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Our Light Affliction

The recent economic downturn has frightened many who stand to lose much from the financial fallout. Corporations such as GM, in an effort to control costs, are willing to end health benefits for retired workers and other companies are following suit, cutting costs in areas that harm those who dedicated and gave their lives to make these businesses great. These events show that hard work sometimes only makes you tired while others reap the benefits. That is depressing when we think only in human terms. Many have pursued the “American Dream” the idea that anything is possible if we are willing to work for it. The reality is that we may work hard and wind up falling short of expected goals as long as other humans can influence and control the outcome of our endeavors. Sometimes that dream can become a nightmare of our own creation. Hard work is only part of the formula. No one succeeds in isolation. If you see a successful person you can rest assured that there have been many others who contributed to their success. Another factor is that the environment has to be willing and able to support and recognize the contributions that have been made and the level of expertise that has been achieved. Chance is also a factor in determining success although the role of blind circumstance is reduced when we put sufficient work into a pursuit and reach a level of mastery that diminishes reliance on external factors. The point is that many folks have watched as their homes, jobs and other pursuits have vanished in the recent tidal wave of problems. Sometimes this was due to mismanagement and other times to outside forces such as factories that close the doors of a plant. In the first to the fourth centuries Christians were subjected to persecution that we will probably not see in our lives. Their goods were taken, their lives threatened (**Heb 11.36-39**) and they were subjected to a number of pressures socially and otherwise. Comparing our lives and the things that are befalling folks today, although unpleasant, are nonetheless short of what faithful Christians faced during earlier times. Paul refers to the present distress that they faced as a “light affliction” and states **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...”** (**2 Cor 4.17**) Difficulties that we face now might drive home the need to concentrate on that which is truly meaningful. Serving God gives us a sense of identity and helps us to weather the storms of life. The pursuit of what Jonah referred to as **“lying vanities”** (**Jonah 2.8**) leads to despair and loss. Some of the

loftiest houses entrusted with the management of financial investments have proven to be unstable and untrustworthy. Christ tell us, **“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”** (**Matt 6.19-21**). The encouraging thing is that recently I have heard more folks state that they are thankful that they have the things that they do and are able to take care of their families to the extent that they can. We have also seen a more generous spirit on the part of those who are willing to help others. During such times we are reminded of our need for God and the instability of the world around us. We learn the value of the home with God that has been promised to those who are faithful to him and this will help us to strive harder to get there. Paul, in the passage above, was speaking of the things that he and other apostles had to endure in order to teach and preach the gospel. His conclusion was that there was no comparison between what they were losing in the present world and the reward that awaited them after death. With the persecutions in mind we can appreciate the struggle of those in earlier times who were willing to give their lives for a cause that had no promise of earthly gain. That is faith. The greatest lesson that we can learn is that there is no solidity or future in things based on this world. The only thing that has a future is believing and serving God. It may be difficult at times to be patient and wait for bad things to pass. We get spoiled when things go well and we lose sight of what is important. As Solomon stated, **“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”** (**Eccl 12.13-14**).

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