

“Looking Unto Jesus”

The Psalmist spoke of Messiah thus: “many are *the afflictions* of the Righteous, but Yahweh delivereth him out of them all” (Psa. 34:19 see context). In Christ we have an example of one who endured suffering for righteousness sake. Again, it is written: “Christ also *suffered for us, leaving us an example*, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2:21). Christ suffered affliction as an example for us to follow, and as we look to his victory over his mortal weakness, we are indeed strengthened and encouraged to endure to the end, as he did.

Our New Testament reading for the day, Hebrews chapter 12, invites us to consider our Master from that aspect:

“let us run with patience the race that is set before us, *Looking unto Jesus* the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, *endured the cross, despising the shame*, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb. 12:2).

Notice the point being made here, it was not sheer determination that enabled our Master to overcome his suffering: it was for the vision of “joy” that was ever set before his mind. The example of Christ is to be ever looking to the glories of the kingdom to come – to “seek first” that kingdom in all our ways; and this itself will help us to endure tribulations that will inevitably come upon us. Proverbs 29 epitomises this spirit: “where there is no vision, the people perish ...” (Prov. 29:18). The vision of the kingdom enables us to endure: but without that vision we cannot prevail over tribulation, and will so perish without hope. The hope that we share is elsewhere described as an “anchor of the soul” (Heb. 6:19), keeping us sure and steadfast in the way. Again, the inspired writer to the Hebrews speaks of the importance of being vigilant in our waiting for Messiah to come again: “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto *them that look for him* shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28). Jesus shall come “without sin unto salvation” not to everyone; not to the world at large, but only “unto them that look for him”. The coming of Christ then, is something which must be a predominant feature of our daily thoughts, as we “look for him”, or as Hebrews 12 puts it: “looking unto” him.

Hebrews 12 presents Christ in two aspects in this regard: the “author” and “finisher” of our faith (Heb. 12:2) and we shall consider these aspects in turn:

JESUS THE AUTHOR

The Greek word translated “author” carries the sense of “princely leader”, or “captain”. Hebrews 2:10 translates the same word as “captain”, as in “the captain of their salvation”. As a captain, Christ is the one who leads warriors into battle, and who will give them the victory. He is our princely leader; we follow him in our warfare against the flesh, seeking to serve him and not King Sin.

There is an interesting event recorded in Joshua chapter 5 that has a bearing on this. Joshua, as the captain over Israel prepared himself to go to war, and so obtain the inheritance for Israel. So the record continues:

“when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua

went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as captain of the host of Yahweh am I now come ...” (Josh. 5:13-14).

Notice that Joshua “looked”, and saw the heavenly captain, who would secure the victory. What a tremendous event this was: the meeting together of the captain of Yahweh’s host on earth, and the immortal captain of Yahweh’s heavenly host. This was the Angel that would go before Israel, and bring them into the land (Exo. 23:23), subduing their enemies before them. Both Joshua and the Angel would go forth together: Yahweh manifested in the flesh (Joshua) and spirit (the Angel), working in union to secure the victory. Even so, we find both aspects (both human and divine) coming together in our Captain who shall lead us into our promised inheritance. Isaiah chapter 55 speaks thus of our Messiah: “I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and a commander to the people” (Isa. 55:4). Notice again, he is an example, or “witness” as well as a leader and commander, as we have seen.

JESUS THE FINISHER

Messiah is the Princely Captain of our salvation, and also a “finisher”. The word for “finisher” carries the idea of a *perfector*, one who completes and puts the final touches to the work in hand. Whereas the Law “made nothing perfect” (Heb. 7:19), of Christ it is said: by one offering ***he hath perfected for ever*** them that are sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). We are “his workmanship” (Eph. 2:10), and that work will continue through to the bestowal of immortality, the means by which the mortal servants of Messiah will be perfected. So the Apostle wrote: of his position of certainty: “being confident of this very thing, he which hath begun a good work in you ***will finish it*** (AV Margin) until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

