

“Yet a Little While”

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.”
—Hebrews 10:35-38

THE ELEMENTS OF FAITH, confidence, and patience are most essential to a victorious Christian life. Faith in God and in the wisdom of his providences, even though they may at times seem to frown upon us, gives strength to endure whatever he deems to be best suited to our highest spiritual welfare. Faith and confidence in God's times and seasons, and a patient waiting for their outworking in our lives, as well as their application in a larger sense to his plan of salvation, are also essential. It is from this standpoint particularly that in our text the apostle

urges upon us the importance of “faith,” of “confidence,” and of “patience”—that is, constancy

and steadfastness, as the Greek word translated “patience” is defined.

The Scriptures as well as experience bear testimony to the failure which often results from a lack of constancy in Christian endeavor. Jesus reminds us of this in the parable of the sower. In this parable the seed of Truth is shown to fall in four different places: by the wayside; upon a rock; among thorns; and on good ground. That which fell by the wayside was trodden under foot and carried away by the birds. It did not grow at all. That which fell upon the rock and among thorns showed signs of life, but there was no constancy of growth. Only that which fell upon “good ground” grew to maturity, and of this the Master said that it brought forth fruit “with patience,” the thought again being constancy.—Luke 8:5-15

The “wayside” believers are those to whom the message of the Gospel sounds pleasing. It is just what they like to hear. When they are told about the coming kingdom blessings they agree that it is the best message they have ever heard. They give the impression of enthusiastic and deep interest, but they never progress further. Though enthusiastic, there was no depth of heart-soil in which the seed could take root. Their interest was only passive. Other things soon entered their heart and mind which appeared more alluring, claiming their attention.

The seed which fell upon the rock fared better. There was some soil there, but it was shallow. The seed germinated and showed signs of growth. However, the soil having little depth, it lacked moisture and the young plant withered under the heat of the sun. Thus we have another group illustrated. These

actually accept the message of the Scriptures. They profess to be followers of the Master, but they are “shallow” of heart in that they are unable to commit themselves to the trials and difficulties of the narrow way. They are at first zealous, but then their interest begins to wane, and finally disappears altogether.

Then there was the seed which fell among thorns. Here the soil was deeper, but the young plant was choked by the sturdier growth of the thorns. This, Jesus explained, shows how some believers permit the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches to turn their hearts and minds away from the service of the Lord. How true this is in the experience of many well-meaning Christians. Let us be on guard that it does not become true of us!

In these examples is a lesson for all followers of Christ. Some of us have been in the narrow way for many years, perhaps several decades. This fact may easily give us a sense of security, but if it does, it may be a false security. The length of time we have patiently endured means victory only if we continue to do so unto the end. (Matt. 10:22; 24:13) One might run well for many years, and yet turn out to be like the plant which grew from the seed that fell upon the rock, or that grew among thorns.

FAITHFULNESS UNTO DEATH

To continue faithful is one of the great tests upon every Christian. Those who pass the test have not only had the seeds of Truth enter into “good ground,” but also “having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15)

This is a test which enters into all that we endeavor to do and to be as Christians. For example, at the beginning of each year we may resolve to study the Scriptures a certain amount each week; that we will attend ecclesia meetings regularly; that we will engage ourselves in spreading the message of the Gospel of the kingdom; and that we will be faithful in prayer and in doing all we can in service to the brotherhood.

How easy it is, though, to become slack with respect to one or more of these things which we know we should do and have resolved to do. We may carry out our good intentions fairly well for a while, but then begin to relax just a little—not much at first, perhaps, but gradually. If we are not watchful and prompt to take stock of ourselves, all the good things which we determined to do at the beginning of the year may be almost entirely neglected in a relatively short period of time.

