Faithful Endurance

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."
—James 1:12

IN THE EPISTLE OF JAMES, he tells us that if we endure temptation we shall receive a 'crown a1of life,' and as footstep followers of Jesus we have learned from the Word of God that we are to develop and maintain endurance in the carrying out of our consecration vows. The quality of endurance may be defined as continuing faithfully under pain or distress with patience, and without murmuring. As the revelator has also said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

The condition of pain or distress as referred to in our featured text may come upon the Lord's people who are soldiers of the cross when they suffer for righteousness' sake. This may occur in the form of persecution in one form or another, or possibly by the infliction of actual bodily harm. Christian suffering during the present time may also take the

form of mental weariness, stress, or other infirmities of the flesh. Some of these afflictions may result from our trusting in the Lord, and enduring efforts to remain faithful to our High Calling. We may also suffer in our effort to proclaim the true message of the Gospel regarding the future kingdom blessing for all mankind.

The most outstanding example we have of endurance in suffering, brought on by faithfulness in Divine service, is our Lord Jesus. From Jordan to the cross, his was a most strenuous service. Daily he gave his all, never sparing himself. As the Prophet Isaiah has said, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."—Isa. 53:12

Jesus' journeying from place to place was exceedingly difficult, especially when compared with the means of travel in our modern world. Although he was a young and perfect man, his exhausting ministry is generally recognized as an exceptional feat of endurance. It is also very apparent from the Scriptures that the healing of the sick, as performed by him, although through the use of the Divine miracle-working power which was at his command, was not without the expending of his own energy in his healing ministry, and the giving out of his own vitality.

Soon after Jesus had chosen the twelve to be his apostles (Luke 6:13-16), he was searched out by those who sought to see and hear him speak. Great numbers of people also came to be healed by him as

recorded by Luke. "He came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all." (vss. 17-19) The word 'virtue,' as used here by Luke, suggests the astounding degree of power that our Lord possessed even during his earthly ministry, which was but an illustration of the greater power to be exercised on behalf of the whole human family in the administration of his future kingdom.

This virtue [power] that our Lord Jesus used has also been brought to our attention on another occasion. "A woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind him, and touched the border of his garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanched. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude throng thee and press thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me: for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." (Luke 8:43-46) It can truly be said of Jesus that he "took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."—Matt. 8:17

Jesus thus gave of himself faithfully and with continuing endurance. He cheerfully endured pain and suffering, desiring only that the Father's will be done in and through him. He knew that faithful

endurance also called for continuance in the work of bearing witness to the Truth, and that not until he had been faithful unto death would his part in this great work be ultimately accomplished.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

Another outstanding example of a faithful servant who endured prolonged physical suffering for the Lord's sake was the Apostle Paul. He said, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." (II Cor. 12:15) His general pattern of experiences in every place he visited on his various missionary journeys included stress, and often the inflicting of physical pain by one means or another.

Writing about this, Paul said of himself, "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."—II Cor. 11:23-28

In writing to Timothy, Paul, who had endured so much for the Lord's sake, exhorted, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus

Christ." (II Tim. 2:3) To show that he never expected others to do what he was not willing to do himself, he could say, "I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (vs. 10) The apostle added a wonderful testimony relating to his many tribulations, and said, "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."—II Tim. 3:10,11

Let it not be misunderstood, however, that the instances of Paul's physical endurance in the Lord's service were easy for him, because they were very difficult, as he further wrote, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."—I Cor. 9:27

It is important to note that, in spite of Paul's zeal for the Lord, and his resolute determination to carry out all that was required of him, his experiences were not endured in his own strength. He had special help from the Lord, as indicated in his exhortation to Timothy. "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God." (II Tim. 1:8) What Paul meant by this was that he was able to bear the suffering which came upon him in the service of the Truth because of the help supplied by the Lord.

This special help was through the Holy Spirit, the holy power from God. In his letter to the breth-

ren at Ephesus, he said, "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10) As in the case of all the faithful ones who have gone before us, our Heavenly Father is able to perform this for us. "Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us."—Eph. 3:20

In contrast to the experiences of some in the Early Church, we today are not called upon to share the same kinds of experiences that may have been the order of the day during a different time and place. In many respects, our experiences as followers of the Master result in much less physical suffering that was endured by many who preceded us. But this is all the more reason for holding nothing back in the way of time or strength as we endeavor by all the means at our disposal to prove our willingness to endure whatever suffering may result from our faithfulness.

To walk in this way, as our Lord set us an example, we should follow in his steps and walk in newness of life with him. "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."—Rom. 6:4,5

This implies not only a passive conformity to his disposition or spirit, but also an active, energetic zeal in the promulgation of the wonderful Truth that we share, at all costs and hazards. While the risks of danger to which we are exposed today in

witnessing to the Truth are vastly different from those of the early disciples of Jesus, yet there are dangers. Many of these are subtle, deceptive, and discouraging; and if we are not watchful may cause us to stumble as well as to be unfruitful and unfaithful in the Lord's service.

Let us not permit any deceptive human philosophy to convince us that we need no longer to endure self-sacrifice in the service of the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. Theories which offer plausible excuses for not continuing to endure hardness in the proclamation of the Truth are very tempting to the flesh. Nothing but the sincerity of our consecration and the determination to endure faithfully to the end of our course will safeguard us against such delusions.

The attitude of endurance and faithfulness will keep us faithfully in the Truth, and loyal to it when we have come to realize that our Father's unspeakable favor to us is far better than what the world has to offer, or whatever this present life could possibly have or give. We who have humbly and faithfully laid upon God's altar every earthly good thing, every hope and ambition, and every power of our being, may rejoice in telling the good tidings to those who have an ear. We rejoice to sound forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into this marvelous light. The message is too good to keep. If we could not proclaim it, it would be as a burning fire shut up in our bones, so we must tell it out. We are willing that the telling of it cost us the misunderstanding and persecution of former friends, and possibly the breaking of earthly ties. We are willing that it shall cost us the frown of the world.

Today, as in the past, we have the privilege of witnessing to the Truth by word of mouth in private conversations, or in public assemblies. We may also have the privilege of writing letters to friends and relatives when it seems opportune to do so. We are blessed by the availability of the printed message of Truth, radio, television and internet with which we can help to support the message of Truth. By all these means, the Gospel of the kingdom continues to go out to all the world for a witness unto all nations.

We may faithfully serve the Truth as ambassadors of Christ. Surely all who are standing firm in this spirit will cooperate in every way they can as the Lord gives them opportunity. All may contribute through their prayers on behalf of this service during the closing years of the present Gospel Age. Let us faithfully endure to make our calling and election sure. ■