

The Church's Probation

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"You, O God, have tested us." [Psalm 66:10](#).

THE Psalmist, who spoke these words in his song, told forth the experience of the godly in all generations. In the Patriarchal age, when Abraham was called to leave his kindred and go forth from Ur of the Chaldees, he was constrained to sojourn as a stranger among a people that he knew not, told to wait with patience for a son whom God would give him in his old age and, at length, commanded to take that son to the top of a mountain and offer him as a sacrifice! He might well say, "You, O God, have tested us." Isaac could say the same when he tabernacled in the Land of Promise, having not so much as a foot of it that he could call his own except his father's sepulcher. Jacob learned the same stanza when he was tested in Laban's household, when he wrestled with God in Peniel and triumphed over the Angel at Jabbok! This he knew when he went down into Egypt and, dying, blessed the sons of Joseph. All the Patriarchs, as they fell asleep, could say, "You, O God, have tested us." And this was the song of the Church during her sojourn in Egypt when she was lying among the pots—and during her wanderings in the wilderness when she passed through a desert land by a way which she had not traversed before. And this, too, was the voice of the Church under the conduct of Joshua when Israel came through Jordan and began to defy the hosts of the Canaanites—when they drew the sword against mighty adversaries who dwelt in cities fenced with high walls, gates and bars and came forth to battle in chariots that had scythes of iron—"You, O God, have tested us." With such a word as this in their mouths, the judges fell asleep after they had avenged Israel and done mighty deeds for the Lord of Hosts! This David could well say, for he had seen affliction. This the kings who walked in his steps and this the Prophets who spoke in God's name might all have said, "You, O God, have tested us."

And God's dear Son, the Captain of our salvation, was, Himself, tested and tested in all things, too! He was thrust into the hottest part of the glowing coals and tested as you and I have never been tested—tested to such an extent as our heart has not conceived! And among the professed followers of Jesus, all the sons of God are witnesses to this Truth, "You, O God, have tested us"—whether they were tested in dungeons where they lay victims of damp and mildew, or on racks where every bone was dislocated and every muscle snapped—or at the stake where they mounted in chariots of fire to Heaven, or on the rocks where they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, tormented—in all these temptations and trials God tested them! And even to this day, though by less severe methods,

yet by other tests, as I shall have to show, the Church has still the same song to sing and each dying saint must still subscribe his name to the long list. Yes, and every bright spirit around the Throne of God, in looking back upon his experience on earth, will have to swell the great chorus, "You, O God, have tested us." There is not an ingot of silver in Heaven's treasury that has not been in the furnace on earth and been purified seven times! There is not a gem of purest serene ray which that Divine Jeweler has not exposed to every sort of test! There is not an atom of gold in the Redeemer's crown which has not been molten among the hottest coals so as to rid it of its alloy! It is universal to every child of God—if you are a servant of the Lord, you must be tested—you shall never enter Heaven unproved! You must be tested in the fire—the test, the assaying must take place upon every one of us. Nor do I think we ought to shun it. Perhaps it may happen that in the feeble words I speak tonight, some reason may be given which shall reconcile your hearts to the sternness of the test and even make you kiss the hand of the Refiner when He puts you into the fire!

I. WHAT IS IT THAT YOU, O GOD, HAVE TESTED IN YOUR PEOPLE?

I think we may answer, He has tested everything. If we have anything that has not been tested, it either is to be tested or else it is so bad that it is not worth testing. Everything we have that God has given us will have to be tested. There is not a grain of Grace that will escape the probation—He is sure, in some way or other, to test and exercise it. We have no manna to lay in the cupboard to breed worms—the manna is given us to eat. The Rock that follows us with its refreshing streams flows that we may drink—when we shall cease to thirst, the river will cease to flow—we only have Grace given to us that it may be tested.

I think we can say, looking back upon our lives, those of us who are in Christ Jesus, that the Lord has tested our sincerity. Ah, how many put on the harness when we first put it on—and where are they now? In our little Gospel experience, how many have we seen who have turned their backs in the day of battle? Yes, the young knights went out gaily enough to the field—but say nothing about their return! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon," how their shields were broken, their lances splintered and their plumes trailed in the mire! When any turn from Zion's way, our best method of using their apostasy is as Cowper used it, for self-examination—

"When any turn from Zion's way,

(Alas, what numbers do)!

