travelling to heaven a very difficult thing. When we do not cling to wealth, it will not harm us; but there is a deal of bird-lime in money. You that have no riches may yet find a test in your daily mercies: your domestic comfort, that loving wife, those dear children—all these may tempt you to walk by sight instead of by faith. Ay, and continued health, the absence of all depression of spirit, and the long abiding of friends and relatives, may all make you self-contented, and keep you away from your God. It is a great trial of faith to have much for sight to rest upon. To be in the dark—altogether in the dark—is a grand thing for faith; for then you are sure that what you see is not seen of the flesh, but is in very deed a vision of spiritual faith. To be under a cloud is a trial, truly; but not one-half so much a trial as it is to have continually the light of this world. We are so apt to mistake the light of carnal comfort for the light of God, that it is well to see how we fare without it.

One form of this trial is praise. You know how Solomon puts it: "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." A Christian minister may go on preaching very earnestly, and God will help him, though everybody opposes him; but when the world comes and pats him on the back, and pride whispers, "You are a fine fellow; you are a great man!" then comes the test of the man. How few there are that can endure the warm atmosphere of congratulation! It is dangerously relaxing to the spirit. Yea, nobody can keep himself right under it, unless the almighty grace of God shall sustain his faith. When the soft winds blow they bring with them the temptation, "Now preach the doctrines that tickle men's ears!" "Go in to be scientific, and learned, and clever! Get the approbation of the great ones of the world, and the leaders of advanced thought in the church." And unless you say, "Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God," such a trial of faith may be too much for you. "Oh," says one, "that will not fall to my lot." No, no; you will not be a popular preacher, perhaps; but then, you may be very acceptable in the company wherein you move, and worldly people may flatter you to the verge of ruin. You sing very nicely, do you not? Well, they may want you to sing them a song that is not one of the songs of Zion. Because of your natural attainments, and the amiability of your temper, you may become a great favourite with ungodly people; and that is an intense trial to the faith of a child of God. The friendship of the world is as much enmity with God as it used to be in apostolic times. It is a bad sign when a courtier is in great favour with the king's enemies. Stand up, and stand out, as the servant of God, and in whatever sphere you move, make it your one and only business to serve my God, whether you offend or please. Happy shall you be if you survive the trial of your faith which this will involve!

Another trial of faith is exceedingly common and perilous nowadays, and that is, *heretical doctrine and false teaching*. There be some who are carried away with this wind of doctrine, and others carried away with the other; and blessed is he who is not offended in Christ; for, naturally, the cross of Christ is offensive to the minds of men.

There are temptations that rise out of the gospel itself, yea, out of its very depth and breadth. There is a trial of faith in reading the Scriptures. You come across a doctrine which you cannot understand, and because you cannot understand it, you are tempted not to receive it. Or, when a truth which you have received appears to be hard, and speaks to you in an unlovely fashion, so that your natural feelings are aroused against it; this is a trial of your faith. Remember how our Lord Jesus lost quite a company of disciples on a certain occasion. He had taught a doctrine about eating his flesh and drinking his blood; and from that hour many went back, and walked no more with him, till the Saviour had to say, even to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" Truth is not always welcome to our ignorance, or to our prejudice, and herein is a trial of faith. Will we believe ourselves or our God? Do we want to believe God's truth, or do we wish to have the Lord's message flavoured to our taste? Do we expect the preacher to play our chosen tunes, and speak our opinions? Beloved, it does us good to be well rasped sometimes; to have a word come to us, not as a sweet wine, but as a purging medicine, that shall search us through and through, and make us enquire before God, "Are we true men, or are we aliens?" If we run in the same line with God's truth, we are true; but when we run counter to the truth of God, we are ourselves untrue. It is not the Book that is to be altered: our hearts want altering. Happy is that man whose faith can endure the trial of the Book. "Is not the word of the Lord like a fire or a hammer?" This is so even to the Lord's own people.

