

503 Faith, Hope, Love

Paul's life in three "Acts" – resisting Christ, then encountering Christ, and then serving Christ - is a fine example in our last Reflection of the sheer difference which God the Father makes, through His Son Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, in bringing about a radically changed "born-again life".

In I Corinthians 13.13 we read the well-known words written by Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (NKJV). These three spiritual virtues took root in "Act Three" of Paul's life, and they clearly have a central place in any God-fearing life, be that life being lived under either the Old or the New Covenant.

For we also come across these three virtues, (picked out here in capital letters), in Psalm 31.23-24, "O LOVE the Lord, all ye his saints: [for] the Lord preserveth the FAITHFUL, and plentifully rewardeth the proud doer. Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that HOPE in the Lord" (KJV).

In Psalm 31 life is tough for David: a net laid for him by his enemies, along with their slander and plots to kill him (vv.4,13); he is in trouble, filled with grief and sighing, with failing strength and "bones consumed" (vv.9-10); he has been "a reproach" among his enemies and neighbours, and "a fear" to his acquaintances, forgotten as "a dead man out of mind", and like "a broken vessel" (vv.11-12). We get the message, and may well have had similar times and experiences ourselves.

Yet David remains strong in FAITH, HOPE and LOVE with regard to the Lord. "In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust (from vv.1,6). For David continues to trust, even when his life is grim, that the Lord is "my strong rock ... house of defence ... my rock and my fortress ... my strength" (from vv.2-4); and, "... how great is thy goodness ... his marvellous kindness ... thou heardest the voice of my supplications ... the Lord preserveth the faithful" (from vv.19,21-23).

So in his prayers David boldly asks for the Lord to intervene. "Let me never be ashamed, deliver me, bow down thine ear to me, deliver me speedily" (from vv.1-2). "Lead me, guide me, pull me out of the net" (from vv.3-4). "Have mercy upon me, O Lord; deliver me, make thy face to shine upon me, save me" (from vv.9,16). "Let me not be ashamed, let

the wicked be ashamed, [and] let them be silent in the grave; let the lying lips be put to silence” (from vv.17-18).

We notice the grounds on which David makes his appeals – that the Lord may answer him “for thy name’s sake ... for thy mercies’ sake” (from vv.3b, 16b). David recognises here that the Lord’s responses which he is asking for will truly spring from, and will reflect, the Lord’s own character; in other words – “Lord, I am only asking you to do what it is in your nature to do anyway”!

A high point of the psalm is found in those few words in verse 15a – “My times [are] in thy hand” – a simple recognition that the Lord is the Lord, He is ever-faithful, and He knows what He is doing. We are reminded here of Jesus’ own ministry, where much of what David has been passing through as described in Psalm 31, Jesus knows all too well for Himself – enemies, plots, lies, weariness, tears, frustration (egs., Luke 4.1-13, 28-30; 11.15 / Mark 4.37-38 / John 11.35 / Mathew 23.37-39). As Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, when part of Him was desperate to “cut and run” from His Father’s will as He faced up to the horrors soon to befall Him, He made His humble response, “Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done” (from Luke 22.42b). These words go hand in hand with David’s earlier response found in Psalm 31.15. Both responses show faith in the Lord God, hope in the Lord God, and love for the Lord God; in essence, “My times are in thy hand, may thy will be done”.

The nations of the world are in an increasingly troubled state, requiring our multi-response of faith, hope and love, and of watching, readiness and prayer. We finish this time with a condensed version of those words from the start, “O LOVE the Lord, all ye his saints ... the Lord preserveth the FAITHFUL ... Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that HOPE in the Lord” (Psalm 31.23-24. KJV).

Yes, for God the Father has mightily blessed us in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. In Christ we have the Way, the Truth and the Life, and in Christ we have nothing and no-one to fear (eg., Romans 8.37-39).

And Yes, for by God’s call and grace we do indeed love, trust and hope in the Lord - and we have a Bible-full of good reasons for doing so!

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