What we may have found true with respect to the good hopes we have at the beginning of the year can also be true of our Christian life as a whole. In our text Paul calls our attention to this and gives us the remedy, saying, “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” The “will of God” here referred to is our consecration, our covenant to do the Lord’s will in our every thought, word, and deed. However, merely entering into this covenant is only the beginning of the Christian life. After this comes the testing of our faith, zeal, and love. It is only when we patiently, with constancy and steadfastness, endure the trials which divine wisdom deems best, that we may hope to receive the

fulfillment of God's promise to give us a "crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

The Hebrews to whom Paul wrote the admonishing message of our text, started out well. When they first believed, they labored faithfully for the brethren. They "took joyfully the spoiling" of their goods. (Heb. 10:34) Earlier in his epistle, the apostle had reminded them, "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end." (Heb. 6:10-12) However, when Paul recognized that they were not manifesting "the same diligence," he told them, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions."—Heb. 10:32

How much we all should take these admonitions to heart! How does our zeal for God, for the Truth, for the brethren, compare with that which fired us with enthusiasm when we first believed and consecrated ourselves to do God's will? If we have less zeal today, perhaps the heat of trials have had a withering effect upon us, or we have permitted the cares of this world to interfere with the carrying out of our consecration. In either event, we have need of patience, constancy, and steadfastness, lest we "draw back" to the point where the Lord will "have no pleasure" in us.—Heb. 10:38

THE TEST OF WAITING

David said, "My times are in thy hand." (Ps. 31:15) This is the proper attitude for every child of God, but it is not always easy to be wholly resigned to God's will. We are so prone to measure time by our own short span of life that we are often impatient

in our waiting on the Lord. Our faith is time-tested in many of our experiences of life. It is tested in our waiting for God to answer our prayers. It is tested by the necessity of waiting for visible results to reward our Christian efforts. It is tested by our waiting for God to lift the burden which we feel is nearly too heavy for us to bear.

In the chapter following the one from which our text is taken, Paul presents a long list of the ancient ones of old who lived and died by faith. One cannot read the Old Testament accounts of how these devout souls endured without being impressed with the fact that time entered prominently into the testing of many of them. They were “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” and desired and sought “a better country.” They sought it, but they did not find it in their lifetime. Instead, they “died in faith” not having received the fulfillment of many of God’s promises.—Heb. 11:13-16

We may well draw a lesson from Noah’s long and patient service of God while the ark was being prepared. (Gen. 6:3; I Pet. 3:20) Surely Noah must have had the wonderful quality of endurance. Then there was Abraham. How he needed to exercise patience and steadfastness while waiting for God to fulfill promises made to him. For twenty-five years Abraham waited for the promised birth of Isaac, yet his faith “staggered not.”—Gen. 12:4; 21:5; Rom. 4:20

Moses waited on the Lord forty years in the land of Midian. (Acts 7:29,30) He served the Lord another forty years in the wilderness under the most trying circumstances. (vs. 36) David, although anointed to be king of Israel, waited patiently for years until

it was God's due time to give him the throne. Most of the time David waited, he was being persecuted and hunted by Saul whose place he was anointed to take as king of Israel. Twice he had an opportunity to kill Saul and bring his waiting and persecution to an end, but David declined to do so because Saul was "the LORD's anointed." (I Sam. 24:1-11; 26:1-16) He knew that God had said, "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." (Ps. 105:15) David was willing to wait on the Lord.

What has been true of God's people as individuals has also been true of them as a whole. In the development of his plan God has in large measure wisely concealed most of the time elements until after events have begun to be fulfilled. How faithfully and patiently the prophets of old looked and waited for the Messiah and for the establishment of his kingdom. They were all used of the Lord to prophesy concerning the Messiah and his kingdom. There was much that they did not understand about the Messianic purpose, but they did know that the Messiah, God's "anointed," was coming, and that Israel would be blessed under his reign. They lived and died inspired by this hope.—Ps. 2:1-12; Isa. 61:1-4

Even when Jesus did come, the time element of his kingdom was concealed. The disciples inquired, "When shall these things be?" and again, "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Matt. 24:3; Acts 1:6) Prior to his death and resurrection Jesus himself did not know the time of his return and the establishment of his kingdom, and he said so to his disciples. (Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:32) It is true that there are Scriptures which show that

at this end of the age those who are watching will not be in darkness “that that day should overtake them as a thief.” (I Thess. 5:1-4) This, however, has proven to be largely a matter of identifying events which indicate that the “day of the Lord” has come. It did not promise the ability to know in advance the time of its coming.

