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The Sermons of John Wesley - Sermon 47

Heaviness Through Manifold Temptations

"Now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations." 1 Pet. 1:6.

1. In the preceding discourse I have particularly spoken of that darkness of mind into which those are often observed to fall who once walked in the light of God's countenance. Nearly related to this is the heaviness of soul which is still more common, even among believers. Indeed, almost all the children of God experience this, in an higher or lower degree. And so great is the resemblance between one and the other, that they are frequently confounded together; and we are apt to say, indifferently, "Such an one is in darkness," or "Such an one is in heaviness;" -- as if they were equivalent terms, one of which implied no more than the other. But they are far, very far from it. Darkness is one thing; heaviness is another. There is a difference, yea, a wide an essential difference, between the former and the latter. And such a difference it is as all the children of God are deeply concerned to understand: Otherwise nothing will be more easy than for them to slide out of heaviness into darkness. In order to prevent this, I will endeavor to show,

I. What manner of persons those were to whom the Apostle says, "Ye are in heaviness."

II. What kind of heaviness they were in:

III. What were the causes: and,

IV. What were the ends of it. I shall conclude with some inferences.

1. I am, in the first place, to show what manner of persons those were to whom the Apostle says, "Ye are in heaviness." And, first, it is beyond all dispute, that they were believers at the time the Apostle thus addressed them: For so he expressly says, (1 Pet. 1:5,) "Ye who are kept through the power of God by faith unto salvation." Again, (1 Pet. 1:7,) he mentions "the trial of their faith, much more precious than that of gold which perisheth." And yet again, (1 Pet. 1:9,) he speaks of their "receiving the end of their faith, the salvation of their souls." At the same time, therefore, that they were "in heaviness," they were possessed of living faith. Their heaviness did not destroy their faith: They still "endured, as seeing him that is invisible."

2. Neither did their heaviness destroy their peace; the "peace that passeth all understanding;" which is inseparable from true, living faith. This we may easily gather from the second verse, wherein the Apostle prays, not that grace and peace may be given them, but only that it may "be multiplied unto them;" that the blessing which they already enjoyed might be more abundantly bestowed upon them.

3. The persons to whom the Apostle here speaks were also full of a living hope. For thus he speaks, (1 Pet. 1:3,) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again," -- me and you, all of us who are "sanctified by the Spirit," and enjoy the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" -- "unto a living hope, unto an inheritance," -- that is, unto a living hope of an inheritance, "incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." So that, notwithstanding their heaviness, they still retained an hope full of immortality.

4. And they still "rejoiced in hope of the glory of God." They were filled with joy in the Holy Ghost. So, (1 Pet. 1:8), the Apostle, having just mentioned the final "revelation of Jesus Christ" (namely,

when he cometh to judge the world,) immediately adds, "In whom, though now ye see him not," not with your bodily eyes, "yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Their heaviness, therefore, was not only consistent with living hope, but also with joy unspeakable: At the same time they were thus heavy, they nevertheless rejoiced with joy full of glory.

5. In the midst of their heaviness they likewise still enjoyed the love of God, which had been shed abroad in their hearts; -- "whom," says the Apostle, "having not seen, ye love." Though ye have not yet seen him face to face; yet, knowing him by faith, ye have obeyed his word, "My son, give me thy heart. "He is your God, and your love, the desire of your eyes, and your "exceeding great reward." Ye have sought and found happiness in Him; ye "delight in the Lord," and he hath given you your "hearts' desire."

6. Once more: Though they were heavy, yet were they holy; they retained the same power over sin. They were still "kept" from this, "by the power of God;" they were "obedient children, not fashioned according to their former desires;" but "as He that had called them is holy," so were they "holy in all manner of conversation." Knowing they were "redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, as a Lamb without spot and without blemish," they had, through the faith and hope which they had in God, "purified their souls by the Spirit." So that, upon the whole, their heaviness well consisted with faith, with hope, with love of God and man, with the peace of God, with joy in the Holy Ghost, with inward and outward holiness. It did no way impair, much less destroy, any part of the work of God in their hearts. It did not at all interfere with that "sanctification of the Spirit" which is the root of all true obedience; neither with the happiness which must needs result from grace and peace reigning in the heart.

