

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

“Hampering or Hindering”

The warning sounds down along the line to us in this generation. Are you, O careless heart, a fruitless tree in the Lord's vineyard? Shall the words of doom ere long be spoken of you? How long have you received His gifts? How long has He watched and waited for a return of love? Planted in His vineyard, under the watchful care of the gardener, what privileges are yours! How often has the tender gospel message thrilled your heart! You have taken the name of Christ, you are outwardly a member of the church which is His body, and yet you are conscious of no living connection with the great heart of love. The tide of His life does not flow through you. The sweet graces of His character, "the fruits of the Spirit," are not seen in your life. {Christ Object Lessons Pg. 215}

God in His Son had been seeking fruit, and had found none. Israel was a cumberer of the ground. Its very existence was a curse; for it filled the place in the vineyard that a fruitful tree might fill. It robbed the world of the blessings that God designed to give. The Israelites had misrepresented God among the nations. They were not merely useless, but a decided hindrance. To a great degree their religion was misleading, and wrought ruin instead of salvation. {Ibid Pg. 215}

The gardener does not refuse to minister to so unpromising a plant. He stands ready to give it still greater care He will make its surroundings most favorable, and will lavish upon it every attention. {Ibid Pg. 215}

You realize, though it may be but dimly, that you are a cumberer of the ground. Yet in His great mercy God has not cut you down. He does not look coldly upon you. He does not turn away with indifference, or leave you to destruction. Looking upon you He cries, as He cried so many centuries ago concerning Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? . . . I will not execute the fierceness of Mine anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim; for I am God, and not man." Hosea 11:8, 9. The pitying Saviour is saying concerning you, Spare it this year also, till I shall dig about it and dress it. {Christ Object Lessons Pg. 217}

With what unwearied love did Christ minister to Israel during the period of added probation. Upon the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." {Luke 23:24} After His ascension the gospel was preached first at Jerusalem. There the Holy Spirit was poured out. There the first gospel church revealed the power of the risen Saviour. There Stephen--"his face as it had been the face of an angel" (Acts 6:15)--bore his testimony and laid down his life. All that heaven itself could give was bestowed. "What could have been done more to My vineyard," Christ said, "that I have not done in it?" Isa. 5:4. So His care and labor for you are not lessened, but increased. Still He says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." {Isaiah 27:3} "If it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that" {Christ Object Lessons Pg. 218}

The heart that does not respond to divine agencies becomes hardened until it is no longer susceptible to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Then it is that the word is spoken, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" {Christ Object Lessons Pg. 218}

Today He invites you: "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God. . . . I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. . . . They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine. . . . From Me is thy fruit found." Hosea 14:1-8. {Christ Object Lessons Pg. 218}

Our heavenly Father measures and weighs every trial before he permits it to come upon the believer. He considers the circumstances and the strength of the one who is to stand under the proving and test of God, and He never permits the temptations to be greater than the capacity of resistance. If the soul is overborne, the person overpowered, this can never be charged to God, as failing to give strength in grace, but the one tempted was not vigilant and prayerful and did not appropriate by faith the provisions God had abundantly in store for him. Christ never failed a believer in His hour of combat. The believer must claim the promise and meet the foe in the name of the Lord, and he will not know anything like failure. {Our High Calling Pg.323}

In heaven it is said by the ministering angels: The ministry which we have been commissioned to perform we have done. We pressed back the army of evil angels. We sent brightness and light into the souls of men, quickening their memory of

the love of God expressed in Jesus. We attracted their eyes to the cross of Christ. Their hearts were deeply moved by a sense of the sin that crucified the Son of God. They were convicted. They saw the steps to be taken in conversion; they felt the power of the gospel; their hearts were made tender as they saw the sweetness of the love of God. They beheld the beauty of the character of Christ. But with the many it was all in vain. They would not surrender their own habits and character. They would not put off the garments of earth in order to be clothed with the robe of heaven....

Solemn will be the day of final decision.... Sad will be the retrospect in that day when men stand face to face with eternity. The whole life will present itself just as it has been. The world's pleasures, riches, and honors will not then seem so important. Men will then see that the righteousness they despised is alone of value.... Then they will see the results of their choice.... There will be no future probation in which to prepare for eternity. It is in this life that we are to put on the robe of Christ's righteousness. This is our only opportunity to form characters for the home which Christ has made ready for those who obey His commandments.

The days of our probation are fast closing. The end is near. To us the warning is given, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." Luke 21:34. Beware lest it find you unready. Take heed lest you be found at the King's feast without a wedding garment. "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." "Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame." {Matthew 24:44; Revelation. 16:15} {Christ Object Lesson Pg. 318-319}

We are never called upon to make a real sacrifice for God. Many things He asks us to yield to Him, but in doing this we are but giving up that which hinders us in the heavenward way. Even when called upon to surrender those things which in themselves are good, we may be sure that God is thus working out for us some higher good.

In the future life the mysteries that here have annoyed and disappointed us will be made plain. We shall see that our seemingly unanswered prayers and disappointed hopes have been among our greatest blessings.

We are to look upon every duty, however humble, as sacred because it is a part of God's service. Our daily prayer should be, "Lord, help me to do my best. Teach me how to do better work. Give me energy and cheerfulness. Help me to bring into my service the loving ministry of the Saviour." {Ministry of Healing Pg.473- 474}

For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads has overtaken you *and* laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted *and* tried *and* assayed beyond your ability *and* strength of resistance *and* power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable *and* strong *and* powerful to bear up under it patiently. {1 Corinthians 10:13 Amplified}

The patience of God has an object, but you are defeating it. He is allowing a state of things to come that you would fain see counteracted by and by, but it will be too late. God commanded Elijah to anoint the cruel and deceitful Hazael king over Syria, that he might be a scourge to idolatrous Israel. Who knows whether God will not give you up to the deceptions you love? Who knows but that the preachers who are faithful, firm, and true may be the last who shall offer the gospel of peace to our unthankful churches? It may be that the destroyers are already training under the hand of Satan and only wait the departure of a few more standard-bearers to take their places, and with the voice of the false prophet cry, Peace, peace," when the Lord hath not spoken peace. I seldom weep, but now I find my eyes blinded with tears; they are falling upon my paper as I write. It may be that ere long all prophesyings among us will be at an end, and the voice which has stirred the people may no longer disturb their carnal slumbers. When God shall work His strange work on the earth, when holy hands bear the ark no longer, woe will be upon the people. Oh, that thou hadst known, even thou, in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! Oh, that our people may, as did Nineveh, repent with all their might and believe with all their heart, that God may turn away His fierce anger from them. {Testimonies to the Church Volume 5 Pg. 77}