

God's tried and exercised people (Quality: Very good, Quiet)

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Preacher: Cottingham, Peter (1947 - 2014)

[0 : 00] I'm speaking for the Lord's very gracious and merciful help. I direct your thoughts to the book of Joshua, chapter 1, and the last part of verse 5.

Book of Joshua, chapter 1, and the last part of verse 5. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. There are those times when the Lord's servants come before us with a particular word.

Then we may be tempted to say, ah, but they know something about us. And so they come with a particular word.

Well, in my introduction to this word, and as the Lord has brought it and laid it upon my spirit, let me speak firstly of one or two instances in this way, and how I have never refrained from taking that word that I trust that the Lord has given to me.

[1 : 28] And there have been those times when it has been very hard, very difficult. and yet the Lord has given, I trust that he has given that needed grace, that strength and support to faithfully discharge my duty before the people, but firstly before my God.

There have been those instances, some more marked than others, when the Lord has laid a particular thought upon my spirit, a subject, a text, a word, in prospect of going to a particular place, or speaking in a particular way, whether it is for a service, or whether it is for an address.

And, after that has been laid upon my spirit, there have been certain things that I have heard regarding, and really it does not behoove us to listen to those things that are spoken.

If you know what there is within each one of us, then I feel sometimes we tend to have a delight in speaking those things, and it would be better if we kept silent over, but we cannot help hearing some things.

And I have felt to myself, well, what do I do now? It brings to my thoughts, I remember reading of one of the Lord's servants, I do not know how long ago it was, I cannot remember now, but it was something like two or three hundred years ago.

[3 : 27] He was commanded to go and preach before, I believe it was in Scotland, before the lords and nobles and all those that were in high places.

And the Lord laid upon his spirit a particular word that he knew that it would not be acceptable to them. And it would go against all those things that they were so taken up with, that it would not be acceptable to them.

And he turned aside from that word, and went with a comforting and comfortable word.

And what did he say? Although the Lord was still with him in the ministry of the word, he never since that time had the liberty that he had known before.

He knew that he had sinned, he knew that he had done wrong, and the Lord chastened him because of it. The Lord, it is true, did not leave him. He was still helped to proclaim the truth, but he never had that liberty that he once knew.

[4 : 48] Oh, how you can feel for such a person. How you can feel for them, how they would fear and how they would tremble in going before such a congregation, and with a word that the Lord had laid upon his spirit that would have, well, if they would have attended to it, would have cut them to pieces.

But what do we have in the, especially in the prophets of old? They did not shirk their responsibility.

They did not turn aside from what the word of the Lord, from what the Lord had given to them to speak. Think of different ones put into prison.

You think of those, and other people would have killed them, and how they turned aside from the word of the Lord, and how they were unable to faithfully declare it.

Now, I've often felt in this, and there have been those times when certainly it has not been an easy pathway. But I feel this, that if my hearers know that I can be faithful in the correction, faithful in speaking those words, and sometimes are hard words to speak, and hard words to hear, and harder still to accept, as coming from the Lord.

[6 : 22] Oh, then, won't there be the hope that if I come, and I mean in my own spirit as well, in the hearts of my hearers, that we're to help, support, strengthen, to confirm, and to lead on in the way that is right, to raise up a precious Christ, then, oh, then, there will be that hope that there is a reality in it.

And so I come with this word. And I know that there are those of you that have those things in front of you, and others, unbeknown to me, you may have those different paths to walk in, for ye have not passed this way heretofore.

But what do we have in the account that I brought before you this evening? I do not like leaving out any part of the word of God, because the second chapter has got precious truth in it.

But I felt these first and third chapters spoke of those things that I wanted to, what I trust that the Lord had given me to speak before you this evening. What do we have?

The faithfulness of God unto his people. And what have we known?

[7 : 52] In our little measure, in our little experience, in the path and the way that the Lord has led us and brought us through thus far, haven't we tasted of his goodness?

Haven't we known his mercy? Haven't we seen his guidance and direction? Haven't we known his presence going before us?