The disciples of Christ are a work in progress. Being constituent members of a New Creation, of which Christ is the firstborn (from the dead), we seek to be renewed in the spirit of our mind, seeking to show forth the image of He who made us. Here is our work: that we believe in the one who has called us for the manifestation of His Glory (Jno. 6:29). We set our hand to that work willingly, looking forward to the great bestowal of our reward. But we do not work alone - and ultimately the work is that of Christ and his Father, by way of preparing a people worthy of perpetuation into immortality when Christ comes to gather together his people from the dead and the living. As it is written: “***work out*** your own salvation with fear and trembling. For ***it is God which worketh in you*** both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

LOOKING UNTO JESUS

As we saw earlier, we are instructed to look to our Captain as one who has been victorious over the enemy of sin and death. There is another Old Testament event that has a bearing on this: the warfare of Amalek against Israel. The Amalekites were the first nation to war against Israel, and Moses was the captain who led the defence. The account in Exodus chapter 17 demonstrated the importance of looking unto Moses for their deliverance. He held up the “rod of God” in his hands, as evidence of Divine power to save. When the rod was held up, Israel prevailed, but when Moses let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. The lifting up of the rod spoke of victory, but the letting down of it spoke of defeat.

We read in this chapter of how Moses' hands grew weary, so that he could not keep them lifted up by himself. So two men, Aaron the priest, and Hur from the tribe of Judah, came to support him:

“... Moses hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun” (Exo. 17:12).

There are many points of exhortation that arise out of a consideration of this passage. Moses could not lift up his hands alone: he was without strength to give the victory due to mortal weakness. He had to be helped. The context of Hebrews chapter 12 which we are considering, is “striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4). And we are to help our brethren and sisters in that warfare, both by way of personal example, and also by way of helping them practically. So Hebrews 12, in alluding back to Exodus 17 speaks of our warfare against sin, and exhorts: “Wherefore, lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees ...” (Heb. 12:12). Just as Moses hands and knees were supported by the strength of Priest and Ruler (Aaron and Hur), so these key factors are seen in Messiah, and his lifting up. Just as Israel had to look to Moses, even so we look to Christ for salvation. But like Aaron and Hur, we seek to strengthen our brethren and sisters, encouraging them in the warfare, strengthening them when they are failing under the weakness of human mortality.

There is another aspect to consider. Moses, for other particular reasons, was not able to bring Israel into their land – that work was reserved for Joshua (Hebrew form of “Jesus”). This foreshadows the way in which the Law (as embodied in him) could not provide them their inheritance: that work would come about by Jesus the Christ. Maybe a similar point is being made in Exodus 17: Moses was too weak to hold up that rod by himself. But by contrast, Christ lifted up himself in sacrifice with no human help. So the spirit of Christ in the Psalmist wrote in prayer to Yahweh: “Be not far from me; for trouble is near; **for there is none to help**” (Psa. 22:11). We cannot begin to appreciate the magnitude of the work of our Master, which he accomplished by himself – yet for us, as our savior from sin.

THE JOY

The motivating force which enable our Master to overcome, was the vision of “joy” that was set before him. But precisely what was that “joy”? The Psalms contain the answer: Another passage that Hebrews 12 is based on, is Psalm 16, which also speaks of Messiah being in the Father's presence:

“... my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: **in thy presence is fullness of Joy;** at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa. 16:9-11).

Hebrews 12 speaks of Jesus who sits in his Father's presence, at his Right Hand, having seen the Joy that enabled him to endure. This Psalm also speaks of the same thing; Christ being in the presence of the Father, with reference to his “right hand” which is where “fullness of joy” can be found. This Psalm is cited in Acts chapter 2, and directly applied to our Lord Jesus Christ:

“for David speaketh concerning him, *I foresaw the Lord always before my face*, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved. Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; *thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance*: (Acts. 2:25-28).