I think I hear my Savior say,

'Will you forsake Me too?'"

But, up to this time, one way in which God has tested our sincerity has been to keep our leaf green and, through Divine Grace, that sincerity has kept its hold, while some who, in the first flush of religious excitement, promised well for Heaven, afterwards withered and faded. While many who were like the fair blossoms of the spring upon the trees were blown down by the East wind, or fell with a shower on the ground, we have been left, by Divine

Grace, to bring forth some little fruit, though not as much as we could desire! O Brothers and Sisters, it is a great mercy when God tests our sincerity, if, notwithstanding the defection of man and the fickleness and instability of our own hearts, we are able to say, "Lord, You know all things. You know that I love You."

It is a privilege to have our sincerity tested, but it is one which must be purchased at a sharp cost, for we cannot know our sincerity for God without being put where we are much tempted and troubled. I believe many young people think they have the Grace of God in their hearts, who, if they were really put in temptation's way, would soon discover that it is only a sort of hereditary profession and not the true Grace of God they possess. I have a great suspicion about buying hothouse flowers in the street. All summer long you see people with their barrows with the finest flowers you ever saw, but most of them have been forced to bloom. And if you take them home and put them in your garden, on the first cold day they look pale and begin to droop, for they cannot bear the change of climate because they are forced. So I cannot doubt that there are many who join Christian Churches who have been forced—they have been in the hothouse of godliness in association with the saints—and when they are put away from Christian association, where is their piety? Where is their religion? Some of you, I know, have had to suffer this chilling trial. You have been shut up among blasphemers. You have been made to live among the ungodly and profane, or you have had temptations from the polite and the godless—yet, thanks be to God, you have been enabled to retain your hold on Christ! You can say, with the Psalmist, "You, O God, have tested us." And if you are sincere, mark you, as surely as ever you have true godliness, it must and will be put to the test!

And God has also tested our vows of fidelity. Perhaps the fewer vows we make, the better, but when we do make them, how jealous should we be to keep them! What a mass of vows we once made when our blood was hot with the novelty of our new discovery of the beauty of religion! We think we will do we know not what! Our love laughs at impossibilities! We could leap like Curtius into the chasm and sacrifice ourselves for Jesus! Would to God that we were always in that frame of mind! But then we get to promising what we will do if we are put in certain positions—and our promissory notes are not written on stamped paper—they are only written on some common stuff of our own. And we put our signature, but still we dishonor the note when it comes due! We never pay our vows. God did not prompt us to the vow, but our own self-confidence and, therefore, it gets broken. When I look back upon what you and I promised we would do when we first began the Heavenly warfare, and how little we have really done, I think we can mournfully say, "O Lord, You have tested us." Some people talk about the older Christians as being so dull and so lifeless, but let me put it to yourselves, how much better are you? And I, sometimes, in the early days of my preaching, was known to speak of the cool, freezing lips of some ministers and of the dilatory way in which they discharged their duties—but I have had, in

looking at my text, to say of myself, "Lord, You have tested me." And some of these vows that I made—to wit, how I would be the pillar of fire in His cause, and lead the souls of men, and win them to the foot of the Cross—how signally have they been broken, for, "You, O Lord, have tested us." All those fine visions, like potters' vessels when smitten with a rod of iron, have been broken into vile potsherds!