II. 1. Hence we may easily learn what kind of heaviness they were in; -- the Second thing which I shall endeavor to show. The word in the original, is *luphentes*, -- made sorry, grieved; from *luph*, -- grief or sorrow. This is the constant, literal meaning of the word: And, this being observed, there is no ambiguity in the expression, nor any difficulty in understanding it. The persons spoken of here were grieved: The heaviness they were in was neither more nor less than sorrow or grief; -- a passion which every child of man is well acquainted with.

2. It is probable our translators rendered it heaviness (though a less common word,) to denote two things: First, the degree, and next, the continuance, of it. It does indeed, seem that it is not a slight or inconsiderable degree of grief which is here spoken of; but such as makes a strong impression upon, and sinks deep into, the soul. Neither does this appear to be a transient sorrow, such as passes away in an hour; but rather, such as, having taken fast hold of the heart, is not presently shaken off, but continues for some time, as a settled temper, rather than a passion, -- even in them that have living faith in Christ, and the genuine love of God in their hearts.

3. Even in these, this heaviness may sometimes be so deep as to overshadow the whole soul; to give a colour, as it were, to all the affections; such as will appear in the whole behavior. It may likewise have an influence over the body; particularly in those that are either of a naturally weak constitution, or weakened by some accidental disorder, especially of the nervous kind. In many cases, we find "the corruptible body presses down the soul." In this, the soul rather presses down the body, and weakens it more and more. Nay, I will not say that deep and lasting sorrow of heart may not sometimes weaken a strong constitution, and lay the foundation of such bodily disorders as are not easily removed: And yet, all this may consist with a measure of that faith which still worketh by love.

4. This may well be termed a "fiery trial:" And though it is not the same with that the Apostle speaks of in the fourth chapter [1 Pet. 4], yet many of the expressions there used concerning outward sufferings may be accommodated to this inward affliction. They cannot, indeed, with any propriety, be applied to them that are in darkness: These do not, cannot rejoice; neither is it true, that "the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon" them. But he frequently doth on those that are in heaviness; so that, though sorrowful, yet are they always rejoicing.

III. 1. But to proceed to the Third point: What are the causes of such sorrow or heaviness in a true believer The Apostle tells us clearly: "Ye are in heaviness," says he, "through manifold temptations," poikilois, manifold, not only many in number, but of many kinds. They may be varied and diversified a thousand ways, by the change or addition of numberless circumstances. And this very diversity and variety makes it more difficult to guard against them. Among these we may rank all bodily disorders; particularly acute diseases, and violent pain of every kind, whether affecting the whole body or the smallest part of it. It is true, some who have enjoyed uninterrupted health, and have felt none of these, may make light of them, and wonder that sickness, or pain of body, should bring heaviness upon the mind. And perhaps one in a thousand is of so peculiar a constitution as not to feel pain like other men. So hath it pleased God to show his almighty power by producing some of these prodigies of nature, who have seemed not to regard pain at all, though of the severest kind; if that contempt of pain was not owing partly to the force of education, partly to a preternatural cause, -- to the power either of good or evil spirits, who raised those men above the state of mere nature. But, abstracting from these particular cases, it is, in general, a just observation, that

Pain is perfect misery, and extreme Quite overturns all patience

And even where this is prevented by the grace of God, where men do "possess their souls in patience," it may, nevertheless, occasion much inward heaviness; the soul sympathizing with the body.

2. All diseases of long continuance, though less painful, are apt to produce the same effect. When God appoints over us consumption, or the chilling and burning ague, if it be not speedily removed it will not only "consume the eyes," but "cause sorrow of heart." This is eminently the case with regard to all those which are termed nervous disorders. And faith does not overturn the course of nature: Natural causes still produce natural effects. Faith no more hinders the sinking of the spirits (as it is called) in an hysteric illness than the rising of the pulse in a fever.

3. Again: When "calamity cometh as a whirlwind, and poverty as an armed man;" is this a little temptation Is it strange if it occasion sorrow and heaviness Although this also may appear but a small thing to those who stand at a distance, or who look, and "pass by on the other side;" yet it is otherwise to them who feel it. "Having food and raiment," (indeed the latter word, skepasmata, implies lodging as well as apparel,) we may, if the love of God is in our hearts, "be therewith content." But what shall they do who have none of these who, as it were, "embrace the rock for a shelter" who have only the earth to lie upon, and only the sky to cover them who have not a dry, or warm, much less a clean, abode for themselves and their little ones: no, nor clothing to keep themselves, or those they love next themselves, from pinching cold, either by day or night I laugh at the stupid Heathen, crying out,

Nil habet, inflex paupertas durius in se, Quam quod ridiculos homines facit!

