

[STEM Publishing: The writings of C. H. Mackintosh](#): Discipleship in an evil day.

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"Follow thou me." John 21: 22.

C. H. Mackintosh.

Preface.

The following Tract is a reprint of a paper which appeared in a recent number of "The Present Testimony," containing the substance of a Lecture on the first three chapters of the Book of Daniel. It is published in this form, at the request of a number of Christian friends and with earnest desire that the Holy Spirit may be pleased to use it for the purpose of leading many hearts to seek a closer walk with God.

C.H.M.

Discipleship in an evil day.

The first three chapters of the Book of Daniel furnish a most seasonable and important lesson at a time like the present, in which the disciple is in such danger of yielding to surrounding influences, and of lowering his standard of testimony and his tone of discipleship, in order to meet the existing condition of things.

At the opening of chapter 1 we have a most discouraging picture of the state of things, in reference to the ostensible witness of God on the earth. "In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God, which he carried into the land of Shinar, to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the house of his god." (Daniel 1: 1, 2) Here then we have an aspect of things quite sufficient, if looked at from nature's point of view, to discourage the heart, to damp the spirit, and paralyse the energies. Jerusalem in ruins, the temple trodden down, the Lord's vessels in the house of a false god, and Judah carried away captive. Surely the heart would feel disposed to say, There is no use in seeking to hold up the standard of practical discipleship and personal devotedness any longer. The spirit must droop, the heart must faint, and the hands must hang down, when such is the condition of the people of God. It could be naught but the most contemptible presumption for any of Judah's sons to think of taking up a true Nazarite's position at such a time.

Such would be nature's reasoning; but such was not the language of faith. Blessed be God! there is always a wide sphere in which the spirit of genuine devotedness can develop itself — there is always a path along which the true disciple can run, even though he should have to run in solitude. It matters not what the outward condition of things may be, it is faith's privilege to hang as much on God, to feed as much on Christ, and to breathe as much of the air of heaven, as though all were in perfect order and harmony.

This is an unspeakable mercy to the faithful heart. All who desire to walk devotedly can always find a path to walk in; whereas, on the contrary, the man who draws a plea, from outward circumstances, for relaxing his energy, would not be energetic, though most favourably situated.

If ever there was a time in which one might be excused for taking a low ground, it was the time of the Babylonish captivity. The entire framework of Judaism was broken up; the kingly power had passed out of the hand of David's successor, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar; the glory had

departed from Israel; and, in one word, all seemed faded and gone, and naught remained for the exiled children of Judah, save to hang their harps upon the willows, and sit down by the rivers of Babylon, there to weep over departed glory, faded light, and fallen greatness.

Such would be the language of blind unbelief; but, blessed be God! it is when everything appears sunk to the lowest possible point, that then faith rises in holy triumph; and faith, we know, is the only true basis of effective discipleship. It asks for no props from the men and things around it; it finds "all its springs" in God; and hence it is that faith never shines so brightly as when all around is dark. It is when nature's horizon is overcast with the blackest clouds, that faith basks in the sunshine of the divine favour and faithfulness.

Thus it was that Daniel and his companions were enabled to overcome the peculiar difficulties of their time. They judged that there was nothing to hinder their enjoying as elevated a Nazariteship in Babylon as ever had been known in Jerusalem; and they judged rightly. Their judgment was the judgment of a pure and well-founded faith. It was the self-same judgment on which the Baraks, the Gideons, the Jephthahs, and the Samsons of old had acted. It was the judgment to which Jonathan gave utterance, when he said, "There is no restraint with the Lord to save by many or by few." (1 Sam. 14) It was the judgment of David, in the valley of Elah, when he called the poor trembling host of Israel "the army of the living God." (1 Sam. 17) It was the judgment of Elijah, on Mount Carmel, when he built an altar with "twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob." (1 Kings 18) It was the judgment of Daniel himself when, at a further stage of his history, he opened his window and prayed toward Jerusalem. (Dan. 6) It was the judgment of Paul when, in view of the overwhelming tide of apostasy and corruption which was about to set in, he exhorts his son Timothy to "hold fast the form of sound words." (2 Tim. 1: 18) It was the judgment of Peter when, in prospect of the dissolution of the entire framework of creation, he encourages believers to "be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless." (2 Peter 3: 14) It was the judgment of John when, amid the actual breaking up of everything ecclesiastical, he exhorts his well beloved Gaius to "follow not that which is evil but that which is good." (3 John 11) And it was the judgment of Jude when, in the presence of the most appalling wickedness, he encourages a beloved remnant to "build themselves up in their most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, to keep themselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." (Jude 20, 21) In one word, it was the judgment of the Holy Ghost, and, therefore, it was the judgment of faith.

