

# Light Affliction?

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Jesus Christ says in Matthew 11:30, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." His burden *light*? How does that compare with what Scripture reveals about His life? Notice:

Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.  
(Hebrews 5:8)

Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. . . . (Isaiah 52:14)

He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. (Isaiah 53:3-5)

Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death. For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet; I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. (Psalm 22:12-18)

Do these examples sound like light burdens? And what about the lives of those faithful who have come before us, as recounted in Hebrews?

Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise. . . . (Hebrews 11:35-39)

Were these lives of light burdens? To continue this history of misery, notice Paul's life as he describes it:

Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was

stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. (II Corinthians 11: 23-31)

Is that a life of light burdens? Yet in II Corinthians 4:17, Paul echoes Christ's sentiment, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Does Paul's description of his life really sound like one of *light* affliction?

In our own day, a look at any prayer list in the greater church of God shows that many are carrying heavy burdens. Yet as heavy as these burdens are, we have not yet faced what those who came before us faced:

. . . others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. (Hebrews 11:35-37)

But that could change in the near future, as Matthew 10:17-18, 21-22 warns:

But beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils and scourge you in their synagogues. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles. . . . Now brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. *But he who endures to the end will be saved.* (Emphasis ours.)

## **Enduring to the End**

The question always is: How do we endure to the end no matter what we face now or in the future? Like Christ and Paul, how can we set our minds so that we see our burdens and afflictions as "light"? This is critical because, if we consider our trials as too much to bear, will we endure? But if we see our trials as light, whatever they may be, enduring to the end almost becomes assured.

So how do we make this mindset a part of our lives? In II Corinthians 4:17, Paul gives us two thoughts to consider: 1) "which is but for a moment" and 2) "is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

The first point that needs to be deeply embedded in our minds is the simple fact that, when compared to eternity, our existence in this life—no matter how long—is but for a moment. Several scriptures emphasize this reality:

» For He remembered that they were but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again. (Psalm 78:39)

» Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (James 4:14)

» Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue. (Job 14:1-2)

Our lives are only a moment in time when compared to eternity. After a thousand years under Christ's rule, will today's pains even be a memory? Many readers have had a taste of how this works, of which Jesus gives an example:

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. (John 16:21)

Ladies with children have experienced how a short period of intense pain in the now can be overwhelmed by the joy that comes afterward. It must be a light burden *in comparison*, because many knowing the pain will repeat the experience, and for some, often. In subsequent years, how often does the memory come back? Probably not often, if at all.

The first step, then, is to embed in our thinking this foundational concept of just how short our lives are compared to eternity. This takes prayer and meditation to make this a living reality for each of us, helping to guard against being overwhelmed by the now.

### **The Value of Our Calling**

To see our afflictions as light, the second part of the process is to recognize the value of our calling. We would do well to consider its benefits often. As Paul indicates, the understanding that there is "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" is a necessary component to seeing our trials in this life in comparison as a light affliction, a recognition that enables one to endure to the end.

Therefore, the second key is to know that the price we pay now is miniscule compared to the reward that awaits us. Note the power of that vision:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Having this vision in their lives as a daily reality enabled the heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews to endure to the end. In modern jargon, they did a cost/benefit analysis and concluded that the benefits made the costs insignificant. Christ and Paul made the same analysis, concluding that their burdens and afflictions were light costs compared to what the benefits of eternity held for them.

In Romans 8:18, even with the weight of his trials, Paul again emphasizes that they are infinitesimal costs, so trivial that they are insignificant compared to the mindboggling benefits that await us: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

In the King James Version, the first part of Proverbs 29:18 reads, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” For “perish” a better translation is that they “cast off restraint.” Without a vision they lack restraint, leading to disobedience. This results in a people who will not endure to the end, whose fate, then, is to perish. Without a vision of the future that is as tangible to us as the present, we will walk by sight, only seeing the now, rather than by faith seeing as real a true vision of the future. Without that vision, we risk trading the future for the now (Galatians 6:9; II Thessalonians 2:15), a poor bargain indeed.

### **Future Benefits**

What is an example of those benefits, those rewards for enduring to the end? “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations” (Revelation 2:26). Consider how much the lust for power is a major motivating force in this world. It can be seen operating in families, in workplaces, in churches, and in commerce—and possibly, it is most visible in politics. We can see in all of these instances that people are doing what *they* can to obtain power, often by any means available, fair or foul. They are just following the influence (I John 5:19) of the one who first lusted for power: “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:13-14).

While the world is struggling to get power, God promises to give it to us as a byproduct of enduring to the end. In this life, the only power we have to strive for is power over ourselves. In the next, *God* will provide the rest.

Those who seek power in this world miss the fact, previously mentioned, that our life is but for a moment. Even if they do receive the power they seek, it lasts only for an instant in comparison. Consider how long our power will last if we endure to the end: “The Lord knows the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be forever” (Psalm 37:18).

The vision Scripture provides is so all-encompassing that not one of us can truly comprehend its breadth. After all, this vision is actually God’s own vision. Our minds are limited in what we can see, as Paul points out in I Corinthians 2:9: “But as it is written: eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

But with that said, God gives us the means, His Spirit (I Corinthians 2:10), to follow the example of our predecessors so that we, like them, will see a vision that ensures our enduring to the end. Part of that vision involves identifying the things we hate about this evil world around us and then finding the scriptures that illumine the vision of how God will—together with us using the power He will give us—create a new world devoid of these evils.

Each of us is unique, and what part of that vision will motivate us will likewise be unique. So, before our burdens and afflictions begin to weigh us down, we can choose to prepare now (Matthew 25:1-13) and take the time to identify the evils we hate. With that, we can begin building a vision from Scripture that, through meditation and prayer, allows God to use His Spirit to make that vision as real

as the present to the effect that, *in comparison*, we will be able to say along with Christ and Paul, “My burden is light” and my “light affliction . . . is but for a moment.”