Has poverty nothing worse in it than this, that it makes men liable to be laughed at It is a sign this idle poet talked by rote of the things which he knew not. Is not want of food something worse than this

God pronounced it as a curse upon man, that he should earn it "by the sweat of his brow." But how many are there in this Christian country, that toil, and labour, and sweat, and have it not at last, but struggle with weariness and hunger together Is it not worse for one, after an hard day's labour, to come back to a poor, cold, dirty, uncomfortable lodging, and to find there not even the food which is needful to repair his wasted strength You that live at ease in the earth, that want nothing but eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand how well God has dealt with you, -- is it not worse to seek bread day by day, and find none perhaps to find the comfort also of five or six children, crying for what he has not to give! Were it not that he is restrained by an unseen hand, would he not soon "curse God and die" O want of bread! want of bread! Who can tell what this means unless he hath felt it himself I am astonished it occasions no more than heaviness even in them that believe!

4. Perhaps, next to this, we may place the death of those who were near and dear unto us; of a tender parent, and one not much declined into the vale of years; of a beloved child, just rising into life, and clasping about our heart; of a friend that was as our own soul, -- next the grace of God, the last, best gift of Heaven. And a thousand circumstances may enhance the distress. Perhaps the child, the friend, died in our embrace! -- perhaps, was snatched away when we looked not for it! flourishing, cut down like a flower! In all these cases, we not only may, but ought to, be affected: It is the design of God that we should. He would not have us stocks and stones. He would have our affections regulated, not extinguished. Therefore, -- "Nature unreprieved may drop a tear." There may be sorrow without sin.

5. A still deeper sorrow we may feel for those who are dead while they live; on account of the unkindness, ingratitude, apostasy, of those who were united to us in the closest ties. Who can express what a lover of souls may feel for a friend, a brother, dead to God for an husband, a wife, a parent, a child rushing into sin, as an horse into the battle; and, in spite of all arguments and persuasions, hasting to work out his own damnation And this anguish of spirit may be heightened to an inconceivable degree, by the consideration, that he who is now posting to destruction once ran well in the way of life. Whatever he was in time past, serves now to no other purpose, than to make our reflections on what he is more piercing and afflictive.

6. In all these circumstances, we may be assured, our great adversary will not be wanting to improve his opportunity. He, who is always "walking about, seeking whom he may devour," will then, especially, use all his power, all his skill, if haply he may gain any advantage over the soul that is already cast down. He will not be sparing of his fiery darts, such as are most likely to find an entrance, and to fix most deeply in the heart, by their suitableness to the temptation that assaults it. He will labour to inject unbelieving, or blasphemous, or repining thoughts. He will suggest that God does not regard, does not govern, the earth; or, at least, that he does not govern it aright, not by the rules of justice and mercy. He will endeavor to stir up the heart against God, to renew our natural enmity against him. And if we attempt to fight him with his own weapons, if we begin to reason with him, more and more heaviness will undoubtedly ensue, if not utter darkness.

7. It has been frequently supposed, that there is another cause; if not of darkness, at least, of heaviness; namely, God's withdrawing himself from the soul, because it is his sovereign will. Certainly he will do this, if we grieve his Holy Spirit, either by outward or inward sin; either by doing evil, or neglecting to do good; by giving way either to pride or anger, to spiritual sloth, to foolish desire, or inordinate affection. But that he ever withdraws himself because he will, merely because it is his good pleasure, I absolutely deny. There is no text in all the Bible which gives any colour for such a supposition. Nay, it is a supposition contrary, not only to many particular texts, but to the

whole tenor of Scripture. It is repugnant to the very nature of God: It is utterly beneath his majesty and wisdom, (as an eminent writer strongly expresses it,) "to play at bo-peep with his creatures." It is inconsistent both with his justice and mercy, and with the sound experience of all his children.

