

Bishop John Hooper's Letter of January 21, 1555

by J.C. Ryle

The sermon emphasizes the importance of standing firm in faith and trusting in God's strength and power, even in the face of adversity and persecution.

Scripture: Psalm 73:25-26, Matthew 10:28, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:17-18, Philippians 3:20, 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 12:1-2, James 1:12, 1 Peter 5:10, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Faith in Adversity", "Eternal Perspective"

Description

J.C. Ryle reflects on Bishop John Hooper's poignant letter written from prison shortly before his martyrdom, emphasizing the trials of faith amidst persecution. Hooper urges his friends to remain steadfast in their commitment to God, highlighting the importance of prioritizing divine favor over worldly comforts and fears. He acknowledges the pain of imprisonment and loss but reassures that true joy and fulfillment come from enduring faith and the hope of eternal life. Hooper's message serves as a powerful reminder of the need for courage and constancy in the face of adversity, encouraging believers to focus on the eternal rather than the temporal. He concludes with a heartfelt plea for prayers for his family and himself, demonstrating his unwavering faith in God's providence.

Transcript

A letter which Master Hooper did write out of prison to certain of his friends, three weeks before his cruel burning at Gloucester.

The grace of God be with you. Amen.

I did write unto you of late, and told you what extremity the Parliament had concluded upon concerning religion, suppressing the truth, and setting forth the untruth, intending to cause all men by extremity to forswear themselves, and to take again for the head of the Church him that is neither head nor member of it, but a very enemy, as the Word of God and all ancient writers do record: and for lack of law and authority, they will use force and extremity, which have been the arguments to defend the Pope and Popery since this authority first began in the world.

But now is the time of trial, to see whether we fear God or man. It was an easy thing to hold with Christ while the Prince and world held with Him; but now the world hateth Him, it is the true trial who be His.

Wherefore, in the name and in the virtue, strength, and power of His Holy Spirit, prepare yourselves in any case to adversity and constancy. Let us not run away when it is most time to fight. Remember, none shall be crowned but such as fight manfully; and he that endureth to the end shall be saved. You must now turn all your cogitations from the peril you see, and mark the felicity that followeth the peril--either victory in this world of your enemies, or else a surrender of this life to inherit the everlasting kingdom. Beware of beholding too much the felicity or misery of this world; for the consideration and too earnest love or fear of either of them draweth from God. Wherefore think with yourselves, as touching the felicity of the world, it is good; but yet none otherwise than it standeth with the favour of God. It is to be kept; but yet so far forth, as by keeping of it we lose not God. It is good abiding and tarrying still among our friends here; but yet so, that we tarry not therewithal in God's displeasure, and hereafter dwell with the devils in fire everlasting. There is nothing under God but may be kept, so that God, being above all things we have, be not lost.

Of adversity judge the same. Imprisonment is painful; but yet liberty upon evil conditions is more painful. The prisons stink, but yet not so much as sweet houses where the fear and true honour of God lacketh. I must be alone and solitary; it is better so to be, and have God with me, than to be in company with the wicked. Loss of goods is great; but loss of God's grace and favour is greater....It is better to make answer before the pomp and pride of wicked men than to stand naked in the sight of all heaven and earth before the just God at the latter day. I shall die by the hands of the cruel man: he is blessed that loseth this life, full of mortal miseries, and findeth the life full of eternal joys. It is pain and grief to depart from goods and friends; but yet not so much as to depart from grace and heaven itself. Wherefore there is neither felicity nor adversity of this world that can appear to be great, if it be weighed with the joys or pains of the world to come.

I can do no more but pray for you; do the same for me, for God's sake. For my part (I thank the heavenly Father), I have made mine accounts, and appointed myself unto the will of the heavenly Father; as He will, so I will, by His grace. For God's sake, as soon as ye can, send my poor wife and children some letter from you; and my letter also, which I sent of late to D. As it was told me, she never had letter from me, since the coming of M.S. unto her; the more to blame the messengers, for I have written divers times. The Lord comfort them, and provide for them; for I am able to do nothing in worldly things. She is a godly and wise woman. If my meaning had been accomplished, she should have had necessary things; but what I meant God can perform, to whom I commend both her and you all. I am a precious jewel now, and daintily kept, never so daintily; for neither mine own man, nor any of the servants of the house, may come to me, but my keeper alone--a simple, rude man, God knoweth; but I am nothing careful thereof. Fare you well.

The 21st of January, 1555.

Your bounden,

JOHN HOOPER

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