But the trial of our faith usually comes in the form of affliction. Our jealous lover uses tests that it may be seen whether he has our heart. The trial of your faith comes thus:—You say, "Lord Jesus, I love thee. Thou art my best beloved." "Well," says the heavenly Lover, "if it be so, then the child that nestles in thy bosom will sicken and die. What wilt thou say then?" If thou be indeed true in what thou hast stated concerning thy supreme love to Jesus, thou wilt give up thy darling at his call, and say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." The Lord is very jealous of our love. I do not mean that he is so towards all of you: I speak of his own people. The more he loves us, the more he tests us. Whatever it may be with us poor creatures, it is always so with Jesus, that his love goes with his jealousy, and his jealousy with his love. Sometimes he says, "Good woman, I shall take away thy husband, on whom thou leanest, that thou mayest lean the more on me." I remember Mr. Rutherford, writing to a lady who had lost five children and her husband, says to her, "Oh, how Christ must love you! He would take every bit of your heart to himself. He would not permit you to reserve any of your soul for any earthly thing." Can we stand that test? Can we let all go for his sake? Do you answer that you can? Time will show.

My Lord sometimes comes to me in this fashion. He says, "I have made thee to trust me these many years. I have supplied the wants of thy work by liberal friends. I am about to remove a generous helper." I go to the grave of my friend, and the suggestion dogs me, "Who is to provide for the Orphanage and the College, after

other dear friends are buried? Can you trust God then?" Blessed be the name of the Lord, this fiery trial has never even left the smell of fire upon me; I know whom I have believed. Then a dear brother, our best worker, our heartiest helper, comes to me, and says, "Good-bye, dear Pastor; perhaps I may never see you again on earth." He is very ill, and about to lie under the surgeon's knife, and the fear is that he may not rally. I go home, and say to myself, "What shall I do without this useful man?" And then I have to say, "Why, do? Do what I have done before—trust in the living God." If you once get to walk the walk of faith, the Lord will often try you in this way, to see whether you come up to your own confession—whether you really trust in the Lord, and have your expectation from him alone. Can you truly say,

"Yea, shouldst thou take them all away,
Yet would I not repine"?

If every earthly prop were knocked away, could you stand by the lone power of your foundation? God may not send you this or that trial, but he will send you a sufficient amount of trial to let you see whether your faith is truth or talk, whether you have truly entered the spiritual world, or have only dreamed of doing so. Believe me, there is a great difference between a diamond and a paste gem, and the Lord would not have mistaken at the last. So, you see, the trials of faith are very various.

III. In the third place, YOUR FAITH WILL BE TRIED INDIVIDUALLY. The text says, the trial of *your* faith. O dear friend, it is an interesting subject, is it not, the trial of faith? It is not quite so pleasant to study alone the trial of *your* faith. It is stern work when it comes to be *your* trial, and the trial of *your* faith. You have not gone much into that particular department, perhaps. Well, I say again, do not wish to do so. Do not ask for trials. Children must not ask to be whipped, nor saints pray to be tested. There is a little book which you will have to eat, and it will be bitter in your mouth, but sweet in your bowels: that book is the trial of your faith. The Lord Jesus Christ has been glorified by the trial of his people's faith. He has to be glorified by the trial of *your* faith. You are very obscure, perhaps, dear brother. You have but few talents, my dear sister. But, nevertheless, there is a particular shape and form of trial that will have to be exercised upon you rather than upon anyone else. "Oh," say you, "I know it, sir; I know it." Well, then, if you know it, do not complain of it; because, when you have your own trial, and the trial of your own faith, you are only treated like the rest of the family. What son is there whom the father chasteneth not? You are only treated like the Head of the family. You are only treated in the way which the great Father of the family knows is necessary for us all. God had one Son without sin, but he never had a son without trial, and he never will have until he has taken us all home out of this world. Why should we expect that God should deal better with us than he does with the rest of his chosen? Indeed it would not be better, after all, because these trials are the means of working out our lasting good. But if it were not so, who am I, and

who are you, that God should pamper us? Would we have him put us in a glass case and shield us from the trials which are common to all the chosen seed? I ask no such portion. Let me fare as the saints fare. I only wish to have their bread and their water, and love their Father, and follow their Guide, and find their home. We will take our meals with them, whatever God puts upon the table for them, will we not? The trial of our faith will be all our own, and yet it will be in fellowship with all the family of grace.

