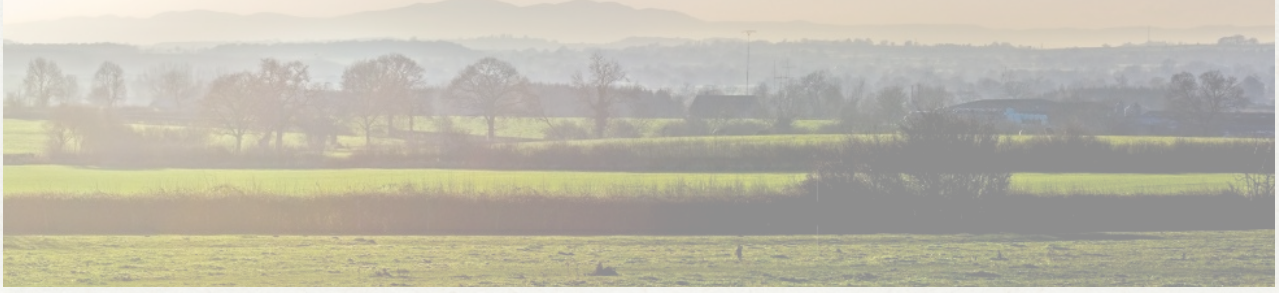




Malvern Mashal 101



'Overweight'

The word the Lord gave me in one of my morning devotions this week was 'overweight'. We'll leave others to worry about being *physically* overweight; I am interpreting the word in the sense of heavy shadows hanging over people – but linking it with 2 Cor. 4:17, as the 'overweight' of God's glory – and specifically in the sense that it often seems to come through trials and afflictions. (2 Cor. 4:17)

Paul invested heavily in the Thessalonian church *so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted – and it turned out that way, as you well know. (1 Thess. 3:2-4)*

This is by no means an isolated occasion in the New Testament Scriptures. We have mentioned before that the Lord has forewarned us very clearly on a number of occasions when a season intense pressure was about to come our way.¹ Most commonly we have found that His strongest warnings come just hours, or at the most days, before a particular difficulty arises. In Scripture, however, we sometimes find people being warned even years ahead of time: in some cases right at the outset of their calling. In this edition we are going to look at how this affected three people in particular: Mary, Peter and Paul.

Mary: 'Let it be to me according to Your word' (Luke 1:38)

When the angel visited Mary to inform her that she had been specially selected to bear

the Lord Jesus, there were both long and short term challenges woven into the beauty of the calling. How, after all, could the call to carry a child, as it would appear to others out of wedlock, fail to bring not just condemnation down on her head but even the possibility of being stoned? Yet here was the angel promising that nothing is impossible to God, and that His power would overshadow her and cause her to bear a child. The best things come in surprising packages – an overweight of eternal glory in an obscure provincial birth.

Mary was troubled and had to untangle in her mind precisely who it was who was offering her this tremendous privilege. Was it truly an angel from Heaven or some deceptive power? She, like all of us at various junctures in our pilgrimage, needed discernment. But she most truly *was* favoured by the Lord – as surely as there are not a few who fondly imagine themselves to be *more* favoured of God than they really are – and others who imagine that the Lord would never choose or use them anyway!

When Mary had worked this matter through and realised that it truly was of the Lord, utterly extraordinary though it sounded, she was courageous enough to jeopardise her marriage, and to risk her reputation. But for her courage there would have been no divine birth. What does this have to say about not giving in to the fear of man?

Some months later, Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be God's sign to the world, and that He would be heavily opposed by hostile people. The force of this rejection would greatly hurt His mother too. From the very beginning, therefore, Mary carried not only

¹ Cf ruachministries.org/valeoftears/handlingdarktimes.



the awesome preciousness of her calling but also the constant knowledge that 'a sword would pierce her own heart' too. (Luke 2:36) Every word spoken against Him would hurt her, and as for her feelings at the Cross they are best imagined rather than spoken out.

I can't help wondering whether many leaders today, if 'judging' such a prophetic word might not have been inclined to edit that bit out of Simeon's utterance as being 'unedifying' or 'discouraging'. Yet it truly was inspired by God. In a sense, the shadow of the Cross lay across the coming of the Lord Jesus into the world.

Sometimes there is a role for what I call anticipatory grief, as we contemplate the reality of certain impending and inevitable losses.¹

'Peter, do you love Me?' (John 21:15)

Although He waited till after they had eaten together, the Lord Jesus had sobering things to say to Peter at the very time when He was restoring Him after his fall. They had already seen each other a number of times without the Lord referring to Peter's recent denial of Him – but they both knew they would have to address the 'elephant' in the room. When He does so on the beach, the Lord does not bother to ask his friend how much he has wept over his failure; He knows full well that Peter has reproached himself bitterly, and He therefore he has no need to do so.

But neither does He go to the opposite extreme and flatter him with reassurances about what a great leader he will be, and what fruit he will bear in all the mighty missions he will conduct! No, the Lord is concerned to repair the deep trust and friendship between them, and therefore He asks him if he truly loves Him – and loves Him more than the pleasures of the world or the chance to make a living out of his former profession.

