

Trial by the Word

(No. 1277)

Delivered on Lord's-Day Morning, February 6th, 1876, by

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At the [Metropolitan Tabernacle](#), Newington.

"Until the time that his word came: the word of the Lord tried him." [Psalm 105:19](#)

JOSEPH WAS ALTOGETHER an extraordinary personage. He was a young man of great personal beauty, and he exhibited also a lovely character, full of gentleness, kindness, and truth. The grace of God had made him as beautiful in mind as nature had made him comely in person. He was also exceedingly thoughtful; perhaps at first rather more thoughtful than active, so that his brothers, not only because he had seen two remarkable visions, but probably because of his contemplative habits, said of him, "Behold, this dreamer cometh." He was the swan in the duck's nest; his superior genius and character separated him from the rest of the family, and none of them could understand him; he was, therefore, the object of their envy and hatred, so that they even proposed to murder him, and ultimately sold him for a slave. He was destined, however, for a nobler lot than theirs; they were to feed their flocks, but he was ordained to feed the world; they were to rule their own families, but he to govern the most ancient of empires. From the very beginning his supremacy in Israel had been foretold by a double dream. Their sheaves were seen to pay homage to his sheaf, while the sun and moon and eleven stars also made obeisance to him. This was the light which shone upon Joseph's early days, the star of prophecy which afterwards gilded his darkest moments and cheered him on while he endured affliction. You may rest assured, brethren, that wherever God gives extraordinary gifts or graces, and appoints an extraordinary career, he also appoints unusual trial. There is a verse which I think it is Cowper's which says that

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

To eminence of any desirable kind there is no royal road, but we must wade through tribulation to it. For Joseph to become prime minister of Egypt the path lay through the prison-house: to all true honor the road is difficult. Expect, then, dear friend, if God gifts thee, or if he graces thee, that he intends to try thee. Such a reflection will tone down thine exultation and prevent its degenerating into pride, and it will aid thee to gird up the loins of thy mind and stand in all sobriety, prepared for that which awaits thee. Look upon talents and graces, and high hopes of eminent usefulness as signs of inevitable tribulation. Do not congratulate yourself, and sing, "Soul, take thine ease; thou art happy in possessing such special gifts," but prepare to do the life-work to which thou art called. Thou art favored of the Lord, but do not look for the happiness of ease, carnal enjoyment, and human approval,

for "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."

Joseph's worst trial happened to him when he was accused of attempting a foul assault upon his mistress. Who would not writhe under so horrible a charge? When he was put in prison, and his feet were made fast with fetters, he became exceedingly troubled, so that the iron surrounded his soul. How long he was in "durance vile," as a chained prisoner, we do not know, but it must have been some considerable period; and during those dreary months thoughts of his father and his fond love, memories of his cruel brothers, and reflections upon his sad lot, must have keenly wounded him. He was pained to remember how much his character had suffered from a woman's malicious falsehood, and most of all how much blasphemy the heathen had poured upon the name of God, whom he had represented in the house of Potiphar. Do you wonder that the iron entered into his soul?

The word of the Lord tried him very severely. Alone, in darkness, in an uncomfortable cell, his limbs fretted with chains, no one to speak to him, every one condemning him as guilty of the basest treachery towards the man who had made him his confidential and favored servant—he found himself regarded as the offscouring of all things, and the object of ridicule to all who were about him. "The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him;" but, blessed be God, his bow abode in strength, and he overcame at the last.

This morning we will commune together upon the trials of Joseph, and our own afflictions. Our first reflections shall be spent upon *the importance of trial*; secondly, we will consider *the peculiarity of the believer's trial* for "the word of the Lord tried him;" and thirdly, we will observe *the continuance and the conclusion of the trial*,—"until the time that his word came." May the ever blessed Spirit direct our meditations.

I. First, let us dwell upon THE IMPORTANCE OF TRIAL. The Lord might easily have taken every one of us home to heaven the moment we were converted. Certainly his omnipotence was equal to the task of our immediate perfect sanctification. If the dying thief was rendered fit to be in Paradise the same day on which he believed, so might each one of us have been made ready to enter heaven; but it has not so pleased God. We doubt not that there are myriads before the eternal throne who have reached the abode of bliss without treading the winepress of affliction.

