

Milk & Honey

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Spiritual Food and Encouragement for Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ

The Trial of Your Faith

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(Adapted from an article that appeared in "Knowing the Scriptures", Nov. – Dec. 1935)

Peter therefore was kept in prison; but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers; bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison. (Acts 12:5-6)

There is something characteristic about the circumstances in which Peter appears in this incident: "the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers." Luke, who records the fact, has also recounted in his gospel how this same disciple slept on the Mount of Transfiguration. It seems strange that Peter should sleep when a subject of such surpassing interest was being discussed, when Moses and Elijah met with the Savior and spoke with Him about the great event which would terminate their own dispensation, when "they spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." (Luke 9:31) And yet how very up-to-date the situation is, for we who live in an atmosphere that is literally charged with the imminence of the great event which will make the end of our age, are no more alert and no more watchful than Peter and his companions were.

And then Mark writes of an occasion also where Peter slept. It was the Garden of Gethsemane. The gathering sorrows which the Savior had to bear alone had driven Him to seek from a few of His own, a little fellowship in His rejection. "And He cometh and findeth them sleeping." (Mark 14:37) Again history is seen repeating itself. For our Lord's rejection is not over yet. The stigma that attaches itself to His Name may still be felt. The opposition of a hostile world must still be braved, or there is the alternative of lapsing into an unfaithful and compromising inertia.

But while these two failures on Peter's part may be censured by those who will, the incident recorded in the Scripture quoted above shows an altogether different side of Peter's character. This time there is attached to his slumber an unquestioning trust, an implicit faith in God, an unwavering confidence in prayer which commands our admira-

tion. "Peter therefore was kept in prison, but prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for Him." There is the secret of the prisoner's peace of mind. Think of the eloquence of the word "but." Ranged on one side of it is all the power of a selfish and antagonistic monarch and on the other side only a handful of humble believers. They had prayer, and behind their prayer they had God and that was all they needed.

Some of Peter's best learned lessons were taught him while he lay in prison. Without this experience, he could never have written in his first epistle, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you." (1 Pet. 4:12) What force is added to his words by his own experience of the fiery trial. Or who knows but that one of God's purposes in allowing Peter's faith to be tried was that he might be qualified to write: "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold... might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7)

Probably the truth which impressed Peter most was the same truth that Martha and Mary learned - *that God is never in a hurry*. It seems clear that Peter had endured the privations of imprisonment for a considerable time. We may also be sure that his brethren had been constant in their supplication on his behalf. And yet God almost allowed the very morning of Herod's intended crime to dawn before He effected His servant's deliverance. But deliverance did come, and surely with it there came to Peter's soul the understanding that "God's time is best" for the testing of his faith resulted in its strengthening.

This trustful calm has almost become a lost art. We know more of the bustle of a restless spirit than the sleep of an unquestioning trust. Let us remind ourselves that God is still on the Throne—that He still has an interest in our supplications, and that He is still able to make our extremity His opportunity. *

Spread The Word Conference

The Spread The Word conference will be held at Greenwood Hills Bible Conference, July 24–31, 2004. Speakers: Bill Gustafson, Rex Trogdon, Bruce Hulshizer, and Tom Irwin. Call (717) 352-2150 for registration information.

Epaphras

The Service of Prayer

C. H. Mackintosh

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Colossians 4:12).

There is a very striking difference between the inspired records of the people of God and all human biographies. The former may truly be said to be "*much in little*"; while many of the latter may as truly be said to be "*little in much*." The history of one of the Old Testament saints—a history stretching over a period of 365 years—is summed up in two short clauses—"Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). How brief! but yet how full, how comprehensive! How many volumes would man have filled with the records of such a life! And yet, what more could he have said? To walk with God comprehends all that could possibly be said of any one.

A man may travel round the globe; he may preach the gospel in every climate; he may suffer in the cause of Christ; he may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick; he may read, write, print and publish; in short, he may do all that ever man could or did do; and yet it may be all summed up in that brief clause, "He walked with God." And right well it will be for him if it can be so summed up. One may do nearly all that has been enumerated and yet never walk with God one hour; yea, one may not even know the meaning of a walk with God. The thought of this is deeply solemnizing and practical. It should lead us to the earnest cultivation of the hidden life, without which the most showy services will prove to be but mere flash and smoke.

There is something peculiarly touching in the mode in which the name of Epaphras is introduced to our notice in the New Testament. The allusions to him are very brief, but very pithy. He seems to have been the very stamp of man which is so much needed at the present moment. His labors, so far as the inspired penman has recorded them, do not seem to have been very showy or attractive. They were not calculated to meet the human eye or elicit human praise. But oh, they were most precious labors—peerless, priceless labors! They were the labors of the closet, labors within the closed door, labors in the sanctuary, labors without which all beside must prove barren and worthless. He is not placed before us by the sacred biographer as a powerful preacher, a laborious writer, a great traveler, which he may have been, and which are all truly valuable in their place.

The Holy Spirit, however, has not told us that Epaphras was any of the three; but then, He has placed this singularly interesting character before us in a manner calculated to stir the depths of our moral and spiritual being. He has presented him to us as *a man of prayer*—earnest, fervent, agonizing prayer; prayer not for himself, but for others. Let us harken to the inspired testimony:

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently (agonizing) for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis." (Col. 4:12,13) Such was Epaphras! Would there were hundreds like him in this our day! We are thankful for preachers, thankful for writers, thankful for travelers in the cause of Christ; but we want men of prayer, men of the closet, men like Epaphras.

We are happy to see men on their feet preaching Christ; happy to see them able to ply the pen of a ready writer in the noble cause; happy to see them making their way, in the true evangelistic spirit, into "the regions beyond"; happy to see them, in the true pastoral spirit, going again and again to visit their brethren in every city. God forbid that we should undervalue or speak disparagingly of such honorable services; yea, we prize them more highly than words could convey.

But then, at the back of all we want a spirit of prayer—fervent, agonizing, persevering prayer. Without this, nothing can prosper. A prayerless preacher is a profitless preacher. A prayerless writer will send forth barren pages. A prayerless evangelist will do but little good. A prayerless pastor will have but little food for the flock. We want men of prayer, men like Epaphras, men whose closet walls witness their agonizing labors. These are, unquestionably, the men for the present moment.

There are immense advantages attending the labors of the closet, advantages quite peculiar, advantages for those who engage in them, and advantages for those who are the subjects of them. They are quiet, unobtrusive labors. They are carried on in retirement, in the hallowed, soul-subduing solitude of the divine presence, outside the range of mortal vision.

How little would the Colossians have known of the loving, earnest labors of Epaphras had the Holy Spirit not mentioned them! It is possible that some of them might have deemed him deficient in zealous care on their behalf. It is probable that there were persons then, as there are those now, who would measure a man's care or sympathy by his visits or letters. This would be a false standard. They should see him on his knees to know the amount of his care and sympathy. A love of travel might take me from London to

