

Trials of Our Time

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Hebrews 11 presents a record of triumph over trials through ages past in the lives of men and women who lived by their faith. The partial list of the indignities they suffered reads:

. . . others were tortured, . . . and others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, . . . wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth (Heb. 11: 36-38).

Some suffering of this sort for righteousness still occurs in our world, but most of it is gone, at least in the Western World.

But we still have our trials. Ours are of a subtler sort, but they are nonetheless powerful and real. I think that, because of their subtlety, they may in some ways be even more treacherous than those of yesteryear.

Our world is geared to succe\$\$, and it becomes increasingly hard to resist the impulse to believe that life consists of the abundance of things possessed. Naked materialism, as it is heated to a white-hot, consuming lust by the drummers of Madison Avenue, (i.e., advertising moguls) provides a trial to many a saint which, though not as immediately painful, is no less deadly than the rack and the scourge. It is going to be difficult to explain to the Lord how we were able to acquire an estate but were never able to get the Gospel around the world.

Another fearful trial we face is satisfaction—content with mediocrity and being bogged down in superficialities. To exceed the church budget is great, but Laodicea was doing that (Rev. 3:17). The temptation is ever with us to equate building a church with building a building; to mistake worship for service; to confuse inviting people to worship (do we even do this anymore?) with taking the Gospel into the world; to believe that regular class and worship attendance alone constitute faithfulness, regardless of how one lives otherwise; to assume that the flock is being pastored when we are having regular elders' meetings; to be satisfied that the church is fulfilling her mission by meeting three or four times per week.

Failure to recognize the reality of either the existence or potency of these trials of our time makes them even more perilous. They rob the church and the individual as well of the spiritual life-blood necessary to serve the Lord acceptably.

Will it not be the irony of ironies if we squander the great material treasure the Lord has placed in our hands of most modern-day saints with which to do His work, on our own fleshly pleasures, so much so that we are drowned in a sea of contentment with little zeal for spiritual causes?

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