"Babes hither caught from womb and breast,
Claim right to sing above the rest;
Because they found the happy shore,
They never saw nor sought before."

Theirs is a victory for which they never fought; they wear a crown though they never bore a cross. To sovereign grace these blessed ones will never cease to ascribe their bliss. But as for those of us who live to riper years, it will be written concerning all of us as of others who have gone before, "These are they who came out of great tribulation, and have

washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." But why is it so appointed? Is this discipline of any use to us? The word here used is in itself a light upon the question, "The word of the Lord assayed him" that would be the correct translation. The word of the Lord assayed Joseph as gold is assayed: it is a term best understood at the Mint, and among refiners. Trial in the Christian church is the Lord's fining pot, which is never off the fire. It has this excellent effect, that it separates the precious from the vile. As long as the church exists, I suppose she will have traitors amongst her number, for if Judas intruded under the watchful eye of the Chief Shepherd, we may be pretty sure that many a Judas will elude the far less watchful eyes of the minor shepherds. Because trial and persecution test men's professions, they are used as the winnowing fan in the Lord's hand, as it is written, "He will thoroughly purge his floor." In persecution, the mere professors, the camp-followers and hangers-on, soon flee away, for they have no heart to true religion when the profession of it involves the cross. They could walk with Jesus in silver slippers, but they cannot travel with him when his bleeding feet go barefoot over the world's rough ways, and therefore they depart every man to his own, and we may say of them "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." So that trial as a permanent institution is of much service to the church in promoting her purity, and we are bound to praise the Lord whose fire is in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem.

A similar process goes on in the individual soul. No Christian man is all that he thinks he is; our purest gold is alloyed. We have none of us so much faith as we impute to ourselves, nor so much patience, or humility, or meekness, or love to God, or love to men. Spurious coin swells our apparent wealth. It is amazing how rich and increased in goods we are till the Lord deals with us by a trial, and then full often we discover that we are naked, and poor, and miserable in the very respects in which we boasted ourselves. Oh, man, if thou be a child of God thou art like a house which he is building with gold, and silver, and precious stones; but by reason of thine old nature thou art mixing up with the divine material much of thine own wood, and hay, and stubble; therefore is it that the fire is made to rage around thee to burn out this injurious stuff which mars the whole fabric. If the Holy Spirit be pleased to bless thine afflictions to thee then wilt thou be daily led to put away the materials of the old nature with deep abhorrence and repentance, and thus shall the true work of God which he has built upon the sure foundation, stand in its true beauty, and thou shalt be builded for eternity.

Every good man is not only tested by trial, but is the better for it. To the evil man affliction brings evil, he rebels against the Lord, and, like Pharaoh, his heart is hardened. But to the Christian it is good to be afflicted, for, when sanctified by the Spirit trial is a means of instruction to him, second to none in value. The rod of God teacheth us more than all the voices of his ministers. When the Christian has been passed through the fire, the assaying,

by removing the dross, adds a new lustre to the gold. Brother, thou art not what thou shalt be, nor canst thou be what thou shalt be except through a measure of trial. Child, it is needful for thee to feel the weight of thy Father's hand, or thou wilt never behave thyself as a man. Thou must see his face veiled with frowns, and hear his voice in harshness chiding thee for thy transgressions, otherwise thou wilt always retain the follies of childhood. Our chastisements are our promotions. They are privileges more precious than the rights of princes. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Joseph could say this, and all the Lord's Josephs either own it now or will have to own it hereafter.

Let us look a little more closely, and we shall see that trial did much for Joseph. First, *it corrected the juvenile errors of the past*. Far be it from me to find any fault with so admirable a youthful character; but it was youthful, and needed maturing. As a simple-hearted, trustful child, he certainly told his dreams quite as freely as it was wise to have done. Perhaps he thought that his brothers and his father would have been as gratified as himself, but even his father rebuked him, and his brothers were indignant to the last degree. It was natural that a boy of seventeen should be pleased with the thought of power and eminence, but such a feeling might have gendered evil, and therefore it needed to be toned down, and its eager expression kept within bounds. We find Joseph more self-possessed and more reticent by-and-by, and we read in after life that he restrained himself, ay, when the strongest passions were at work within him, and his own brother Benjamin was before him, he sacrificed his feelings to the dictates of prudence. We see no more boyish exultation, no more telling of his dreams: in quietness and confidence he found his strength. This he no doubt learned amid the sorrows of his prison-house.