“WHAT MANNER OF TIME”

An interesting insight on the element of time in God’s plan is brought to our attention by the Apostle Peter. He tells us that the prophets sought diligently to know “what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11) The Prophet Daniel foretold the sufferings of Christ and the cutting off in death of Messiah the Prince. In connection with this prophecy Daniel was given a time measurement of seventy weeks, or four hundred and ninety days.—Dan. 9:24-27

According to Peter, the prophets who were used to give these prophecies endeavored to ascertain the “manner of time” referred to by these “days” and “weeks.” Perhaps they were acquainted with the words God spoke to Moses or the vision he gave to Ezekiel in which a time measurement was revealed to them upon the basis of reckoning “a day for a year.” (Num. 14:33,34; Ezek. 4:3-6) Knowing of this, Daniel and other subsequent prophets might well wonder whether or not this was the manner in which the seventy weeks were supposed to be reckoned. Apparently many of the devout Jews had concluded that such was the case, and it was

probably on account of this that many were in expectation of him at the time just preceding his ministry.—Luke 3:15

The seventy weeks were indeed four hundred and ninety years, dating from a decree issued by King Artaxerxes to rebuild the city and walls of Jerusalem. This is reckoned according to the Scriptural method cited above of “a day for a year,” or in this case, 7 days per week times 70 weeks = 490 days, or years. Daniel’s prophecy spoke of the seventieth week as in a sense separate from the others, yet a part of them. It indicated that the Messiah would come at the close of the sixty-ninth week, and would be cut off in the midst of the seventieth.—Dan. 9:26,27

It was fulfilled just this way, but those living during that long period did not understand it. This time clock helped to arouse the devout Jews at the First Advent of Jesus to the fact that the Messiah was due, yet they were disappointed because they did not understand the prophecy clearly enough to realize what was meant by him being “cut off” in the midst of the seventieth week, but “not for himself.”

Even the disciples, who had accepted Jesus as the promised Messiah, did not understand the strange turn of events which resulted in what they saw as his “untimely” death. Their hopes were in a measure revived when Jesus manifested himself to them after his resurrection, but they were still concerned regarding the time when the Messianic promises of God would be fulfilled. “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” they inquired.

Jesus explained that it was not for them “to know the times or the seasons,” which the Father

was keeping “in his own power,” to be revealed to his people as such information became necessary for them to understand. He told the disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until they received power from on high. They did this, and at Pentecost their waiting was rewarded by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. —Acts 1:7,8; 2:1-4

THINGS TO COME

Jesus had promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit would show them “things to come.” (John 16:13) It indeed did! The apostles, who by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were given prophetic vision, foretold the great apostasy which would develop in the church after their death, and recorded much valuable information concerning events that were to occur near the close of the Gospel Age when it would be the due time for the Master’s return and Second Presence.

While they were shown things to come, however, it was not revealed to them when they were coming. It is noteworthy that in the apostolic writings there are no specific time prophecies given concerning the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom. Apparently God did not want his people to know in advance just how long the Gospel Age would be, nor when the kingdom would be established. Paul wrote, “Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you, For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.”—I Thess. 5:1,2

Paul does not indicate that there was no need to write of the times and seasons because the brethren at Thessalonica already knew them. Rather, it was

because they knew that the “day of the Lord” would come “as a thief in the night,” hence that no one could know in advance, and to attempt to write about it would be merely speculation. Paul no doubt knew that Jesus had said it would be essential to be on the alert and watchful in order to know of his presence when he did return.—Matt. 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:33-37