And how the Lord has been pleased, dear Friends, to test our professions and pretensions to eminence! Do you recollect—with some of you, it will not be very difficult to look back, certainly not with me—do you remember how you thought, when first you knew the Lord, how different you would be from that nervous Mrs. Much-Afraid? You went to see her when you were first converted and sat down and talked with her. And as you came away, you said, "That woman is a bag of nerves! If ever I live to her age, you will not find me so desponding." You have been tested since then and how has it been with you? Do you remember how, when you came one evening from a Prayer Meeting, when some friend had prayed so long and so drearily, you said, "Please God, if ever I have the privilege of praying aloud at a Prayer Meeting, there shall always be life and earnestness in my prayer"? How has it been with you, Brother? I question whether any man ever attained to the eminence in piety that he once marked out for himself and whether we have not all had occasion to eat our words. Have I not said many things about what I would do if I was in somebody else's place—and what I am sure I would do if I had that man's ability and that man's opportunity? We used to brag about the lofty heights which we would climb and the mighty summits on which we would stand—and here we are, still creeping along in the valley! Do not make this confession to lull your conscience, or to comfort yourselves for being in the lowlands. We ought to be on the mountains—we ought to be all we hoped to have been—it is wrong in us not to have gained what we longed for. We must cleanse ourselves for this. Oh, how it ought to humble us to think how God has tested us and brought us down!

My pastoral experience, which, if you call it short, has, nevertheless, been very, very broad and bears witness to this. Whenever I have seen a Christian talking large things about his loftiness in Grace and his attainments, I have always seen him, sooner or later, brought as low as the dust. I have known some Brothers and Sisters who have said that they never had a doubt of their acceptance—and I have thanked God for them and have hoped they never might—but I have seen some of them in such a condition as I pray I never may be in. I believe there are such things in the world, to this day, as those bullocks that pushed with side and with shoulder, and that fouled the waters with their feet where the trembling ones came to drink. Such professors as those will find that the Lord will bring them down before long. Those big saints will one day be glad enough to creep into a mouse hole and feel themselves thrice happy if they are permitted to be numbered among the meanest of the Lord's people. As surely as we ever make these high pretensions to great things, we shall be brought down and we shall have to cry, "O Lord, we did exalt ourselves, we did promise

high and great things, but you, O Lord, have tested us. And when it came to the test results, what insignificant, what worthless, what despicable worms we turned out to be!"

But, Beloved, we have not only been tested in our sincerity, and in our vows, and in our lofty pretensions, but have we not also been tested in our strength? How strong we are sometimes! As my friend, Will Richardson, who, though he is a poor laboring man, is a Divine I like to quote just as some people would quote St. Augustine, said to me one day, "Brother Spurgeon, if you and I ever get one inch above the ground, we get that one inch too high and the Lord will bring us down again." How true that is! And the old man said, "O Sir, you know, in winter time, I feel as if I could do such a deal of mowing, and as if I could reap the fields at such a rate! But when the hot summer comes on, poor old Will wipes the sweat from his brow and he thinks it is hard work, reaping, after all, and he will be very glad when he can get home and lie down, for he is getting to be an old man. O Sir," he said, "If I could reap in the summer as I think I can in the winter, then I should do all right."

And is not that the way with us? When there is no trial to bear, we can do all things, or can bear all sufferings! When there are no duties to be performed, then our strength runs over and we have too much and some to give to our neighbors! But when we get into the work and the struggle, and begin to reap and to mow, the sweat of weariness is such that we long to be away from it! Our strength, when tested, is found to be less than nothing and vanity! "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You"—the man who can sing with the Psalmist, "All my springs are in You." You know, dear Friends, many streams that run in winter become dry in summer, but they tell us that those wells that sap the mainsprings never get dry. How happy is the Believer who has sapped the mainspring, who has got deep enough down in his faith and confidence in God not to be dependent on the land springs and the upper waters, but has got down to the mainspring, for then weeks of drought may be followed up by months without rain, but still his soul shall go on bubbling up and his fountain shall always flow!

Moreover, the Lord has tested our faith as well as our strength. Our faith is indeed our real strength because our faith is that by which we lay hold upon God's arm. Has not your faith been tested, Brother? An untried faith is no faith. At least, I mean if a man has had faith for some considerable length of time and that faith has not been tested, I question whether it ever came from God. I may truly say of faith what the old naturalists used to falsely say of the salamander—that it lives in the fire. The natural element of faith is fire—it never gets on well unless it has some fire to try it. What do you think faith is given us for unless it is to be tested? Did you ever know a man build a house—and then shut it up and let no one live in it? Houses are built to be inhabited! So God does not give anything without a design. Do you know a man who keeps his wheat year after year and never puts it through the mill? Let me tell you that my God puts all His wheat through the mill—and you must all go between the big stones and you must have your crushing! You will never come out