He was, perhaps, also in his early days too much in a hurry to realize the promised blessing. He would see the sheaves do obeisance to his sheaf at once, while he and his brethren were as yet but green corn, and the harvest had not come: hence the pleasure he had in the coat of many colors which his father's fondness put upon him. He thought the dream was being realized, no doubt, when that princely garment was put upon him, and he began in some measure to exercise the dignity which the Lord had promised him by reporting his brethren to his father, which action I do not condemn, but it, no doubt, made his brothers feel that he took too much upon himself, since they were many of them old enough to have been his father, and had families of their own. At any rate, he had not learned then, as he had to learn afterwards, during thirteen weary years, that visions tarry, and that we must wait for them, since the promise is not for to-day nor for to-morrow, but abides until it reaches ripeness. God promiseth us great things which we see not as yet, and therefore we must with patience wait for them; we must not put on the coat of many colors yet, nor be hasty to rebuke our elder brothers, for we are not yet set on high by the hand of the Lord. Joseph had his royal coat in due time, and he had the fullest conceivable opportunity for reproving his brothers when in after days they went down into Egypt to buy corn, and their

hearts smote them for all the wrong that they had done to him. In prison Joseph learned to wait: I do not know a harder or more valuable lesson. It is worth while to suffer slander and to feel the fret of fetters to acquire the patience which sits still and knows that Jehovah is God. To tarry awhile and not to pluck our fruit while it is yet green and sour, this is rare wisdom. To be instructed to leave the time as well as the form of the blessing in the hands of God is to have been to school with the best result.

Joseph also learned in his trial much that was good for present use. For instance, he found by sweet experience that the divine presence can cheer us anywhere. If he had always been at home with his father, always his father's darling, he would have known that the love of God is sweet to a favored youth, but no one would have been astonished at that. Even Satan would have said, "Well may he rejoice in thee, O Lord. Hast thou not set a hedge about him and all that he hath?" But he learned that God could be with him when he was sold for the price of a slave: with him when led as a captive across the desert, when he walked wearily by the camel's side with the Ishmaelites: with him in the slave mart to find him a master who might appreciate him; with him when he became a servant in the house, by blessing him, prospering him, and causing him to find favor in the eyes of his master till he became overseer of all that Potiphar had: and then, best of all, though some would say worst of all, he learned that God could be with him in a dungeon. He could not have known that if he had stopped at home, he must be brought into the thick darkness, that the brightness of the divine presence might be the more fully seen. There is nothing in this world so delightful as the light of God's countenance when all around is dark. You may tell me that the presence of Jesus is glorious upon Tabor's glorious mount, and I will not contradict you, though I have realized the poet's words☒

"At the too transporting light
Darkness rushes o'er my sight."

but give me the soft subdued light of God's love in adversity; Christ on the stormy waters for me: Christ in the midst of the furnace with his persecuted ones. Never does the Lord's love taste so sweet as when all the world is wormwood and gall. See how the mother presses her dear babe to her bosom when it is sick, or has had a bone broken. The little one may run about the house at other times, and the mother is pleased with it and loves it, but if you want to see all her tenderness, if you would read all her heart, you should see her when it scarcely breathes, when she fears that every moment will be its last. Then all the mother is revealed. How she fondles it, and what a store of sweet words she brings forth. So, if you would see all of God, you must know what deeps of trouble mean, for then the great heart, the glorious, infinite love comes welling over, and the soul is filled with all the fullness of God. It was worth while, I say, for Joseph to be falsely accused, and to be laid in irons, to learn experimentally the supporting power of the heavenly Father's smile.

There, too, Joseph learned that temporal things are not to be depended upon. The indulgences of his father's house end in his being sold as a slave, and the coat of many colors is dipped in blood. His prosperity in the house of Potiphar also came to a sudden end, and from being an overseer he became a prisoner in irons. Now he knew that earthly good is not to be depended on, and therefore not worthy to be the object of pursuit to an immortal soul: he sees that all things beneath the moon change, waxing and waning as doth the moon herself, and he learns to look to something higher and more stable than circumstances and surroundings.

