

Letter 197.

by James Bourne

James Bourne's sermon explores the necessity of humility and reliance on God through trials and afflictions for spiritual growth and understanding of His mercy.

Scripture: 1 Kings 8:12

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Humility Before God"

Description

James Bourne shares about the trials and spiritual growth he experiences, emphasizing the importance of humbling oneself before the Lord, seeking His help, and walking in the fear of the Lord amidst worldly contradictions. He reflects on the sweetness of waiting upon the Lord, the beauty of Christ's mercy, and the need to continually make Him the sole refuge. Bourne acknowledges the wisdom of God in various life circumstances, recognizing that through trials, he learns to see greater beauty in a dying Savior and have his affections set on eternal things.

Transcript

[To Mrs. T.] Fittleworth, 22 August 1840.

My dear Cousin,

I am called to many and peculiar exercises here, and am surrounded with people that will neither hear nor show reason. I am for peace, but they are for war. I was exactly situated in the same way about ten years ago, only a few miles from this place. I think the Lord suffers me to be thus pursued, that with this ballast I may walk more steadily, and watch the coming and going of spiritual life. I perceive this is but little noticed; especially the first rise of a listless spirit, which is so hard to get removed. I perceive the promised daily cross, when sanctified, is one fruitful means of leading us to mourn to the Lord under the perplexing contradictions of the world; and this mourning to the Lord will be much more profitable to us than resenting any offence that we may seem to have received. Pride feels itself quickly injured, and resentment and recompense are the only means of gratifying it; but oh, the death and distance they work Here I soon find myself heavily laden, and greatly alarmed lest I should be left to abide under the influence of this death; a cry is created, with many confessions, and the deliverance is not so soon brought about as said, for there must be much humbling and taking the lowest place. O what a blow to the pride of man to be made really nothing, the last, the least; yet how profitable and safe For here it is, and here alone, that Christ pays his visits. He goes down, it is said, "to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies" [Song. vi. 2]. But what a change takes place by these kind and tender visits; how they calm the tumultuous spirit and

make pride to go into his den; and instead of revenge, what bowels of mercies and humbleness of mind are found, and what tender fear is created to keep up the spirit of grace and supplication, that we may be assured that the Lord's salvation is nigh us, and that no harm can overtake us in this manner of walking. This I conceive is walking in the fear of the Lord; and under this leading, though surrounded with ten thousand enemies, we must come off more than conquerors.

Such is the goodness and mercy of God, that he will manage our difficulties, both as to weight and measure, so that they shall be to our profit, and by them teach us more earnestly to seek his help. Until sharply exercised in this way, I did not know the meaning of that sweet Psalm [cxxxiii.], "Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us." Oh this waiting? there is often an inconceivable sweetness in it, although at the time I cry, How long? So that I dare not complain of my difficulties while the Lord evidently makes them profitable to me, and by them keeps my spirit out of the world, and makes me diligent in searching his word. I find also that the Lord by these things instructs me to enter more fully into the cases of others, and especially to feel for their afflictions, and to take the admonition "considering thyself, lest thou be also tempted."

I had a most humbling sight of myself yesterday as a lost sinner, while I contemplated the wonderful mercy of God in Christ. His beauty, suitableness, compassion, and condescension moved me greatly. He was most precious to me, so that although I cannot fathom many things, and perceive that his judgments are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out, yet at such a time I am enabled to leave all to him; quite sure and satisfied that he will do all things well, yea, more than well; that he has done and will do nothing with me but what shall be to my profit and his glory.

These seasons do not abide, but I think I perceive a lasting savour upon my spirit; which encourages me in fresh attacks, to make him my sole refuge. I sometimes for awhile wonder that he does not overrule some things in which his power seems to be set at defiance; but I soon become silent and put my mouth in the dust. I must never be higher than this. God has so determined it; and I believe this is the cause of all the cross providences that befall me, and that I shall learn by them to see greater beauty in a dying Saviour, and have my affections more fully set upon eternal things. I wonder often how short these seasons of spiritual life are, and how long death reigns in the soul; how often my prayers seem but words, as if all my religion were come to an end; but Christ, the resurrection and the life, raises me continually to bless him for an understanding that the redemption of my soul is precious indeed.

It is surprising how much better my health is. I trust the Lord will sanctify the affliction to his glory, and to the profit of the affectionate friends with whom I correspond, enabling me to set forth in some small measure the exceeding riches of his grace wherein he hath abounded towards me. I hope to be at home on Friday evening, yet long to hear from you once more. You must remember we are without the public means and the personal communion of saints; and though I find the promise in its measure true, "Yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" [Ezek. xi. 16], yet I find the cloudy days are many and solitary, and death conies in from all quarters. I also think upon that part of my family I leave at home, and have many anxious cares and fears, which are the subject of many prayers and much watchfulness. It is a wonderful mercy to have the blessing of God upon my family, yet it comes not by outward observation, but oftentimes through the most threatening circumstances. This is the Red Sea, in which it appears as if we must be drowned, because it seems to involve both body and soul. The flood appears like wrath poured forth without a remedy; but this excites a bitter and lamentable cry, and though

everything seems coming to ruin, yet here it is (and I have found it so) that the Lord turns our captivity with a sweet assurance of eternal life, and a hope that he will be our stay and friend in all our perplexities. Although this satisfies my soul for the present, yet the clouds gather quickly and return after the rain, and my fears come on again and again, which keep me trembling and fearing lest all that is past should yet prove a blank. I think the Lord suffers this that I may not get independent. The flesh loves ease, but the Saviour says, "Take my yoke upon you;" and though his yoke will be easy, and his burden light, to the new man, yet the flesh will always spurn at the cross. Hence comes the conflict; and the Lord takes care that it shall be kept up amongst his people, that he may hear constantly from them. My brightest seasons have followed the darkest dispensations, and I have found the truth of his word, "that he would dwell in the thick darkness" [1 Kings viii. Li]. I cannot help acknowledging the wisdom of God in these various dispensations; for if it were not thus, I should be like the vineyard with its hedges broken down, and the wild boar of the forest entering, or the little foxes which spoil the tender grapes. [Psalm lxxx. 12, 13; and Song. ii. 15].

Yours affectionately, J. B.

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