fit to be offered unto the Lord unless you have been between the stones—there must be "the trial of your faith." We know that our friends in Australia, when they are panning gold, stand up to their waists in water, shaking the earth to and fro to get the golden grains out of it. And you and I, like spades full of earth, must be shaken to and fro that the earth may run away and that the pure gold may remain. Your faith is much more precious than gold, so it also must be tested in the fire. You, Mr. Greatheart, must prepare for a great many battles. And you, "Valiant-for-Truth," depend upon it, you will have to fight until your arm bleeds and your sword grows to your hand, cemented with your own blood! "Father Honest," there is warfare for you before you enter Heaven. You "Little-Faiths" and "Despondencies" and "Much-Afraid's" may go on with but comparatively few trials, for God does not sail His small ships on the sea, but puts them in the shallow waters. But the great ships must cross the Atlantic and big waves may sometimes dash over you, to let the angels in Heaven see how well God can build His saints so that they can stand every storm that earth, or Hell, or Heaven, itself, can send against them! Your faith must be tested!

To sum up all in one, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, depend upon it there is nothing that you have that is good for anything which will not be tested. Your religious principles will be tested. Why should they not be?

There is a certain sort of Christian—I do not know whether I shall think them Christians soon—who profess to be better than anybody else. They are non-sectarians. They have left all sects to make a snug little party to go comfortably to Heaven by themselves. And instead of seeking the conversion of sinners, they seduce the members of our churches and compass sea and land to make one proselyte! And the more useful our church members are, the more do they seek to pervert them to their disorders—and the more industrious they are in every way to show their perfect hatred of the Church of the living God! I sometimes meet with persons who are afraid of them. They say, "What shall we do?" I can only say, if they are right, God prosper them! And if they are wrong, we are not afraid to meet them! We are not afraid that God's cause will suffer by their attacks. I had hoped—there was a time when I was fool enough to hope so—that these were men who really meant what they said. But now they show themselves in their true colors—as the destroyers of every order in the Church and as special enemies of God's ordained servants! Of course we can only bid them the defiance that they bid to us and, in God's name, stand upon our bastions and our bulwarks, as our forefathers did aforetime, fearful of nothing they may do because our cause is God's—and He has delivered us out of the hands of many a confederacy before and He will do so even unto the end!

Never fear, my Brothers and Sisters, any attacks from nominal Christians, or proud, conceited persons who think themselves too good to join with other churches who, in truth, are Babylon! They are the men of wisdom and say, "Stand by, for we are holier than you." But what of the Pharisees of modern times from the South of England? What shall we say

of them? Let them do their best and their worst, and fight as they will. If our course is right, we can bear to have it tested. I like to see breezes spring up—those fresh blasts that every now and then beat upon the good old ship. If she is all right, she will outlast them—and whether it is from disorders within or quarrels without, she will come out of the trouble!

If we have an ordinance, it ought to be tested—may Baptism be tested! Let the Lord's Supper be tested! The Church can never be reformed except by these trials. I always court the trials if they are sent by a Brother in friendliness of spirit. It is only the bitterness with which they come that sometimes makes my blood boil about it. But I must look to the God

that sends it and not to the man who may happen to be the second cause! Whether as individuals, or as a Church, or as a denomination, we shall have to say at last, "O Lord, You have tested us. Blessed be Your name that You have, for—

"Our silver bears the glowing coals The metal to refine." II. And now let us turn to the second question, HOW HAS GOD TESTED US?

Dear Friends, the Lord has tested us in a thousand ways. Many men think that the only test that God gives to His servants is that of trial. He often tests them by trials, by bereavements, by temporal losses, by sickness in body, by personal infirmity, by slander, by persecution—all these are, therefore, tests to a Christian. And a man who can go through all these and find his faith still keeping its hold and that he is able to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord"—such a man may thank God for the test! And, after all, dear Friends, the only Grace that is worth having is that which shall be with us when we go through fire and through water, and when men ride over our heads. Do not tell me of your sunshiny religion! Do not tell me of your summer-day godliness! You may sometimes see, on the Mediterranean, when the waters are calm and still, a little fleet with fair and beautiful sails floating gaily there—it is the nautilus coming up in the sunshine to float. But there is a black cloud yonder and at the first breath of wind that comes whistling across the waveless sea where is that fleet? Where is the nautilus? Every little creature has drawn itself into its shell and fallen to the bottom of the sea! Oh, there are too many of this kind, too many Christians who are with us when everything goes well—but where are they when the times have changed? To use John Bunyan's expressive metaphor—they walk with Religion when she goes in her silver slippers. But when she is barefoot and men laugh at her through the streets, then where are they? Affliction does try men!

