



The Christian's refreshing

It is a part of the Christian's experience to come to seasons of rest and refreshing. These are as important for the soul as times of labour and tribulation, but they seem less frequent. In this way God varies the experiences of the pilgrim journey for each of his children, so that they always have some way of escape from their temptations and some seasons of rest from the burden and heat of the day.

In the journey to Canaan, relief was given to Israel periodically, by the discovery of some fresh oasis or welcome provision of water. In the same way, the Lord's people, on their journey to Zion today, are refreshed as they are led by Christ to new sources of comfort. God brings his weary servants over the trackless wastes of their desert wanderings by stages. From time to time they are rested and refreshed at an oasis of mercy. At such times, it is as if the Lord were saying, *'This is the rest ... and this is the refreshing'* (Isaiah 28:12).

The comfort of these experiences to the weary Christian's soul is exquisite. The mirage becomes a pool and *'the thirsty land springs of water'* (Isaiah 35:7). God commands the traveller to be still, to come apart and rest from the storm of spiritual conflict. The believer stops for a while and pauses to drink deep draughts of comfort. Such moments are highly welcome. They are sometimes unforgettable. They regale the spirit of man at the time they are enjoyed and they return to his mind in after years, when the recollection of them is still sweet and exhilarating.

Physical rest

There are times in the Christian's life when he must recognise and accept that he is in need of a thorough rest. Every faculty in the man of God is engaged in the spiritual warfare. It is therefore not surprising that every faculty becomes periodically exhausted. The body and mind become jaded and the spirit feels no longer able to rise up in hope. When God's servants have laboured and toiled for months together at the post of duty (whether the duty be secular or spiritual) and come to the point of chronic fatigue, they need not feel ashamed to obey the call of a tired constitution. They must unwind and relax. Life without proper relaxation loses its delight and becomes a drudgery. No man can give of his best when he is worn down and spent.

We are apt to think the work of God will collapse if we do not hold it up continually with all our might. But if we have fallen into that state of mind, we have forgotten who God is. The work of God existed and prospered on earth before we were born. It will also exist and prosper when we are dead and forgotten.

Scarcely any greater affront could be offered to God than that odious sentiment of liberal theology which imagines that 'God has no other hands and feet than ours'. On the contrary, his *'chariots are twenty thousand'* (Psalm 68:17). Heaven and earth could more easily pass away than the church of Christ. Concerning the church, God says *'I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day'* (Isaiah 27:3).

'He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.'

(Psalm 121:4)

The Lord Jesus Christ was not ashamed to be found asleep in the boat (Mark 4:38). His people therefore do not need to feel ashamed when, after exhausting service, they too must yield their aching bodies to a period of necessary rest.

When refreshment is essential

There are some who profess faith in Christ who scarcely know what a hard day's work in his service means. For them, one day is much like another. Their agenda of life is about pleasing oneself. They have never learnt how by love to serve others. It is not for these that the refreshment we speak of is designed by the Master. But it is for those who pour themselves out unceasingly in doing good. It is for those who mourn for the afflictions of Zion, who fight the good fight and whose care is to *'build the walls of Jerusalem'* (Psalm 51:18).

The conscientious Christian, on the other hand, is inclined to overwork himself. In his dutiful opinion, it is *never* the right time to rest. Though his wife and family counsel him to take a much-needed time of relaxation, he argues himself into a redoubling of his efforts. Though his close friends hint kindly that his work would be the better if he were to take a week or two of rest, he lashes himself to undertake an additional load of Christian activity. Such heroes still grace the church of Christ even in these days. The people of God should take their hats off to them. They are worth their weight in gold. But they are not above friendly criticism. There are times when rest is essential.

There are certain warning signs which should tell us that we need to relax and to unwind. One such sign is when our mind becomes incapable of facing any aspect of our work with pleasure. There are many aspects of our work, of course, which we would all prefer not to have to face. That is normal enough. But there is a state of mind to which tired people come, in which everything they do looks like a fresh sentence in purgatory. When all the joy has gone from our work, it is usually a sign that the time has come to rest. Again, when all spiritual exercises become wearisome and we can only face prayer or preaching by dragging ourselves to them, it is a sign that rest and relaxation are essential.