The viewpoint of the apostles and other disciples during the period of the Early Church was that the time was short. “The night is far spent,” said Paul, “the day is at hand.” (Rom. 13:12) The long night-time of sin and darkness had already been spreading its pall over the earth for more than four thousand years when these words were written. This was two-thirds of the entire night of six thousand years since our first parents fell into sin. From God’s perspective it was “far spent.” From the human standpoint, however, it would have been most discouraging for those early Christians to have realized that nearly two thousand more years were to elapse before their kingdom hopes would be realized.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

Indeed, the time was short, even in the apostle’s day, but it was long enough for every disciple of Christ to be faithful unto death. In our text the apostle writes, “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” (Heb. 10:37) That “little while” of waiting put a test of endurance upon every believer in the Early Church, and it is still testing the Lord’s people today. We still have need of patience that after making our consecration we may live up faithfully to its terms

even unto death. For each of us, the end of the “little while” will not be reached until our sacrifice is wholly consumed.

In order to encourage the Hebrews with the thought that the consummation of their hopes would occur on time, Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:2-4 where the prophet tells of a vision which was to be made “plain upon tables.” The prophet states that this vision would seem to “tarry,” but would not actually do so. Only from the human standpoint has it ever seemed to God’s people that his plan has been slow of development. From the divine standpoint there has been no delay, no tarrying. God has kindly veiled the eyes of his people concerning the full length of time prior to the establishment of his kingdom, and has allowed the “little while” of waiting to test their patience, faith, and confidence.

“AT THE END”

The prophet assures that the vision, although it would seem to tarry, would “at the end” speak with clarity and truthfulness. (Hab. 2:3) We believe we are now in that “time of the end,” and the vision has spoken. What rich blessings have come to God’s people as a result! The signs of the presence of Christ outlined in the Scriptures are evident, such as a great time of trouble, an unprecedented increase of knowledge, and the “fig tree” bringing forth leaves, pointing to the reestablishment of Israel as a nation. (Dan. 12:1-4; Matt. 24:32,33) The work of harvest associated with his presence has been outlined to the Lord’s people, and they have zealously engaged in it, and continue to do so. (Matt. 13:24-30,36-39) The precious truths of God’s plan,

and the privileges we enjoy in God's service, have come into full view because the "vision" has not tarried, but has spoken.

Nevertheless, with all the marvelous clarity of the Gospel message with which the Lord has favored his people at this present time, we still do not have full knowledge of the time yet remaining. In fact, the time which remains for each of us is the days, weeks, and years still left of our life—no more and no less. That date also is yet unknown to us.

How long or how short our "little while" of waiting may yet be, we do not know. Thus we still have need of patience, and true Christian patience involves more than an inactive waiting for the consummation of our hope. This improper attitude is illustrated in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. (Matt. 25:1-13) Here it is shown that while the bridegroom tarried, the virgins all slumbered and slept.

While this parable has certain time fulfillments, it also serves well to illustrate the temptation which can come to us of becoming indifferent to our consecration when our hopes are not realized as soon as we expect. Let us be on guard against going to sleep, spiritually, especially in this most wonderful time of the church's experience.

Spiritual drowsiness comes upon a Christian in very subtle ways. It is manifested in decreasing appreciation of the Gospel message; loss of desire to study the Scriptures; indifference to the privileges of meeting with the Lord's people; a veering toward the world and the enjoyment of worldly pleasure; a lack of desire to be active in the spread of the Gospel; and in other ways. Any or all of these

symptoms may readily result from the seeming delay of our hopes—a tarrying, as it were, of the vision.

Such spiritual lethargy is described in our text as a “drawing back” from zealously fulfilling the terms of our consecration. What is the remedy? The apostle says it is “confidence,” “faith,” and “patience.” Our confidence in God and in his Word of Truth should be so strong that we will never doubt the wisdom of the manner in which he is dealing with us. Our faith should lay hold so firmly upon his promises that we will never doubt their ultimate fulfillment. Finally, our patience, constancy, and steadfastness should enable us to wait, watch, labor, and pray, until we have completed our sacrifice faithfully, even unto death. ■