But mark you, Believers, there are many others trials! Let me mention some of them that I often think severe. There is a very sharp trial which some Christians have to bear when they have fresh light given them and they shut their eyes against it. There are plenty of things that we never dreamt of in our philosophy that, after all, are true. Am I like a man who, whereunto he has attained, walks by the same rule but is still ready to advance further if the rule is more fully revealed? Hold on to the old and tested truth of the Grace of God which brings salvation, as with a death-grip, but still, you are not yet perfect—there is a height

beyond. Sometimes when you are reading a passage of Scripture, you say, "Ah, yes, yes; it must mean that!" You pray over it. "Yes, it must mean that! But if it means that, what about that text our minister preached from last Sunday week, what about that?" And you are apt to say, "Well, now, I won't believe that, for it does not fit in with my system of theology."

Is there not many a good "Hyper" Brother who has a full knowledge of the Doctrines of Grace, but one day when he is reading the Bible and he finds a text that looks rather wide and general, he says, "This cannot mean what it says! I must trim it down and make it fit into Dr. Gill's Commentary"? That is the way many a Brother does. But is not this the right thing to say? "Now, this does mean what it says. The Lord knows better how to write than I do. There may be faults in my reading, but there cannot be any faults in His writing. Then, if such-and- such a thing is true, I will not doubt it. And if that other thing is true, I will not doubt it. And if they seem to contradict one another, I will believe them both. But I can never entertain a thought that they really do contradict one another—I believe that there is some fault in me—not in the Truth of God."

You sometimes go to the stationer's and you ask for a picture of such-and-such a church. "Yes, Sir," he says, and brings you out a picture. And you say, "There are two pictures here." "Oh, no, Sir," he says, "that is only one." "But," you say, "there are two and this one takes the view a little further to the right and that, apparently, a little more to the left. I do not understand your giving me two pictures." "O Sir," he says, "that is only one! And if you look at it correctly, you will find that the two will melt into one and stand out very clearly and beautifully—much better than in an ordinary print." You look and look again, and say, "There seem to be two, as far as I can see—and I cannot make them to be one." "Stop," he says. He opens his drawer and fetches out a stereoscope. "Now," he says, "just put your eyes there." "Oh, yes," you say, "I see it is only one now! The two pictures havemelted into one!"

I believe there are many Truths in Scripture that are just like two pictures on a stereoscopic slide—they are really one—only you and I have not the stereoscope! When we get to Heaven, we shall get a stereoscope and then they will appear to be one. And we shall see that conflicting Truths of God, such as free-agency and Divine Sovereignty, were only

different views, after all, of the same Truth taken from a little different angle. And we shall see how God gave us both the Truths and how foolish we were to go against them.

Now that man, I take it, is tested to be right who, when he is thus tested with superior light, says, "Well, yes, I have been wrong in many of my thoughts and reasoning. The more I learn of God's Revelation, the more I will open my heart to receive it." I like a Brother or Sister who is ready to advance. I think, as a Church, we ought to always be advancing. It strikes me, for instance, that the breaking of bread should be every Lord's-Day. The more I read the Scripture, the more I feel that it is an ordinance that should be commemorated every Sabbath. "Well," says somebody, "but it has been usually observed once a month and anyway, what does it matter?" If it is Scriptural to have it four times in the month, be it so,

and let us get the benefit of the alteration and do it, saying, "If ever a Truth of God starts up, and fresh light comes, I will follow. Whatever You have to say to me, speak, Lord, for Your servant hears." This is by no means a very small trial to a Christian man, to be tested by fresh Light of God!

