

Letter 188.

by James Bourne

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the fear of God and the promises of God in finding comfort and confidence in affliction.

Scripture: 2 Samuel 23:4, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 72:6, Zechariah 14:3, Malachi 4:2

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Eternal Salvation"

Description

James Bourne reflects on the inevitability of afflictions in life, sharing personal struggles with fear, bodily afflictions, and the constant battle against Satan's deceptions. Despite the challenges, Bourne finds solace in the everlasting covenant with God and the assurance of salvation through Christ. He draws strength from the imagery of the Sun of righteousness bringing healing and the tender grass springing after rain, symbolizing the graces of the Spirit. Bourne also witnesses the peaceful passing of a friend, highlighting the true fruits of a ministry appointed by God and the importance of seeking a testimony approved by Him.

Transcript

Fittleworth, 30 July 1840.

Dear Mrs. Burrell,

There is no situation in life that screens us from affliction. I used to think that poor --'s frequent visits to your father [Mr. Huntington] would be the means of his getting all the blessings, while I should be left in the dark, hopeless and helpless. I have had also the same sort of thoughts respecting you; but I perceive what the word of God says is true, "The land shall mourn . . . every family apart, and their wives apart" [Zech. xiii. 12-14]. I have long watched your casting down, and have seen this very essential grace in it, namely, the fear of God; and to such the time will come when there will be a lifting up.

There will yet be many changes; I seldom find myself in the same place many hours together. My present bodily affliction often rouses my fears, because I see death making hasty steps, and Satan paints before me many terrible things which I shall not be able to contend with. His great aim is to gain my attention to his voice, and to keep me looking at him, and listening to his suggestions, and to my own deceitful heart. All this brings me very low; but (if possible) he will not let me look to Christ; and I think it is every day harder to turn my eyes that way. Yet when the Lord does grant me that power, I am astonished how all the rest vanishes into smoke.

I found some melting from these words in meditation this morning, "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure;" and I could cordially join with David in saying, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." I felt sweetness in the thought, and a secret testimony that the Lord had wrought it in my heart. I felt also much brokenness of heart in reading the preceding verse, "He shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain" [2 Sam. xxiii. 4, 5]. It led me first to consider this - "Unto you that fear my Name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings," and brought to my remembrance the comfort the Lord sent me by those words at the beginning of my affliction. "The tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain," I know secretly to be the graces of the Spirit flowing out after the holy anointing with which he has so often refreshed me. No wonder it should be called tender grass, for nothing makes a man so tender and self-abased, as the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart, which is the clear shining of the Father's love to us in Christ, testified by the Spirit.

It was this "clear shining " that carried our departed friend Mrs. Jones so sweetly through the valley of the shadow of death; and the same would be quite sufficient for me; for it would remove all darkness, and betray all the subtle lies of the enemy. I feel its power now in a measure. It is a very serious thing really to come to dissolution; only I find every promise of God has eternal life in it, and therefore believe that I cannot be confounded in the last conflict. I have often had a secret assurance that the Lord Jesus will be with me then, and feel a holy confidence that it must be as he has said; and in watching the ends of those amongst us, I find none are disappointed.

Some time before Mr. Harvey was taken ill, he spent an hour with me, and I felt quite satisfied and comforted that the Lord was with him. I could never lose sight of this; and I am glad to hear that in the midst of his extreme weakness God manifested the efficacy of his grace, and that the poor man's end was peace. Surely these are not cunningly devised fables, but the true fruits and effects of a ministry which God has appointed. When I mentioned something of this sort to one of a contrary spirit, the reply was, That is nothing; we have had three hundred happy deaths in a short time! The magicians could do most of the wonders the Lord wrought by Moses. But let me be found walking in the fear of God, and seeking for such a testimony as he will approve in the great day. "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence;" for this will stand, and nothing else.

I am here in a most retired spot, and find none enquiring after the Lord. I seek for nothing new, but desire to watch the daily movements within, and find this is sufficient labour for me; and inasmuch as the Lord is with me in it, I perceive it is not in vain. For by this exercise it pleases him to maintain spiritual life; though you see by this letter I am in a low place.

Your faithful and affectionate friend, J. B.

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