In this He shows us the very best way to restore those who have fallen. Even whilst humility teaches us to esteem others as better than ourselves, we simply cannot serve well in

¹ Cf Anticipatory Grief:

ruachministries.org/valeoftears/anticipatorygrieffears

ruachministries.org/valeoftears/anticipatorygriefgoodbye

the ministry without this profound love for the Lord (and trust) flowing in our hearts. Having confirmed Peter in his calling in the work of Jesus, the Lord now warns Him that this would not mean endless ease and honour but rather a profound sharing in His own suffering, and concludes by prophesying the manner of the death by which Peter would glorify the Lord (John 21:18-19) Jesus prefaces this revelation by the words Verily verily in the King James Version. The NIV simply says, 'I tell you the truth' because Jesus wants Peter to know that this is not just a possibility, or even a probability but something that was quite definitely decreed. As He foresaw His own sufferings, so Jesus foresees the sufferings of His friends.

The fact that Jesus specifically says that this will happen to Peter when he is old must have been a great reassurance to him in the early days of the Church when he found himself in prison. The Church needed him and his time had not come. It meant, however, that he, like Mary, had to carry this prophetic forewarning with him for the rest of his life.

The Lord knows the times and seasons, and we can all pray that we will make the transition to times when we are no longer able to do things we once did.

ruachministries.org/valeoftears/shrinkinghorizons.htm

Paul: 'I will show him how much he will suffer'

Peter received His call in the aftermath of denying his Lord. Paul received his after massacring His followers. Grace is abundantly free and transforming, but it does not mean that we will not suffer. Paul was, in fact, shown how much he would suffer for the sake of the Kingdom right at the outset of his ministry, (Acts 9:15-16). The man who had been the hammer of the faithful now becomes the instrument of God's choice – not for fame and pre-eminence but rather to be appointed a lifetime of danger and sufferings. It is the thumbnail sketch of his whole ministry. Later, he is further warned that in every city that he visits, prison and suffering lie ahead for him. (Acts 20:23)

The examples above should be enough to convince us that the Lord often does warn people when they are about to go through great sufferings – but it is really important that we don't *add* to what the Lord has said, or become fearfully preoccupied by the prospect of future afflictions. In the verse referred to above, Paul did *not* say 'I know that *only* prison and suffering lie ahead. What he actually said was 'I *only know* that prison and suffering lie ahead' . . .

Misplace one part of what the Lord has said, and it gives a completely false emphasis. Had Paul 'heard it wrong' in the way suggested above, he could easily have felt so crushed by the thought of the what he would be obliged to endure that he would have lost all incentive to do the work of the Kingdom while there was still strength and opportunity to do so. After all, the devil is such a past master at painting vivid images of suffering to our consciousness, in his bid to weigh us down and knock us out.

How do we respond to the overweight of sufferings that come our way?

It is always important to remember that Fear is **False Emotions Appearing Real!** Psychologists tell us that only about twenty percent of our fears relate to 'real' challenges, the remaining eighty percent being projections of our fears and insecurities. God will give us grace to handle real issues: our task is not to allow fear to paralyse us.

It is also worth remembering when any shock hits that it takes time to adjust to fresh realities.¹ Praise keeps our gaze focused in the right direction, and does more than anything else to keep fear at bay.

Because the devil's specialist Mastermind subject is 'A thousand ways to induce fear in the hearts of believers,' we might be inclined to suppose that any premonitions about the way ahead being full of suffering is purely his domain – or at least something that we can always 'pray away'.

Jesus' words challenge us sharply: 'As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent

me. Night is coming, when no one can work.'
(John 9:4)

I am always amazed at the difference between my understanding that it is a privilege to suffer for the Lord (and that those who suffer with Him will also reign with Him) and my actual response to the first whiffs of it. Partly I think this is because it often feel very much like suffering for the Lord: it usually feels more like the fruit of someone else's aggro or malice, the misfortunes of the way a situation is turning out, or even the fruit of one's own recklessness.

As to how we cope with these times. Paul, like Jesus, set His will to go through whatever Gethsemane style sufferings he would be called to experience in the days ahead. This was much more than just an attitude of gritted teeth acceptance:

'God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him . . . That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.' (2 Cor. 12:10)

Paul loved life as intensely as anyone else, but he loved honouring the Lord – and feared denying and dishonouring him – more than life itself.²

Father, thank You for the way that Mary, Peter and Paul, and so many through the centuries, have handled both the awareness of suffering to come, and the actual reality of it. Thank You that You gave Mary the grace to embrace the lovely thing You were asking of her and to accept the cost it would entail. May we be given grace to do the same. Thank You that she was able to ponder these things in her heart over the years without giving in to fear or fatalism – may we be inspired to do the same.

¹ cf ruachministries.org/valeoftears/shockandguilt
and also
ruachministries.org/valeoftears/nopitsodeep.

² Cf ruachministries.org/valeoftears/shockandguilt

Thank you that Peter accepted what You had said, but continued proactive to the very end, not going into every appointment wondering if this would be the one that would lead to his execution. Thank You for giving him the willingness to follow wherever You led.