Here, too, he was instructed in one sad truth, which we are all so slow to learn, namely, to "cease from man whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?" I do not think Joseph had learned that fully when he interpreted the dream of the butler. It was very natural, and therefore not to be censured that he should say, "Think of me when it shall be well with thee;" but when two whole years had passed and all the while he was forgotten, Joseph must have felt that, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm." He ceased from man, and no longer looked for enlargement from that quarter. Cost us what it may, we are great gainers by any process which enables us to say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him." It is a blessed thing when providence knocks away all the dog-shores, and lets the vessel launch into her true element. See how freely she floats upon the deep sea of God's everlasting love and immutable faithfulness. She is no more liable to decay from the dry rot of carnal confidence, but on the broad sea of divine power "she walks the waters as a thing of life" in joyful reliance upon the ever blessed God. Confidence in man seems bred in our bone, but it must be taken out of us, and happy shall the day be which sees us rid of all hope but that which stays itself upon the Lord alone.

But, dear brethren, the chief use of trial to Joseph and to us is very often *seen in our future lives*. While Joseph was tried in prison God's great object was to prepare him for the government which awaited him. It was designed first to give him power to bear power: a rare acquirement. Solomon says, "As the fining pot to silver, and the furnace to gold, so is a man to his praise." Many a man can bear affliction, but few men can endure prosperity; and I have marked it, and you must have marked it too, that the most perilous thing in all the world is to step suddenly from obscurity into power. Have we not seen men, illiterate and unknown, suddenly introduced to the Christian pulpit, and made much of, and has it not frequently turned out that their names have been by-and-by prudently forgotten, for they were overthrown by the dizzy heights to which they were lifted? It is far better that a man should fight his way up to his position, that he should be assailed by enemies and distrusted by friends, and should pass through a probationary career. Even then he can only stand as the Lord holds him, but without it he is in especial peril. Hence the apostle says, "not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." If I knew

that some young man here present would be greatly owned of God in the future, and become in future a prince in our Israel, if by lifting up of this finger I could screen him from fierce criticism, misrepresentation, and abuse, I would not do it, because, severe as the ordeal might be to him, I am persuaded it is needful that he should pass through it in order to make him able to bear the giddy heights of the position for which God intends him. Joseph on the throne of Egypt, I know not what he might have been if first of all he had not been laid in the stocks. His feet learned to stand fast on a throne through having been set fast in a dungeon. His gold chain was worn without pride because he had worn a chain of iron; and he was fit to be the ruler of princes because he had himself been a servant among prisoners. Through his trial God gave him power to bear power, and this is a far rarer gift than the power to endure oppression and contempt.

Joseph was also trained to bear the other dangers of prosperity. These are neither few nor small. Great riches and high positions are not to be desired. Agur's prayer is a wise one: "Give me neither poverty nor riches." Joseph was in great peril when he came to be lord over the land of Egypt, but during his time in prison he had been learning to spell out a mystery and answer a riddle. Practically, his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream was what he had been learning in prison, namely, that it is idle to boast of the fat kine, since the lean kine can soon eat them up, and it is unwise to be proud of the full ears, because the withered ears can soon devour them. Pharaoh saw in the dream the lean devouring the full-fleshed, but Joseph alone understood it. He saw his fat kine when he was in his father's house eaten up when he was sold as a slave; he saw his full ears when he was in Potiphar's house devoured by the withered ears when he was thrown into prison, and he now knew that there was nothing here below worth our relying upon, since on the chariot of all earthly good there rides a Nemesis, and every day is followed by a night. He was tutored to be a ruler for he had learned the prisoner's side of politics, and felt how hard it was for men to be unjustly condemned without trial. He foresaw that this could not be for ever endured, and that one day the long-suffering lean kine would be goaded to fury, and would eat up the fat ones that oppressed them. Hence Joseph's rule would be just and generous, for in this he would see the elements which would preserve law and order, and prevent the poorer sort from overturning everything.