IV. YOUR FAITH WILL BE TRIED SEARCHINGLY. It will be no child's play to come under the divine tests. Our faith is not merely jingled on the counter like the shilling which the tradesman suspects, but it is tried with fire; for so it is written, "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." The blows of the flail of tribulation are not given in sport, but in awful earnest, as some of us know who have been chastened sore, almost unto death. The Lord tries the very life of our faith; not its beauty and its strength alone, but its very existence. The iron enters into the soul; the sharp medicine searches the inmost parts of the belly; the man's real self is made to endure the trial. It is easy to talk of being tried, but it is by no means so simple a matter to endure the ordeal.

V. Let me yet further observe, that YOUR FAITH WILL BE TRIED FOR AN ABUNDANTLY USEFUL PURPOSE. The trial of your faith will increase, develop, deepen, and *strengthen it*. "Oh," you have said, "I wish I had more faith." Your prayer will be heard through your having more trial. Often in our prayers we have sought for a stronger faith to look within the veil. The way to stronger faith usually lies along the rough pathway of sorrow. Only as faith is contested will faith be confirmed. I do not know whether my experience is that of all God's people; but I am afraid that all the grace that I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours, might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows, and pains, and griefs, is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file? What do I not owe to the crucible and the furnace, the bellows that have blown up the coals, and the hand which has thrust me into the heat? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library. We may wisely rejoice in tribulation, because it worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope; and by that way we are exceedingly enriched, and our faith grows strong.

The trial of our faith is useful, not only because it strengthens it, but because it *leads to a discovery of our faith to ourselves*. I notice an old Puritan using this illustration. He says, you shall go into a wood when you please, but if you are very quiet, you will not know whether there is a partridge, or a pheasant, or a rabbit in it; but when you begin to move about, or make a noise, you very soon see the living creatures. They rise or they run. So, when affliction comes into the soul, and makes a disturbance and breaks our peace, up rise our graces. Faith comes out of its hiding, and love leaps from its secret place. I remember Mr. William Jay saying that birds' nests are hard to find in summer-time, but anyone could find a bird's nest

in winter. When all the leaves are off the trees the nests are visible to all. Often in the days of our prosperity, we fail to find our faith; but when our adversity comes, the winter of our trial bares the boughs, and we see our faith at once. We are sure that we believe now, for we feel the effect of faith upon our character. "Before I was afflicted I went astray," said David, "but now have I kept thy word." He found that his faith was really there by his keeping God's Word in the time of his affliction. It is a great mercy, then, to have your faith tried, that you may be sure beyond all manner of question that you are a true believer.

Besides, when faith is tried *it brings God glory*. Oh, how it honours God when a man can say with a smiling face in prospect of death, "Good-bye, dear sir, I may never see you here again, but we shall meet above"! We who are in health envy the brother who has such joy amid sharp pain. I went the other day to see a dear brother who has since then gone above. He was swollen with dropsy, and was close to the brink of the grave; but to hear the song of assurance, and the utterances of his joy was most sweet and cheering. It made me feel how good God is to his servants. He never leaves nor forsakes them, when they come to their most painful times.

This trial of our faith *does good to our fellow-Christians*. They see how we are supported, and they learn to bear their troubles bravely. I do not know anything that is better for making us brave than to see others believe in Christ and bear up manfully. To see that blind saint so happy makes us ashamed to be sad. To see content in an inmate of the workhouse compels us to be thankful. Sufferers are our tutors; they educate us for the skies. When men of God can suffer—when they can bear poverty, bereavement or sickness, and still rejoice in God, we learn the way to live the higher and more Christly life. When Patrick Hamilton had been burned in Scotland, one said to his persecutors, "If you are going to burn any more, you had better do it in a cellar, for the smoke of Hamilton's burning has opened the eyes of hundreds." It was always so. Suffering saints are living seed. Oh, that God might help us to such faith, that when we come to suffer in life, or to expire in death, we may so glorify God that others may believe in him! May we preach sermons by our faith which shall be better than sermons in words.