Now, all this attaches immense value and interest to Daniel's determination, as expressed in the first chapter of this book. "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself." (Ver. 8) He might, very naturally, have said to himself, "There is no use in one poor feeble captive seeking to maintain a place of separation. Everything is broken up. It is impossible to carry out the true spirit of a Nazarite amid such hopeless ruin and degradation. I may as well accommodate myself to the condition of things around me."

But no; Daniel was on higher ground than this. He knew it was his privilege to live as close to God in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar, as within the gates of Jerusalem. He knew that, let the outward condition of the people of God be what it might, there was a path of purity and devotedness opened to the individual saint, which he could pursue independently of everything.

And may we not say, that the Nazariteship of Babylon possesses charms and attractions fully as powerful as the Nazariteship of Canaan? Unquestionably. It is unspeakably precious and beautiful, to find one of the captives in Babylon breathing after, and attaining unto, so elevated a standard of

separation. It teaches a powerful lesson for every age. It holds up to the view of believers, under every dispensation, a most encouraging and soul-stirring example. It proves that, amid the darkest shades, a devoted heart can enjoy a path of cloudless sunshine.

But how is this? Because "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and for ever." (Heb. 13) Dispensations change and pass away. Ecclesiastical institutions crumble and moulder into ashes. Human systems totter and fall; but the name of Jehovah endureth for ever, and His memorial unto all generations. It is upon this holy elevation that faith plants its foot. It rises above all vicissitude, and enjoys sweet converse with the unchangeable and eternal Source of all real good.

Thus it was that, in the days of the judges, faith achieved more glorious triumphs than ever were known in the days of Joshua. Thus it was that Elijah's altar on Mount Carmel was surrounded by a halo fully as bright as that which crowned the altar of Solomon.

This is truly encouraging. The poor heart is so apt to sink, and be discouraged, by looking at the failure and unfaithfulness of man, instead of at the infallible faithfulness of God. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Tim. 2: 19) What can ever touch this enduring truth? Nothing! And, therefore, nothing can touch the faith which lays hold of it, or the superstructure of practical devotedness which is erected on the foundation of that faith.

And then look at the glorious results of Daniel's devotedness and separation. In the three opening chapters we observe three distinct things, resulting from the position assumed by Daniel and his companions, in reference to "*the king's meat*." 1, They were let into the secret of "*the king's dream*." 2, They withstood the seductions of "*the king's image*." And, 3, They were brought unscathed through "*the king's furnace*."

1. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." This is beautifully exemplified in the case before us. "The magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans," who were breathing the atmosphere of the royal presence, were all in the dark as to the royal dream. "The Chaldeans answered before the king, and said, There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter." Very likely; but there was a God in heaven who knew all about it; and who, moreover, could unfold it to those who had faith enough, and devotedness enough, and self-denial enough, to separate themselves from Babylonish pollutions, though involved in the Babylonish captivity. The mazes, the labyrinths, and the enigmas of human things are all plain to God; and He can and does make them plain to those who walk with Him, in the sanctity of His holy presence. God's Nazarites can see farther into human affairs than the most profound philosophers of this world. And how is this? How can they so readily unravel the world's mysteries? Because they are above the world's mists. They are apart from the world's defilements. They are in the place of separation, the place of dependence, the place of communion. "Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions; that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven, concerning this secret." (Dan. 2: 17, 18) Here we have their place of strength and intelligence. They had only to look up to heaven, in order to be endowed with a clear understanding as to all the destinies of earth.

How real and simple is all this? "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all;" and, hence, if we want light, we can find it only in His presence; and we can only know the power of His presence as we are practically taking the place of separation from all the moral pollutions of earth.

