

Sample Readings

26th May

ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND OURS

Reading: Genesis 15:6–21

And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (v. 6)

Many people lack complete peace with God because they misunderstand what is meant by 'faith' when Scripture says: 'being justified by faith, we have peace with God' (Rom 5:1 KJV). They have read of faith in other connections in the New Testament where people are rebuked for their little faith; and they fall to thinking that the reason they have no peace with God is that their faith is not strong enough. They then imagine that faith is a kind of work that must be performed up to a certain standard before it qualifies for justification and peace.

But that is not what 'faith' means when used in the context of justification, as the analogy between Abraham's faith and ours clearly shows. It was not Abraham's faith that produced the miracle: long years of believing and hoping left his body as good as dead. It was God who accomplished the miracle. Similarly, we are justified when we put our faith in God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. It was not our faith, strong or weak, that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead: it was God who did it.

Imagine we were standing with the apostles round the grave of Christ before his body was raised from the

31st July

THE PURPOSE OF TRIALS

Reading: Hebrews 12:1–13

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (v. 11)

Let us see what it is that God is doing in our trials. Things went so smoothly for us at first, perhaps, and we were enjoying spiritual life so much—and then days of difficulty came. We look back with a sigh to the earlier days and wish we were there still. We enjoyed spiritual life then, but not now; it is all so difficult. Why can't we go back? To reason like this is to reason like a child in the nursery. She has been enjoying life so far. There have been gifts from the parents, and endless play, and the child has enjoyed it. But now comes the day when the parents take the child off to school, and the child does not care for it. Why can't she go back and play as she used to instead of having to be made to face lessons in school that are tedious and uninteresting? But see that child in ten years' time, and she will not want to go back to the nursery. She has now been trained so that she sees greater possibilities in life.

And though God gives us times of great enjoyment in spiritual life, yet sooner or later he allows things to become difficult, so that he might develop us, and so that we get more out of spiritual life. And that is not only here; God thinks not only about the few years of our preparation in this life, but

dead. And imagine further that we realized the fact that Christ's body was in the grave because he died for our sins; and unless he was raised from the dead, there would be no justification for us: we would simply remain as we were, unforgiven and liable to God's wrath (1 Cor 15:17). Aware of the gravity of the situation, we say to one another: 'Look, let's stand round the grave, join hands and start believing as strongly as we can. For if only we can manage to believe with strong enough faith, our faith will cause the Lord's body to rise from the grave, and we can then be sure that we are justified and have peace with God.' Would the strength of our faith bring Jesus out of the grave? Of course not. The very idea is grotesque.

The resurrection of Christ was something that lay beyond any human power to effect. God alone could do it. In fact, if God had not done it, there would never have been any gospel for us to believe (1 Cor 15:14–17). Faith, for us, then means believing that God has done what we could never do, in raising Christ from the dead, and then resting entirely on that and on its significance.

David Gooding, *The Riches of Divine Wisdom: The New Testament's Use of the Old Testament*, pp. 135–6

has in mind a whole eternity. We have to learn to share in his holiness, to behave as he behaves. It is the way the divine persons behave that makes heaven heaven. How short life is to prepare us for eternity! Shall we not rather, then, submit to him? Shall we not trust his wisdom? Shall we not agree that he sees and foresees far better than we do? And shall we not cooperate with him and live? Why, of course! By his grace we will. Now at the time discipline seems painful and not at all pleasant. Afterwards, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

David Gooding, *An Unshakeable Kingdom: The Letter to the Hebrews for Today*, pp. 229–30