In the prison, too, he had learned to speak out. His whole course had been a rehearsal fitting him to be bravely truthful before the king. What temptation was there to him when he stood before Pharaoh to conceal his faith in God? To him, I say, who had risked life and lost liberty for God's sake? It would have been a very great temptation to an ordinary young man not to say anything about the one God in the presence of the head of the Egyptian superstitions, but this did not suggest itself to Joseph. Had he confessed his God in Potiphar's house? Did he not say to Potiphar's wicked wife, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God"? He had stood to his God in prison, and told the butler and baker that

"interpretations belong unto God": and now he stands before Pharaoh he does not flinch for a moment, but he says "God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace." Why, brethren, have you ever thought of the moral courage of Joseph in interpreting that dream? All the soothsayers there who had tried to interpret it and could not—was it likely the heathen king would believe a youth who had been a slave and was fresh brought from a dungeon? When he foretold seven years of plenty and seven years of famine, it was a marvel that Pharaoh believed him. If the narrative had gone on to say, "Then the king said unto his servants, cast this man into prison and feed him with the bread of affliction and the water of affliction until we see whether his word shall come to pass," we should not have been at all surprised. The magicians naturally enough would be ready to say that he was set on to give this preposterous interpretation by persons interested in selling corn; or else they would urge that a man who dared to foretell events so utterly improbable had better be sent back to his prison house. But Joseph believed the word of the Lord, and he spoke with the accent of conviction, and Pharaoh believed also. Whence came this simple-minded courage? Whence this boldness? It was the right royal valour which doth hedge about a virtuous soul—or rather the fearlessness which follows from the fear of God. He stood forth and delivered his message, and the Lord established his word. He had been preparing for this in the day of his sorrow: like a good sword-blade, he had been passed through the fire and through the fire again, that now he might not fail in the day of battle. Oh, dear brothers and sisters, may you gain as much from tribulation as Joseph did, and you will do so if the Holy Spirit sanctifies them to you.

II. We must pass on secondly to notice THE PECULIARITY OF THE TRIAL. According to the text, "the word of the Lord tried him." This might have escaped our observation if the Spirit of God had not placed it upon record. "The word of the Lord tried him." How was that? Potiphar tried him, and the chains tried him, but did the word of the Lord try him? Yes. But there is a previous question—how did he receive any word of the Lord? There was no Bible then; Moses had not lived, there was not even the book of Genesis,—what word of God had he? His dreams were to him the word of God, for they were communications from heaven; the instruction he received from his father was also the word of God to him, his knowledge of the covenant which God had made with Abraham and Isaac, and his father Jacob, was God's word to him. Moreover, the secret teachings of the Holy Spirit quickened his conscience and afforded him light on the way. When there was no written word the divine Spirit spoke without words, impressing truth upon the heart itself. All these were to Joseph the word of God. How did it try him? It tried him thus,—the word said to him in his conscience, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Without that word he would not have been tried, for nature suggested compliance with his mistress's desires. The pleasure of ease, of wealth, of favor, were to be had through that woman's smile, but the word of God came in and said, "Thou shalt not," and Joseph was tried. The test, however, he could bear: grace enabled him to flee youthful lusts and to cry, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

The trial which arose out of his innocence must have again tested him by the word of God. There he is in prison for what? Why, for an action so pure that had he been set on a throne for it he would have well deserved it. Do you not think that many questions perplexed him while he lay in prison? Would not the evil spirit say, "Were you not a fool after all? Do you not think that your chastity was mere superstition?" Thus would the purity of his heart be tried, and the word would search him, and test his hatred of sin. Would not the word of God try his constancy as it asked, "Do you now believe?" What problems were put before him? Is there a moral governor of the universe? If so why does he allow the innocent to suffer? Why am I in fetters, and the lewd woman in favor? Could not an omnipotent God deliver me? Why then does he leave me here? Could Joseph in the face of such questions still cling to the faithful word? He could, and he did; but the word tried him, and proved his constancy, his faith, and his integrity.

Then, too, the word of the Lord which he had heard many years before would come to him and try him. His trembling heart would say, Has God ever spoken to you at all? Those dreams, were they not childish? That voice which you thought you heard in your heart was it not imagination? This providence of God which has prospered you wherever you have gone was it not after all good luck? Has the living God ever revealed himself to one who at length became a slave? Look at your fetters, and ask if you can be his child? And then I suspect that during the time in which Joseph was fettered the word of God had ceased to speak to him as of old: he did not dream nor interpret dreams, and that seems to have been the especial way in which the Lord revealed himself to him. Brother, do you know what it is to be tried by the cessation of comfortable communications? Did you ever live for a time without feeling any text of Scripture applied to your soul, without beholding any vivid flashes of the divine light, or any in-streamings of the Spirit's power through the word? If you have been so afflicted, you have been tempted to enquire, did the Lord ever speak to me at all? Have I been truly converted, or is it after all a myth? And these things which I have looked upon as communications from heaven, have they been after all nothing but the vapours of a heated brain? The word of God tried him, and he had to weigh himself in the balances of the sanctuary.