8. One more cause of heaviness is mentioned by many of those who are termed Mystic authors. And the notion has crept in, I know not how, even among plain people who have no acquaintance with them. I cannot better explain this, than in the words of a late writer, who relates this as her own experience: -- "I continued so happy in my Beloved, that, although I should have been forced to live a vagabond in a desert, I should have found no difficulty in it. This state had not lasted long, when, in effect, I found myself led into a desert. I found myself in a forlorn condition, altogether poor, wretched, and miserable. The proper source of this grief is, the knowledge of ourselves; by which we find that there is an extreme unlikeness between God and us. We see ourselves most opposite to him; and that our inmost soul is entirely corrupted, depraved, and full of all kind of evil and malignity, of the world and the flesh, and all sorts of abominations." -- From hence it has been inferred, that the knowledge of ourselves, without which we should perish everlastingly, must, even after we have attained justifying faith, occasion the deepest heaviness.

9. But upon this I would observe, (1.) In the preceding paragraph, this writer says, "Hearing I had not a true faith in Christ, I offered myself up to God, and immediately felt his love." It may be so; and yet it does not appear that this was justification. It is more probable, it was no more than what are usually termed, the "drawings of the Father." And if so, the heaviness and darkness which followed was no other than conviction of sin; which in the nature of things, must precede that faith whereby we are justified. (2.) Suppose she was justified almost the same moment she was convinced of wanting faith, there was then no time for that gradually-increasing self-knowledge which uses to precede justification: In this case, therefore, it came after, and was probably the more severe, the less it was expected. (3.) It is allowed, there will be a far deeper, a far clearer and fuller knowledge of our inbred sin, of our total corruption by nature, after justification, than ever there was before it. But this need not occasion darkness of soul: I will not say, that it must bring us into heaviness. Were it so, the Apostle would not have used that expression, if need be for there would be an absolute, indispensable need of it, for all that would know themselves; that is, in effect, for all that would know the perfect love of God, and be thereby "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." But this is by no means the case. On the contrary, God may increase the knowledge of ourselves to any degree, and increase in the same proportion, the knowledge of himself and the experience of his love. And in this case there would be no "desert, no misery, no forlorn condition;" but love, and peace, and joy, gradually springing up into everlasting life.

IV. 1. For what ends, then, (which was the Fourth thing to be considered,) does God permit heaviness to befall so many of his children The Apostle gives us a plain and direct answer to this important question: "That the trial of their faith, which is much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried by fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7.) There may be an allusion to this, in that well-known passage of the fourth chapter; (Although it primarily relates to quite another thing, as has been already observed:) "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you: But rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may likewise rejoice with exceeding great joy." (1 Pet. 4:12,&c.)

2. Hence we learn, that the first and great end of God's permitting the temptations which bring

heaviness on his children, Is the trial of their faith, which is tried by these, even as gold by the fire. Now we know, gold tried in the fire is purified thereby; is separated from its dross. And so is faith in the fire of temptation; the more it is tried, the more it is purified; -- yea, and not only purified, but also strengthened, confirmed, increased abundantly, by so many more proofs of the wisdom and power, the love and faithfulness, of God. This, then, -- to increase our faith, -- is one gracious end of God's permitting those manifold temptations.

3. They serve to try, to purify, to confirm, and increase that living hope also, where unto "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath begotten us again of his abundant mercy." Indeed our hope cannot but increase in the same proportion with our faith. On this foundation it stands: Believing in his name, living by faith in the Son of God, we hope for, we have a confident expectation of, the glory which shall be revealed; And, consequently, whatever strengthens our faith, increases our hope also. At the same time it increases our joy in the Lord, which cannot but attend an hope full of immortality. In this view the Apostle exhorts believers in the other chapter: "Rejoice that ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ." On this very account, "happy are you; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you:" And hereby ye are enabled, even in the midst of sufferings, to "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

4. They rejoice the more, because the trials which increase their faith and hope increase their love also; both their gratitude to God for all his mercies, and their good-will to all mankind. Accordingly, the more deeply sensible they are of the loving-kindness of God their Saviour, the more is their heart inflamed with love to him who "first loved us." The clearer and stronger evidence they have of the glory that shall be revealed, the more do they love Him who hath purchased it for them, and "given them the earnest" thereof "in their hearts." And this, the increase of their love, is another end of the temptations permitted to come upon them.