And I believe that we can say this, that as we have known it, and as we have to cry unto the Lord that we might not be left to our own selves, our own spirit, or our own ways, that we want more and more for the Lord to be with us.

Oh, we want his promise to be fulfilled. And I believe those that are exercised thereby. I firmly believe this, that when the Lord lays upon the soul of one of his people, this exercise that the Lord would be with them, those different exercises that have to go through the fire, that he will bring it to pass.

Now let me say this, that it will be in his way and according to his purpose that it might redone to his honour and to his glory.

[9 : 30] Oh, how many times we've been mistaken. Why? Because of our own sinful heart as we've tried to put our own interpretation upon a particular matter.

The exercise has been of the Lord. But you know how it is. If there is that that comes into our path and we feel it is of the Lord, we do not have the patience or the right understanding to leave all in his hand.

You see, this is where our own sinful heart is such a barrier, such a stumbling block that we scheme and plan and devise the Lord's ways rather than resting upon the Lord for all things.

And yet the mercy of the Lord as he overrules all these things for good. Oh, the many times I have to wonder at the Lord's patience and his forbearance with me.

And when we think of these things of what the Lord has with the children of Israel, his patience with me.

[11 : 04] He made a covenant, that covenant with their forefathers, that he should bring them out of Egypt and into the promised land and inheritance for me.

And now they are at the point of being possessors of this inheritance. And the Lord said firstly to his servant, I believe he felt he needed it.

He felt he needed it. I will be with thee. That was the word that came in particular upon my spirit.

As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

Let us go back to Moses first of all. What do we have? When we can try sight our own path, how the Lord has led us and brought us through even to this time, we have to look on in wonder at the sovereign purposes of our God and at his sovereign grace.

[12 : 43] Oh, and we consider how the Lord has yes, raised us up. Raised us up to a hope.

Raised us up to then trust in him and in the sacrifice that was made and the blood that was shed for sin.

I know it's tried. I know that you're tempted regarding the reality of these things in your own soul. But isn't it in this way that the Lord has given you not a vain hope but a good hope in his mercy.

Now, I can say this, each one of you, you had your beginning in a particular way. I mean the beginning in a natural way of your life as we think of Moses.

Look how he was spared. Look how he was kept. God had a work for him to do. We know that Satan has always sought to destroy the work of God, the Lord's people, the work of salvation and redemption.

[14 : 16] that is his object with that hatred and enmity that he has against all that is good and right. He has sought it and will seek it even till that time when he shall be bound eternally.

There are those binds and those chains that are placed upon him for it is thus far that he can go and no further. As our Lord said to Simon Peter that Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not.

Oh remember this, when you are tried, sometimes beyond measure and you feel the enemy coming like a flood. and it is over so many things and especially over those things that you trust the Lord has done with you within, in your soul, in your path, in your case, in your exercises.

Oh and you feel that all these things are of nothing, there is no reality there, Satan's working yourself. well, through Pharaoh, this Moses that was to be raised up, it was Satan's desire to destroy.

Was this why the command went forth? Our sovereign God had a purpose, to bring his chosen people out of Egyptian bondage and there was to be one raised up.

[16 : 14] Look at that in the time of Christ there Satan sought to work again to destroy. Oh, when Satan took possession then of Herod and that command went out, to take all those, everyone, that Christ should be killed, that Moses here should not live, should not lead his people out of Egypt, that Christ should not save his people.

God is sovereign, that we have a God that is sovereign, and we have a God of love and mercy, that the life of Moses was spared, and Christ, the Son of the Living God, died for his people upon the cross.

Moses. Moses then, his life was spared. In his, those very tender years, the Lord so worked it, he should have that influence.

Yes, that nurse that was fine for him, was his own mother. father. We know that he was under the daughter of Pharaoh's protection.

No harm could now come to him. But even in this, oh, if you know how Satan works so often in your own heart, it's Satan's scheme and plan that when Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's household, then his heart could be turned against the Lord's people.

[18 : 28] Oh, have you known what it is for the Lord to watch over your ways in your young life? Oh, what a mercy it is. This is what we pray for for the dear young people and the children. Oh, that the Lord would watch over their ways and keep them.