My time has gone, and I have much to say to you. I wanted to say to you about the trial of your faith, dear friends, that **SOME ARE TRIED VERY SPECIALLY**. Some endure many more tests than others, and that is because God has a great favour to them. Many men God does not love well enough to whip them. They are the devil's children, and the heavenly Father does not trouble them. They are none of his, and so he lets them have a happy life, and perhaps an easy death: "there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." But they are to be pitied, and not envied. Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep! Woe unto you who have your portion in this life, for it shall go ill with you in the world to come! God's children are often much chastened because they are much loved. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Men

take most trouble with that which is most precious. A common pebble will be let alone, but a diamond must be fretted on the wheel till its brilliance is displayed.

Some persons are also much tried in their faith because they are very fit for it. God has fitted the back for a heavy burden, and the burden will be sent. He has constituted them on purpose that they should be helpful in filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ, for his body's sake, which is the church." Men build strong columns because they are meant to carry great weights. So God makes great Christians, on purpose that they should bear great afflictions for his glory.

He does this also because he would have some men do him a special service. What an honour it is to do the Lord a special service! When some man in our army behaves himself very grandly, and wins a battle, what will her Majesty do? Why, she will send for him next time a war arises. If any of you are brave in bearing affliction, you shall have the honour of enduring more affliction. Does not every soldier court the opportunity of service? He that looks over his soldiers says of a certain one, "I shall not send him; he is feeble and faint-hearted; yonder veteran is the man for me." Do not think that you would be honoured by being allowed to ride to heaven on a feather bed. True honour lies in being permitted to bear and suffer, side by side with him of the bloody sweat and of the five open wounds. This is the guerdon of the saints—that they should on earth be decorated with

"Many a sorrow, many a tear."

They shall walk with their Lord in white, for they are worthy.

Yes, dear friends, the Lord often sends us greater trials than others, because he means to qualify us for greater enjoyments. If you want to make a pool capable of holding more water, you dig it out, do you not? And many a man has been dug and enlarged by affliction. The enlargements of trial enable us to hold more grace and more glory. The more a gracious man suffers, the more he becomes capable of entering into fellowship with Christ in his sufferings, and so into fellowship with Christ in his glory by-and-by.

Come, let us be comforted as to the trial of our faith. There is no hurt in it. It is all for good. The trial of our faith is entirely in the hands of God. Nobody can try us without God's permission. He will try us just as much as we ought to be tried, and no more. While he tries us with one hand he will sustain us with the other. If he gives us bitters, he will give us sweets in full proportion. A dear sister said to me this week, "When I used to be in poverty and in trouble, the Word of God was much more sweet to me than it is now that I am prospered." I do not wonder at it. I have made a similar remark when I have been long without an illness. Some of us have cried, "Take me back to my sickness again. Take me back to slander and rebuke again." A Scotch saint said that when they met in the moss, or by the hill-side, and were harried by Claverhouse and his dragoons, Christ was present at the sacraments in the heather much more than he ever was afterwards when they got into the kirk,

and sat down quietly. Our worst days are often our best days, and in the dark we see stars that we never saw in the light. So we will not care a pin what it is that may befall us here, so long as God is with us, and our faith in him is genuine. Christian people, I am not going to condole with you, but I congratulate you upon your troubles, for the cross of Christ is precious.

But you that do not love my Lord and Master, if you roll in riches, if your eyes stand out with fatness, I mourn over you. Bullocks fattened for the slaughter, your joys are but the prelude to your woes. Oh, that God would have mercy upon you, and that you would have mercy upon yourselves, and flee at once to Jesus, and put your trust in him! Faith in the work, offices, and person of the Lord Jesus is the way of salvation. May he help you to run in it at this hour, for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew vii. 13—29.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—691, 731, 700.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—In answer to a general desire that I should let my beloved readers know of my condition, I will write a line or two each week. Owing to extreme weakness it has taken me the whole week to reach my sunny retreat, but at each stage I have found myself a little better, and I can now walk a little—a very little; yet for this I am deeply grateful to him "who restoreth our life." I hope, by rest in this genial climate, to recover tone, strength, and freshness of mind, and then I trust all will be spent, in future days, for God's glory. Through the blessing of God upon the labours of Messrs. Fullerton and Smith a cheering work is going on at the Tabernacle. I beg my readers to pray that the Lord may be glorified among the people in the absence of the usual worker, and that the printed sermons may speak with power when the preacher himself is silent.

Yours, dear friends, in Christ Jesus,

Mentone, Nov. 24, 1888.

C. H. SPURGEON.