Notice again, that which Christ had ever set before him was a vision of his Father: “I foresaw the Lord always before my face”. That was the vision of joy that strengthened him in the days of his mortal weakness: appearing before his Father’s literal presence for the first time! What a union that must have been; with joy both with the Lord Almighty, and His Son! And this will be the most significant and important feature of the Kingdom: not the physical prosperity – although that will be so – but rather that Yahweh might dwell with men. That those who have become His Sons through faith and obedience shall dwell in harmony with their Creator. “as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the Glory of Yahweh” (Num. 14:21). This is the aspect that we should desire above all else. “Seek ye first the kingdom of God” is the instruction of Messiah. But he continues: “and his righteousness”. This is the aspect that we must seek for: not only the physical prosperity that will be enjoyed then, but also for the time when the earth shall be governed by Yahweh’s righteous principles. When all things redound to His honour and His glory, then we shall truly find joy and peace in joyful immortality with our Saviour throughout the ages to come.

LEST YE BE WEARIED AND FAINT

The reason why we should look to our Master’s example in suffering for righteousness’ sake is given: “lest ye be *wearied and faint* in your minds” (Heb. 12:3). The terminology here returns us to Israel’s warfare against Amalek, which we looked at above. Deuteronomy describes the tactic by which Amalek went to war:

“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, when thou was *faint and weary*; and he feared not God” (Deut. 25:18).

Here is an example of the way in which king Sin operates. Amalek targeted those who are “faint and weary”; those who lagged behind, away from the protection of the army that led the way. This is the way in which Sin operates: it dominates the minds of those who are spiritually faint and weary. It wars against the Truth, and against those who are not strong, or as well founded as they ought to be. The exhortation in Hebrews is that we must try to be strong and of a good courage, and not grow faint, lest we become easy prey for king Sin. But we have already seen our responsibility is to help our brethren and sisters, by way of lifting up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees. And here is a vital point, which cuts right across common business practice in the world around us.

In business, those who are lagging behind are cast away. Rather than to spend a lot of time, effort, and money on the weak members of the workforce, they are laid aside to make room for people who are ‘better’ at their job. The workplace is not a charity, as the saying goes, and companies cannot carry dead wood; for a business to be streamlined in its operations, the weakest staff must be replaced by stronger.

This whole spirit is totally against the operations of the Almighty. He is collecting together people for a purpose, and exactly opposite to current Business practice, He purposefully selects the lowly:

“God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty”
(1 Cor. 1:27)

By contrast to worldly business practice, those who are wearied and faint in their minds, are those whom we should give most attention to, in order to strengthen their hand in the Lord. In a way not dissimilar to the Parable of the lost sheep, where the flock is left whilst the lost sheep is sought out, we should give attention to those who need it, rather than those who seem strong in the Truth. Seeking to strengthen the feeble, and edify the weak, we do so by encouraging them to look forward to the joys of the kingdom set before us, and meeting their needs as each case requires. Indeed, the Epistle of James is all about this aspect.

Our Master provides a dramatic and powerful example of endurance. “he that endureth to the end shall be saved” is the maxim of Christ. The prophet Isaiah provides many glimpses into what the Kingdom will be like, but of particular interest is chapter 35, which appears to be another Old Testament background to Hebrews 12. Verse 3 repeats the phrase we have just been considering: “Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees”, but then reinforces the point by continuing: “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not”. Verse 6 recounts how there will be physical blessings in the kingdom, by means of healing the afflicted: “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing ...”. And Hebrews 12 speaks of the lame: “make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way but let it rather be healed” (Heb. 12:13). Verse 8 speaks of a “way of holiness” which the ransomed of the Lord shall walk along. And Hebrews 12 (above) speaks of how we must walk in the way, encouraging each other on our journey.

But what is of particular interest is the way in which this prophecy of Isaiah concludes:

“the ransomed of the Yahweh shall return, and come to Zion with songs and **everlasting joy** upon their heads: they shall **obtain joy** and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa. 35:10).

As we look to that Joy that is set before us, let us take up our cross, and follow the Master. Enduring shame before men for Christ’s sake, we follow His steps, and shall receive his reward. We seek not the riches or favors of this life, but the glories of the Age to Come. That is the source of our Joy; a joy that can strengthen us to share Messiah’s victory. And waging the same warfare as he, we follow him as our Captain, that at the appointed time, we shall enter into the inheritance promised since the foundation of the world.

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