The bright promise of future good would also try him. His fears would say "How is it possible that your brothers should pay homage to you? You are far away from your family and cannot hope to see them again for as for the sheaves that did obeisance to your sheaf, where are they? You are shut up and cannot come forth. Within these walls the jealous Potiphar has doomed you to die." The word of God would say to him then, "Can you believe me? Can you trust the Lord to fulfill his promises?" Oh, my brethren, it is easy for us to talk about this, but if we had to pass through the same ordeal, lying friendless in a dungeon under an accusation of guilt which we abhorred, far away from all we loved, we might feel the word of God to be a very trying thing, and perhaps the dark thought might even flit across our

spirit, "Would God I had never heard that word but could have lived as the Egyptians do, for then I might have been dwelling in pleasure in Potiphar's house still. But this word of God into what trials has it dragged me, into what difficulties has it thrown me. Is it, after all, worth while to know it?" I remember once being very, very ill, and a man who had no godliness, but who was full of wicked wit, accosted me thus. "Ah, you see, whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." "Yes," I said, "I am suffering greatly." "Well," said he with a sneer, "I can do very well without such love, so long as I get off such chastening." I burst into tears, and my very soul boiled over as I cried "If the Lord were to grind me to powder, I would accept it at his hands, so that I might but have his love. It is you who need to be pitied, for sound as your health may be and merry as you look, you are a poor creature, since you have missed the only thing worth living for." I let fly a volley at him, I could not help it. I felt forced to stand up for my Master. Joseph took the Lord's yoke upon him gladly, and found rest unto his soul. He counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the luxuries of Potiphar's house. Thus the word tried him and he was found upright.

I have no doubt the word of the Lord tried Joseph in this way. That word seemed to say, "You thought you loved your father's God, Joseph, do you love him now? You have lost your father's house, you have forfeited the ease of Potiphar's household, you have sacrificed your liberty, and perhaps the next thing will be that you will be taken out to die, can you still hold fast to the Lord?" Joseph was firm in his allegiance, and prepared to follow the Lord at all hazards to the death. The word had come to him, and it tried his steadfastness. Now I may be addressing some young men who are getting into all sorts of trouble through being Christians. I congratulate you! Thus does the Lord train his bravest soldiers. I may be addressing some of you older men who are passing through storms of trial mainly because you hold fast your integrity. I congratulate you! Rejoice ye in this day and leap for joy, for you are only enduring trials which have fallen to the lot of better men than yourselves. Men do not put base metal into the furnace, they spend their assaying upon precious gold. I see in the fact of your trial some evidence of your value, and I congratulate you, my brethren, and pray the Lord to bear you up and bear you through, that like Joseph you may be of great service to Israel and bring glory to God.

III. The last thought is THE CONTINUANCE AND THE CONCLUSION OF THE TRIAL. Trial does not last for ever. Cheer up; the tide ebbs out, but the flood will return again. Note the word "*until*." He who counts the stars also numbers your sorrows, and if he ordains the number ten your trials will never be eleven. The text says, "*until*"; for the Lord appoints the bounds of the proud waters, and they shall no more go over your soul when they reach the boundary of the divine "*until*." "Until the time that his word came" the same word which tried Joseph in due time set him free. If the Lord gives the turnkey permission to keep us in prison there we must remain, *until* he sends a warrant for our liberation, and then all the devils in hell cannot hold us in bondage for an instant longer. My dear brother,

I want you in your trouble to look entirely to God, whose word is a word of power. He speaks, and it is done. He has spoken trouble to you, but he can just as readily speak comfort to you. Never mind what the butler's word is. Do not entreat him, saying, "When it is well with thee speak a word for me." The butler's word will not avail, it is Jehovah's word you need, for "where the word of a king is there is power." It is a blessed thing to know that trouble comes direct from God, whatever the secondary agent may be. You must not say, "I could have borne it if it had not been for that wicked woman." Never mind the wicked woman, look to God as overruling her malice and everything else. He sends the trial, and therefore look to him to deliver you from it.