They have to go out into the world, they have to mix with the world, they have to make their way in the world. But oh, we have to pray that the Lord would keep them, keep them from the evil of the world.

Moses, then I believe, was kept in Pharaoh's household. But he was given the advantages of, we believe, the education and all those things in his early life that was to prepare him for the Lord's work.

Because when he had to return to Pharaoh's household, another Pharaoh, another king of Egypt, then he knew the ways of the Egyptian court.

Pharaoh's heart, he knew how to approach Pharaoh, he knew how to gain his ear. You see how the Lord so then brought him up in that way.

[19 : 47] We know that there came the time, and this was also in the Lord's hand when he had to flee. He went into Midian and in the backside of the desert there he looked after his father-in-law's sheep and there was a time of teaching there that the Lord taught him.

You've been in the backside of the desert. Oh, blessed place it is. Seems to be so barren, but I believe at that time Moses lived very close to his God.

the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him out of the bush that burned with fire yet was not consumed.

How the Lord gave him then charge to go and set his people free.

He said, Lord, who am I? He could not go. He felt himself to be so unworthy. He felt he could not speak.

[21 : 05] He felt to be as nothing. Oh, that those that go out to preach would likewise feel that they were the same. I fear it is not always so.

Oh, I know the Lord's sermon here this night would agree with me in this. how we feel to be insufficient for these things, to be so foolish, so weak.

and yet what is that promise that the Lord has given? For my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Oh, then, then we can go and go resting out all upon him. But it is not just then, the Lord's servants.

There are those times when you, the hearers, may feel, well, you speak in these different ways and you may say, well, it's all very well.

[22 : 09] You walk in these paths, you have the Lord's help and support. This is what these words and these promises, who these are spoken to. No, it's for every child of God, for every path that they are called to walk in, I will be with thee.

Precious promise. And it will be fulfilled. It must be fulfilled.

You may have heard me speak in this way. I do honestly believe it. Then so that is brought to cry like our Lord spoke of it in the parable of the publican, God be merciful to me a sinner.

That is a prayer when it comes out of the secret cryings and groanings within. That cry that comes out of the depths.

that cry that comes out of the heart of a poor sinner that the Lord has brought down into that very place. The Lord will hear and the Lord will answer.

[23 : 35] Oh, can it be possible, you might say, can it be possible that the Lord would hear the cry of this poor sinner?

yes. And this promise here, what do I notice about the promises?

And this is where those souls, they desire to have the spirits sealing upon them. They desire to have the reality of it in their soul.

that there is a sureness there. There are no ifs and buts in it. No, the Lord speaks in this positive and very clear way.

I will be with thee. have you longed for the Lord's presence? Without it, you know that you must fall, that you must make a mistake, that you must take a wrong turning, that it will be brought to confusion, be brought to nothing.

[24 : 44] You know what it is like. If you're left to yourself, oh, how many foolish, foolish, sinful mistakes you make. And this is where the Lord's people are brought to cry more and more.

And isn't it so as the years go by, do you not find it to be so? That this is your cry more and more, Lord, leave me not, forsake me not, go before me, be with me, fulfil these precious promises, and oh, that those promises might be mine.

We often speak of walking out what the Lord has spoken, that path of walking out in different things.

There is a walking out in this word, walking with the Lord's presence. We will not want anything else at all.

No, to have his presence in all things, his smile resting upon us, his presence going before us. To continue then with Moses, he was of that type of man, that type of disposition.

[26 : 21] We could almost say then the Lord lost patience with him. Now I feel that we can say in this, he had to constantly fall before the feet of his God and say, I am unworthy of the least of thy notice.

How can I be one that leads these people forth? What do we often forget? What do we do we do we do we do we do we may not have realised at the time, did Moses?

I am sure he didn't. But nevertheless afterward I believe he could say, yes the Lord led me in these paths and in these ways to prepare me.

And there have been sometimes those hard trying paths and they go on through our lives. Do you know there are those times when we seem to get out of one trouble, one difficulty, one trial and we feel to ourselves well we shall have now a time of peace.