5. Yet another is, their advance in holiness: holiness of heart, and holiness of conversation; the latter naturally resulting from the former; for a good tree will bring forth good fruit. And all inward holiness is the immediate fruit of the faith that worketh by love. By this the blessed Spirit purifies the heart from pride, self-will, passion; from love of the world, from foolish and hurtful desires, from vile and vain affections. Beside that, sanctified afflictions have, through the grace of God, an immediate and direct tendency to holiness. Through the operation of his Spirit, they humble, more and more, and abase the soul before God. They calm and meeken our turbulent spirit, tame the fierceness of our nature, soften our obstinacy and self-will, crucify us to the world, and bring us to expect all our strength from, and to seek all our happiness in, God.

6. And all these terminate in that great end, that our faith, hope, love, and holiness "may be found," if it doth not yet appear, "unto praise" from God himself, "and honour" from men and angels, "and glory," assigned by the great Judge to all that have endured unto the end. And this will be assigned in that awful day to every man, "according to his works;" according to the work which God had wrought in his heart, and the outward works which he has wrought for God; and likewise according to what he had suffered; So that all these trials are unspeakable gain. So many ways do these "light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

7. Add to this the advantage which others may receive by seeing our behavior under affliction. We find by experience, example frequently makes a deeper impression upon us than precept. And what examples have a stronger influence, not only on those who are partakers of like precious faith, but even on them who have not known God, than that of a soul calm and serene in the midst of storms;

sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; meekly accepting whatever is the will of God, however grievous it may be to nature; saying, in sickness and pain, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it" -- in loss or want, "The Lord gave; the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord!"

V. 1. I am to conclude with some inferences. And, First, how wide is the difference between darkness of soul, and heaviness; which, nevertheless, are so generally confounded with each other, even by experienced Christians! Darkness, or the wilderness-state, implies a total loss of joy in the Holy Ghost: Heaviness does not; in the midst of this we may "rejoice with joy unspeakable." They that are in darkness have lost the peace of God; They that are in heaviness have not; So far from it, that at the very time "peace," as well as "grace," may "be multiplied" unto them. In the former, the love of God is waxed cold, if it be not utterly extinguished; in the latter, it retains its full force, or, rather, increases daily. In these, faith itself, if not totally lost, is, however, grievously decayed: Their evidence and conviction of things not seen, particularly of the pardoning love of God, is not so clear or strong as in time past: and their trust in him is proportionably weakened: Those, though they see him not, yet have a clear, unshaken confidence in God, and an abiding evidence of that love whereby all their sins are blotted out. So that as long as we can distinguish faith from unbelief, hope from despair, peace from war, the love of God from the love of the world, we may infallibly distinguish heaviness from darkness!

2. We may learn from hence, Secondly, that there may be need of heaviness, but there can be no need of darkness. There may be need of our being in "heaviness for a season," in order to the ends above recited; at least, in this sense, as it is a natural result of those "manifold temptations" which are needful to try and increase our faith, to confirm and enlarge our hope, to purify our heart from all unholy tempers, and to perfect us in love. And, by consequence, they are needful in order to brighten our crown, and add to our eternal weight of glory. But we cannot say, that darkness is needful in order to any of these ends. It is no way conducive to them: The loss of faith, hope, love, is surely neither conducive to holiness, nor to the increase of that reward in heaven which will be in proportion to our holiness on earth.

3. From the Apostle's manner of speaking we may gather, Thirdly, that even heaviness is not always needful. "Now, for a season, if need be;" So it is not needful for all persons; nor for any person at all times. God is able, he has both power and wisdom, to work, when he pleases, the same work of grace in any soul, by other means. And in some instances he does so; he causes those whom it pleaseth him to go on from strength to strength, even till they "perfect holiness in his fear," with scarce any heaviness at all; as having an absolute power over the heart of man, and moving all the springs of it at his pleasure. But these cases are rare: God generally sees good to try "acceptable men in the furnace of affliction." So that manifold temptations and heaviness, more or less, are usually the portion of his dearest children.

4. We ought, therefore, Lastly, to watch and pray, and use our utmost endeavours to avoid falling into darkness. But we need not be solicitous how to avoid so much as how to improve by heaviness. Our great care should be, so to behave ourselves under it, so to wait upon the Lord therein, that it may fully answer all the design of his love, in permitting it to come upon us; that it may be a means of increasing our faith, of confirming our hope, of perfecting us in all holiness. Whenever it comes, let us have an eye to these gracious ends for which it is permitted, and use all diligence that we may not make void the counsel of God against ourselves. Let us earnestly work together with him, by the grace

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