"'Tis he that lifts our comforts high,
Or sinks them in the grave."

He shuts us up in prison, and he brings us out again.

The time was in God's hands, and it was very wisely ordered. Suppose that the butler had thought of Joseph, and had spoken to Pharaoh about the interpretation of his dream, the probabilities are that when the courtiers of Pharaoh's court heard it they would have made the halls of the palace ring with laughter; and the magicians would especially have poured scorn on the idea that a slave boy who had been imprisoned for scandalous behavior knew more about interpreting dreams than the wise men of Egypt who had been brought up to the art and had gained high degrees in the profession. It would have been a theme of ridicule all over the land. It was the wrong time, and God would not let the butler recollect, because that recollection would have marred the plot and spoiled the whole business: but God's "until" came at the nick of time when Joseph was ready for court, and when Pharaoh was ready to appreciate Joseph. The hour needed its man, and here was the hour for the man. The straight way from the dungeon to the throne was not open until Pharaoh dreamed his dream, then must Joseph come forth and not before. Oh, brother, sit still and wait. The deliverance you are craving for is not ripe yet; wait while the word tries you, for that same word will in due time set you free.

The word set him free in a way which cleared his character, for never a whisper would be raised against him, and Potiphar would know the truth, even if he had not already guessed it. It set him free in a way which secured his eminence, and gave him the means of providing for his father and his household. He might have been liberated from prison before, and have remained only a common person, or gone back to be a slave to some new master; but now his liberation secured his emancipation from slavery and set him in the position which enabled him to provide for his father and his family in the land of Goshen, and so the sheaves did homage to his sheaf, and the sun and moon and eleven stars fulfilled the vision which he had seen so many years before.

You see, brethren, there is a time of deliverance, and the time is fixed of God, and it is a right time: therefore we have quietly to wait for it. Doth not the husbandman wait for the

precious fruits of the earth, and will not you tarry for the fruits of the promise? Be not impetuous. Hush those murmuring thoughts, never allow rash expressions to escape your lips. Bear on, young man, bear on. Ay, and greyheaded man, bear on, bear on. The anvil breaks the hammers in the long run; bear on, bear on. The rock breaks the billows, and is not itself broken. Bear the trials which come to you from God and from his word with joy and patience, for the end is not yet, but when it cometh it shall be everlasting joy.

I think I hear some saying all round the place, "Ah, I see these believers are a very tried people, who would wish to be one of them?" Hearken, friend, and I will tell thee something. Joseph was not the only person in prison, and the righteous are not the only people who are afflicted. The chief butler was in prison, and the chief baker, too. I wonder whether the butler and baker are here, looking sadly to-day. If so, there is this difference between them and Joseph, that the Lord is not with them, but he is with Joseph, and that makes a vast difference, for

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

If God is in the prison with Joseph, Joseph is happy, but it is not so with you tried worldlings. I wonder, O butler and baker, whether you have had any dream; I wonder what has passed through your minds this morning. Wherefore look you so sadly to-day? I am no interpreter of dreams, but perhaps I can unriddle yours. Was a vine before you in your dream? That true and living vine? Did it bud and blossom, and bring forth fruit before your eyes, and did you take of its clusters, and present its pure blood to the King? If so, you will be set free, your dream means salvation: for there is a vine of the Lord's own planting whose wine maketh glad the heart of man, and he who takes of its living fruit is accepted. Dost thou know how to take those clusters and to squeeze them out? If so, the King will rejoice in thee, for nothing is so dear to him as the fruit of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

But hast thou dreamed of cakes which thou hast made by thine own skill? Not fruits from a vine, living and full, but mere cakes, sweetened with thine own self-righteousness, baked in the oven of thine own zeal and industry, and dost thou hope to set these before the King? The birds of the air already peck at them, thou beginnest now to feel that thy works are not altogether what thou thoughtest them to be. Oh, if this be thy dream I tremble for thee, for thou wilt come to an ill end. I pray the Lord put that dream from thee, and teach thee something better. Salvation is of the Lord; whether for butler, or baker, or Joseph, redemption is by Jesus only. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah there is everlasting strength, and they that trust in him shall never be ashamed or confounded, world without end. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON☒ [Genesis 39:1-7, 21-23; 40:1-8, 23; 12:1-9.](#)

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"☒ 214, 750, 754.