We have seen the Lord's faithfulness and goodness in this. Now we can have that time when we can enjoy his presence. We will not be disturbed so much in their thoughts and their minds and then something else comes in.

[27 : 47] Do you know the Lord will never let us settle back upon our knees but oh that we might be ever found upon our knees and that is where the Lord would have his dear people to be ever upon their knees before him.

Now Moses was a man that was greatly favored. The Lord spoke with him.

And I believe we can say that this was why Moses felt himself to be as nothing. And we will be as nothing. We will truly feel it and know it if the Lord speaks unto us.

Do you remember those times? Do you remember the time of your first love, the time of your espousals, when the Lord spoke very sweetly unto yourself?

How did you feel? You felt to be as nothing. and he was all and in all unto your soul. Do you long for the returning of that time?

[29 : 06] Do you long for those sweet moments to be yours again? Well I believe that in the lives and experiences of the Lord's people those times are dotted here and there through their lives.

But it will not be constantly so. we could not bear it. Can any man live who has seen the face of God? Do you know what I mean?

If we were ever upon the night, we would be in such a place that, well here, spirits could not bear up under it.

Do you know the safest place? Flesh doesn't like it. it's in the valley of humiliation. But it's the safest place for a poor sinner to be found.

For there the Lord hears their cries and there the Lord meets with them and there the Lord has promised. What has he promised? Yes, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

[30 : 19] I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. No, I will go before thee. What do we find then with Moses?

is he was a man who had a sinful heart.

I do not mean this in a wrong way and I do not speak it in a judgmental way. I am speaking it in this way. The Lord's people are only what they are by the grace of God.

I mean if they walk in the ways of righteousness and of truth and uprightly before the Lord. They have then old enemy within their old nature that rises up so often.

Do you mourn over it? I do. Peter knew what it was, a hasty spirit. he spoke without considering what he said, what the outcome would be.

[31 : 35] And Moses wanted the Lord to say to him that second time when the water was to be brought forth out of the rock. Speak unto the rock that might bring forth water.

Now Moses, and you know we can sympathise with Moses here I believe. he'd just about had enough of the children of Israel.

They'd complained, they'd turned aside from God's commands, and you know that must have hurt Moses. You think of this, those of you that are truly exercised regarding the house of God, whatever your position might be, it's not just us ministers, it's not just the deacons, it's not just the members of the church but it's others as well.

When you see those that rebel against the word of God, when you see those things that you, oh you cannot accept, when they grate against you, how that wounds you within, why?

Because your heart is tender before the Lord. You cannot bear to see these things. Now with Moses at this time, those people had been so rebellious, so outspoken, they'd not walked in those ways that he'd brought before them at the Lord's command.

[32 : 59] He'd tried to lead those people in the right way, knowing how he had to prove that he could not in his own strength. And so he said unto them, shall we bring water out of this rock, ye rebellious people?

And he lifted up his rod and struck him. He dishonoured God. And God said to him, because thou hast disobeyed me, thou shalt not enter into the land of Canaan, into the promised land.

Oh, he would see it. He would fulfil that that God had commanded him to do. And what do we find with Moses?

is he didn't rebel, did he? He fell under the Lord's hand. There's the working of grace within.

You envy it. I do. You might bow under the Lord's hand in all these things.

[34 : 10] You may be so be given grace. Like Job could say, the Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. So Moses then brought them right to this very place and now Joshua.

Joshua, the son of man, Moses' minister, was to be the new leader. And I fear that we can say this, he did not seek that position at all.

he did not seek it, but the Lord put him in that place. What a mercy it is, if in any humble, lowly place that we may know that we are where the Lord has placed us, where the Lord has put us.

What a mercy this is. oh, what a great mercy it is to be found in our right place. You might say, but I thought I was.

I thought I was. But the Lord has commanded to prepare my stuff for removing. Do you know what it is? Sometimes in their lives we suddenly have to take a different direction.

[35 : 33] Never thought it would come to it. Look back upon those times. There might be something in the future with any of you I do not know. But to be in the Lord's hand and to be given that gracious submission and to know that it is in accordance with his sovereign will and purpose.