Don't you think it is a very sharp trial to be tested by other loves? You have an only child. How fond you are of that girl! How your heart is knit to that boy! You have a dear husband—properly enough you love him, but ah, improperly enough you idolize him! Or, alas, it is a brother, or sister, or some other Christian, and your heart is set on that object. Do you know what Jesus says to you? He has said, "There is a disciple who loves Me—he says he does. I will see if he does—I will give him that child and I will see which he loves the better. I will give him that wife, I will give her that husband—I will see, now, whether I really am King in that heart or not." And in how many ways have we mournfully to suspect that Jesus Christ was not King? O dear Friends, it is sad to think of how it would be if some of us were tested by that test—"If any man loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than Me, he is not worthy of Me." If some are tested in that way, what a trial it must be to them! And there are many who fail here. And many more Christians would fail, perhaps, only that God, on a sudden, comes like a great iconoclast and breaks their images in pieces and utterly spoils their false gods—and then they are compelled to go to Christ and say, "Yes, we do love You." But perhaps that was hardly true while the idol was in the way. It is a hard trial to have these fair things put in competition with Jesus—happy are you if you have been tested and yet have stood the trial!

I believe that God often tests His servants by opening up to them fresh fields of labor. It has been my lot, when I have been busy about my Master's service, here and there to come to a certain corner and see before me what I had never seen before—a great field ripe for the harvest! And perhaps flesh and blood have said, "Well, you have enough to do here—this is your lot." I believe, then, God is trying the man to see whether he is willing to begin that new work which is opening to him. Perhaps it is a work in which nobody else has ever engaged. And when you begin it, some excellent friend shrugs his shoulder and says, "O dear Brother, how imprudent you are!" I think there is no word in the English language that deserves more of my esteem and yet for which I have a greater and more insufferable contempt from the misuse of it than the word, "prudence." Oh, the many times I have it whistled in my ears, "Prudence!" And this is the meaning of the word, "prudence," according to the translation I have given of it by these Brothers and Sisters—never act upon faith. If you can see your way clearly, that is to say if you are strong enough to do it yourself, do it, but never go beyond your own strength! Do not attempt anything in which other people would differ from you in opinion! Along the cool sequestered vale of life keep the tenor of your way even.

If there is a giant Goliath, go to bed and let giant Goliath defy the hosts of Israel as he likes. If there are nations that need help—Macedonians that cry, "Come over and help

us"—tell somebody else what the Macedonians said and say, "What a pity it is that nobody will go!" If Jesus calls, and duty, too, just mind that you are so far off that you cannot hear the call! Like some militiamen I have heard of, who always say, when the bugle sounds for them to come to drill, that they never heard it because they take wonderfully good care to be always so far away that the sound cannot reach them! And there are many such Christians as that—who always get out of the sound of the bugle! "Oh, yes, of course, Lord Shaftesbury presided at the meeting and the Bishop of London, and this member of the privy council, and that member of Parliament were present! And it must be the right thing to do, therefore I will go and do what I can to help, but I do not desire new work. Some woman who has discovered the missing link, or somebody or other, is going to try some absurd, Quixotic scheme for the conversion of the people, but I could not think of giving a shilling for that, because, you see, that is a work of prayer and faith! But the other has a committee, treasurer, vice-presidents and

innumerable patrons—almost as many as the lords, governors and counselors that came to Nebuchadnezzar at the door of the burning fiery furnace."

Most people like those things in which there are plenty of great armies. But there are chosen men who always stand where there is nothing to rest upon but the bare arm of God. This seems to be the test of the Christian when he can dare to say, "This is the field of usefulness which God has put in my way. Though my strength is not sufficient, I have faith. Here I am, and I will do it." "Who are you, O great mountain! Before Zerubbabel you shall become a plain." "Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead your captivity captive, you son of Abinoam." "Shake yourself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem! Loosen yourself from the bands of your neck, O captive daughter of Zion!" For your God is in the midst of you and if you will but do and dare for Him, when tested in the day of trial, you shall have His blessing upon you—and that right early and abundantly!

III. Multitudes of other tests suggest themselves, but our time flies. Let us come, therefore, to the closing question— WHAT HAS BEEN THE RESULT OF ALL THOSE TESTS THROUGH WHICH WE HAVE PASSED?