When we inwardly fight with all the world and all our thoughts turn into battles, it is a sign that nature is over-stretched. When we feel that death is our only comfort, that the light of the sun is only darkness and the prospect of tomorrow is a nightmare, then it is a pointer to the need for a time of respite. When Christ seems to be a harsh Master and the promises of scripture to be hollow, then it is time to draw aside and seek a season of quietness.

Scientists have learnt, by disasters in aircraft, that fatigue occurs even in metal. How much more does man's frail body, which is a house of clay, suffer from fatigue!

Conscientious objections

It is no easy task to persuade a hard-worked Christian that overworking is not a virtue. 'I have no time to rest,' says one man. But a nervous breakdown may force such a man to find time for rest. It would be wiser and better to stop for a while *before* the nervous system becomes overloaded, rather than afterwards. 'I am called on to fight,' says another man. But every soldier needs a time away from the dust and heat of battle. 'There is time enough to rest in heaven,' exclaims a third man. True, but the quality of our work on earth is impaired if we go about it always with a tired mind. Perhaps we have forgotten the Scripture which says: *'Except the Lord builds the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep'* (Psalm 127:1-2).

Refreshment of soul

It is a mistake to equate rest with idleness. The believer will welcome rest, not so much for its own sake, but because it is the most efficient way to prepare himself for further service for the Lord Jesus Christ. Rest, after all, is the best preparation for work.

So far, we have referred mainly to that bodily rest which we associate with times of holiday. But there is a type of refreshment available to the Christian which reaches beyond the material side of

life and touches the very soul. It is this which is the most significant aspect of our theme and the one which we most need to experience in these days in which we live.

The initiation into spiritual rest comes to a man when he becomes assured of his good standing in Christ. Hence our Saviour declares: *'Ye shall find rest unto your souls'* (Matthew 11:29). But it would not be true to say that the believer never stands in need of any further refreshing in his soul once he receives this assurance. The reverse is clearly the case. Christians need to be refreshed again and again. This is an aspect of the believer's life which probably does not receive the attention it deserves.

The Apostle Paul refers at several points in his Epistle to the subject of spiritual refreshment. He says that he looked forward to a time of refreshment when he would share fellowship with believers at Rome (Romans 15:32). He tells us that he was refreshed by brethren from Corinth who ministered to him (1 Corinthians 16:18), and declares that Titus' soul had been refreshed also at Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:13). He commends Philemon for refreshing the hearts of God's people (Philemon 7) and marks out Onesiphorus for special mention as one who had often refreshed him during his time of imprisonment (2 Timothy 1:16). The experience Paul speaks of is clearly a spiritual one, and which is open to us all to seek. It is that cheering and heart-warming sensation in the soul by which we feel lifted above life's storms and cares to a sense of eternal things. This refreshing may be experienced in fellowship with believers or it may come secretly to the heart by means of a sermon, a book or a time of prayer.

The refreshment of which we speak is a renewed enjoyment of God in Christ. It is vital to the life of the soul to receive such impressions of blessing from time to time. By invisible influences and mysterious agencies, God communicates fresh supplies of divine comfort to us at such a season. By their means the heart of the Christian, formerly bent low with care, is once more lifted up with *'joy unspeakable and full of glory'* (1 Peter 1:8). *'Be still and know that I am God'* (Psalm 46:10) is, as it were, breathed like a message from heaven into the troubled heart. The ripples of life are calmed once again and the storm in the mind is soothed into a state of peace. The experienced believer recognises in this experience the voice of Christ and he takes comfort.

The diaries and journals of great Christians do not lack their references to this experience of spiritual refreshment. In prisons, on lonely mission fields, amidst a thousand cares and toils, on beds of sickness, at their journey's end — God's people have sought and found the presence of Christ in a way that has refreshed and renewed them in heart, when all else on earth has failed.

We in our feverish world, perhaps more than those before us, need to wait on Christ for this comfort and enlivenment of soul. Let us apply frequently to him for it, for our own good and the good of others.

'This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing.'

(Isaiah 28:12)

Maurice Roberts

© 2014
www.christianstudylibrary.org