Those people, they could not stay in Egypt. What we think of Abraham then, let's go back a little further in the history of the word of God. We think of Abraham.

The Lord commanded him in those different ways and those different times. He was one that had no settled place here below.

But he had that heavenly city. Oh, even that new Jerusalem that his eyes were fixed to the towards. And isn't it so with the Lord's people?

We here below we have no settled rest. No, but we seek a city who's builder and maker is God. And what have we proved?

[36 : 49] And what shall we prove? You know, I feel that there is this with the Lord's promises. there is that that has gone before, that we have tasted, handled and felt of the word of life, of novice goodness and of his mercy, that gives us the faith.

And do not say to me that you have no faith, for how have you ventured thus far? faith ventures with their whole dependence upon the Lord.

And faith can say his ways are best and he will lead me in that way that is right. Yes, faith then takes hold of those things that the Lord has spoken, that the Lord has fulfilled, that the Lord has brought to pass, and they have to turn them into that cry unto the Lord, well, look at Jacob.

You look at Jacob. The Lord said that he would be with him. And what did Jacob say? If thou wilt be with me.

Those promises then that the Lord's people are brought to plead, those promises that they have to lay before the Lord at the throne of grace, those promises, yes, that they have to watch to see what the Lord working in it.

[38 : 31] They have to venture sometimes and venture by faith, but oh, each step they have to cry unto the Lord that the Lord might be with them, that he would not leave them, that he would not forsake them.

And what do you really mean in this? Isn't it this? Lord, leave me not to my foolish, weak, sinful self, oh, that would turn aside from thy ways, thy commands and thy purposes.

And oh, what a mercy it is that the Lord has not forsaken us. And what do we, what can we take from this then?

If the Lord has been with us, he will be with us unto the end. My thoughts go to those three that were cast into the burning fire of the furnace.

The Lord said to them, I believe, which enabled them to stand firm for the truth. He had said to them before, I will be with thee.

[39 : 53] And he was with them in standing up for the truth, not bowing down to the image, to the idol, not worshipping it.

They did not fear man, for they knew that the Lord was on their side. Now, what did they know? They knew in that furnace that because it was heated to that great heat seven times greater than it was wont to be heated, that it slew those that cast them in.

They knew the presence of Christ in their midst. I will be with thee. I will be with thee. And as the time hastens on, well, we know what happened with Joshua, how he commanded the children of Israel.

He said, you've not passed this way heretofore. This is the way that you must walk. The Lord goeth before you. There must be that space that is left.

There was the Ark of the Covenant. There were the priests that bore it. They went before the people. They stood in the River Jordan and they stood firm there.

[41 : 17] The people passed over on dry land. There were the stones that were taken and raised up as a memorial to the Lord's gracious appearing and to his goodness toward them.

What mean he by these stones? This is what the Lord hath wrought. And are there not those stones of remembrance? Are there not those pillars that we have raised up in times past?

Then we can say, there the Lord helped me. There the Lord appeared for me. There the Lord went before me. And then as we look forward, there is that.

that we do look onward. And how do we look onward? Is it not as the Apostle spoke of it? And oh, perhaps I must bring my thoughts to a close in this way.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, by faith, those that walk by faith, I will be with thee, those that approve that the Lord had been with them and had known what it was for the Lord to be with them even unto the end.

[42 : 32] Amen. Yes, that the Lord would be with them. But what did he say? Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset us.

There are those things that hold us back. There are those many weights, many fears, many stumbling blocks, many things in the way. sometimes it's loved ones as well.

And these besetting sins that are found within, looking, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our fame.

Yes, that looking onward can only be looking unto Christ. In that trembling faith that he will be with us, that he will not forsake us and he will never fail us.

Finally, and I must close in this way, and I trust that the Lord has put it upon my spirit to speak to you in this way. I do not know what the future holds for you here.

[43 : 57] But this I believe I can say. The Lord has spoken and I trust that the Lord has given me this word to come before you this evening, perhaps even just for this, as I was with Moses. So I will be with? I will not fail nor forsake me. Amen. Thank you.