Well, I think, dear Friends, we have lost a good deal by our tests. We have gained much, but we have likewise had our heavy losses. "What," says one, "lost anything by God's testing me?" Yes, Brother, I will tell you one or two of the things you have lost. I think you have lost that habit of putting your trust so much in earthly things. So many trees have been cut down that you had built on, that you begin to wish to build somewhere beyond the stars—you find that this world is not your rest. If you have lost that, you have lost something. Have you not also lost that habit of talking so positively about what you mean to do? A good thing if you have! You do not glitter so much, but there is more gold in you. You do not flash and

sparkle, and make as much noise, but the waters run stiller because they are deeper. You have lost that habit of boasting in an arm of flesh!

As the result of your being tested, you have lost that disposition to invite trial. I know a Christian woman—I think she is here this evening—who had not any trouble, for some time, and she was very troubled about having no trouble. She prayed to God to send her some—she will never pray that prayer again! She was like a child whom I heard crying in the street and his mother opened the window and asked him what he cried for. And when he said, "Nothing." She said he should have something to cry for before long. There are many children of that sort—they think they cannot be children of God because they are not always living in hot water. But when they get the trial, they never think that again—never! Those are some of the things we have lost. We go through the Red Sea of trial—some few things we leave in the Red Sea along with the Egyptians—may they never be washed up again!

One has learned, by being tested, to lose that habit of treading quite so hard on the ground as we used to do. Sometimes we used to tread on other people. By being tested, we tread more gently. We used to push and say, "If the man is in my way, I cannot help it." Now we walk a little more carefully. We do not wish to touch other people's sore places because we know our own. I heard a dear Brother say, the other night, that I comforted the doubters a great deal too much. I thought if that dear Brother had to go through some of the deep waters we have known in connection with this Church, he would find the doubters need a great deal more comforting than he thinks, for when one has been in the dungeon and has not been able to read his own title clear—and when there have been times when sin and Satan have so prevailed over Grace that one could only say, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" then we have needed something very sweet and very comforting. I do not think that a Christian knows much of doing business on the great waters if he does not feel, sometimes, as if he would give all he has to have as good a hope as the meanest lamb in Jesus' fold has. And, dear Friends, we lose that habit of being so hard and speaking so loftily—and these are blessed losses. Lord, send us many such losses!

Then, we also gain much by being tested. I cannot tell all that we gain. I never read a list of the earrings and the bracelets that the Israelite women gained from the Egyptians. And I cannot, therefore, give you a category of all the golden jewels, all silver bracelets and the rich ruby tiaras that Christians get from the depths of their tribulation. We get all sorts of choice things. Was it not Rutherford who said that he drank many sorts of God's wine, but the wine which was the sourest of all was the sweetest when it was down? And so it assuredly is. There are many sorts of bread that we eat that are very delightful—many breads of Heaven. But that which is baked on the coals, just as the bread which Elijah ate was baked—that is the meal that makes us go in the strength thereof for 40 days! All bread that

comes from God is good, but that which the black ravens with their hoarse throats bring to us—that is the bread which is most fit for God's prophets. All our passages through the fiery furnace make us like swords when they are well annealed—they are ready to cut right through the bone—it makes us true Jerusalem blades thus to be put through the fire again and again. Well, Brothers and Sisters, you and I will not cease from being tested until we get to Heaven and then it will be all over. And we shall sing and this shall be the sweet note of it, "You have tested us, O God, and blessed be Your name for it! Before we were afflicted, we went astray, but now have we kept Your Word."

There are many here who, I fear, if they were tested, would be found to be dross. Let such remember that God, by His Grace, can transmute the vile metal into the purest gold. One touch of the Cross of Christ, one drop of His precious blood can turn a sinner into a saint! "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." And however great and vile your sins may be, "there is life in a look at the Crucified One." One glance at the bleeding Savior and your sins are forgiven. A simple act of trust in Jesus, and you are saved and then, from that time forth, though you will have trials, you shall bless God for them! And we shall meet in Heaven to praise the name of the Most High, world without end! Amen.