Thank you that Paul longed to glorify you whether in life or by his death. Thank You that he was totally sincere – not double minded at all. Thank You that so far from giving in to the immense pressures the powers of darkness directed his way, he pressed on to fulfil his calling and to achieve the highest prize, knowing full well that it has been granted to us not only to believe in the Lord Jesus but to suffer with Him. (Phil. 1:29)

Concerning the death of Lazarus, Jesus promised, 'If you believe, you will see the glory of God.' (John 11:40) Is there any area of our life in which we have ceased doing this?

We should not be surprised by the fiery trials that come our way. These trials are actually working together for us an exceeding and an altogether greater, eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17) That is surely the real meaning of the word overweight which I believe the Lord is highlighting. We would love to hear from you about how you fare at such times!

I loved Phil Lawson Johnson's song in which the first chorus ends 'He is surrounded in glory,' and ends by declaring 'We are surrounded in glory.' More and more the Lord wants us to know how thin is the veil between Heaven and earth. The root word for glory itself in Hebrew, however, speaks of a 'weight'. In God's sight there is nothing theoretical abstract or merely 'doctrinal' about us being surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. The glory of God is the purpose of God and is therefore indistinguishable from Himself. It is a wonderful theme to meditate on!

Pray for all who are affected by the 'overweight' of heavy issues. State persecution, as in places such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Iran; social or financial constraints; the pain of being misunderstood or challenged and so on.

Take time to let such people come to mind - and then pray that they may remain clear thinking and proactive, rather than held down by fear.

Pray they may have the right level of support through their trials.

Pray for the Lord to bring a 'dividend on the trouble,' causing there to be more fruit than if the situation had not come about in the first place. This was certainly true for Paul after being arrested and put in jail in Philippae; (Phil. 1:12-13). Ponder the fruit that has come as a result of handling certain shocks *well* in your own life – as well as those where you could have fared better!

See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. (2 Cor. 7:10-12)

Treva Solanki recently pointed us to the NKJV translation of Psalm 11:4, which includes a fascinating reference I had not noticed before to God's eyelids!

The LORD is in His holy temple,
The LORD's throne is in heaven;
His eyes behold,
His eyelids test the sons of men.

God may be in an unseen place, out of our sight, but we are not out of His. He sees through people's outward attitudes and pretensions to what they really are. He is not mocked.

The Psalms are such a rich source of comfort, leaving out nothing of the challenges that face those who lead a godly life. You might find something relevant to pray in this respect by going to:

www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+11:4&version=NKJV Click on **Show Resources** on the right in the middle of the page, and then click **Asbury Bible Commentary, B: Prayers for Deliverance from Accusation and Persecution.**

They point to a God who is willing to share the sorrows and struggles of His children, and to intervene meaningfully on their behalf.

Reawakenings

In this edition we are also releasing two short tracks from the first CD of *Reawakenings*, continuing our series on the theme of the New Heaven and New Earth. Both of them are set to harp pieces played by Bill Klein, from his publication *Lauda*. Please see www.ruachministries.org/reawakening/cd1.htm

Track 3 from Reawakenings



ruachministries.org/reawakening/cd1track03.mp3

On the night before He died, the Lord Jesus said, "I will not drink the fruit of the vine again until I drink it anew with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29).

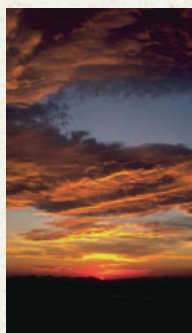
Food and drink must therefore have their place in that utterly grace-filled sphere that You have prepared for the redeemed human race, where God beloved animals will lie down at peace with each other and at ease with us, leaving us free to enjoy whatever rewards and commissions the Lord may choose to apportion as He ushers in the new heaven and the new earth.

When souls saved by Christ fall asleep they emerge from the tent of their bodies and enter the realm of Paradise:

a place of parkland rest and refreshment, of blissful reunions with those in Christ whom we have loved, and with those who persevered beyond their trials to the infinitely better resurrection beyond. (Heb. 11:35,38)

Let's not end the story at what may prove to be but the end of the beginning:

the call of God will appoint the meek to return with Christ to reign and rule on Earth.



This is our ultimate calling, and how we respond in life will determine our fitness for service there, where Beauty personified renews the earth in glory, and so fulfils the prophecies of old. (Hab. 2:14) (See Rev. 20 for a picture of Earth as it would have been had sin not entered in).

Track 4 from Reawakenings

ruachministries.org/reawakeningcd1track04.mp3

Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given the authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for proclaiming the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or hands. They came to life again, and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.) Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, for they will be priests of God and of Christ, the Messiah, and will reign with Him a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4-6)

By Your Spirit's grace enable us to play our part in this first and greatest resurrection. By Your Spirit's power be deposit and bridge between these two worlds; Reawaken our heart to these unseen heavenly realms, and draw us into Your courts to reflect on what it means to live and move in Your power



and authority – for anything that we lose now for the sake of the King now will be amply reaccredited then.

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