And, observe, a further result of Daniel's holy separation. "Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an oblation and sweet odours unto him." Here we have earth's proudest and most powerful monarch at the feet of the captive

exile. Magnificent fruit of faithfulness! Precious evidence of the truth that God will always honour the faith that can in any measure, rise to the height of His thoughts! He will not, He cannot, dishonour the draft which confidence presents at His exhaustless treasury. Daniel, on this memorable occasion, realised, in his own person, as fully as ever it was realised, God's ancient promise: "And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord; and they shall be afraid of thee. . . And the Lord shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath."(Deut. 28: 10, 13)

Assuredly Daniel was, in the above scene, "the head," and Nebuchadnezzar "the tail," as looked at from the divine point of view. Witness, also, the bearing of this holy Nazarite, in the presence of the impious Belshazzar. (Dan. 5: 17-29) Have we not, here, as magnificent a testimony to the destined pre-eminence of the seed of Abraham, as when Joshua's victorious captains placed their feet on the necks of the kings of Canaan (Joshua 10: 24); or, when "all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart?" (1 Kings 10: 24) Unquestionably; and, in a certain sense, it is a more magnificent testimony. It is natural to expect such a scene in the history of Joshua, or of Solomon; but to find the haughty king of Babylon prostrate at the feet of one of his captives, is something far beyond the utmost stretch of nature's expectation.

There it is, however, as a most striking and soul stirring proof of the power of faith to triumph over all manner of difficulties, and to produce the most extraordinary results. Faith is the same mighty principle, whether it act on the plains of Palestine, on the top of Carmel, by the rivers of Babylon, or amid the ruins of the professing Church. No fetters can bind it, no difficulties deter it, no pressure damp it, no changes affect it. It ever rises to its proper object, and that object is God Himself, and His eternal revelation. Dispensations may change, ages may run their course, the wheels of time may roll on, and crush beneath their ponderous weight the fondest hopes of the poor human heart; but there stands faith, that immortal, divine, eternal reality, drinking at the fountain of pure truth, and finding all its springs in Him, who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

By this "precious faith" it was that Daniel acted, when he "purposed that he would not defile himself with the king's meat." True, he could no longer ascend to that holy and beautiful house, where his fathers had worshipped. The rude foot of a foreign foe had trodden down the holy city. The fire no longer burned on the altar of the God of Israel. The golden candlestick no longer enlightened, with its seven lamps, the holy place. But there was faith in Daniel's heart, and that faith carried him beyond every surrounding influence, and enabled him to appropriate, and act in the power of, "all the promises of God," which are "Yea, and Amen in Christ Jesus." Faith is not affected by ruined temples, fallen cities, faded lights, or departed glories. Why not? Because God is not affected by them. God is always to be found, and faith is always sure to find Him.

2. But the same faith which enabled those holy men of old to refuse the king's meat, enabled them, also, to despise the king's image. They had separated themselves from defilement, in order that they might enjoy a more intense communion with the true God; and they could not, therefore, bow down to an image of gold, even though it were ever so high. They knew that God was not an image. They knew He was a reality. They could only present worship to Him, for He alone was the true object thereof.

Nor did it make any matter to them that all the world was against them. They had only to live and act for God. It might seem as if they were setting up to be wiser than their neighbours. It might savour of presumption to stand against the tide of public opinion. Some might feel disposed to ask if truth lay only with them? Were all "the princes, the governors, and captains, the judges, the treasurers, the

counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces," sunk in darkness and error? Could it be possible that so many men of rank, of intelligence, and of learning were in the wrong, and only a few strangers of the captivity in the right?

With such questions our Nazarites had nothing to do. Their path lay right onward. Should they bow down and worship an image, in order to avoid the appearance of condemning other people? Assuredly not. And yet how often are those, who desire to keep a conscience void of offence in the sight of God, condemned for setting themselves up and judging others.

Doubtless Luther was condemned by many for setting himself up in opposition to the doctors, the cardinals, and the pope. Should he, in order to avoid such condemnation, have lived and died in error? Who would say so?

"Ah! but," some will reply, "Luther had to deal with palpable error." So thought Luther; but thousands of learned and eminent men thought otherwise. So also in the case of "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego," they had to do with positive idolatry; but the whole world differed from them. What then? "We must obey God rather than man." "Let others do as they will; as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." If people were to remain in error and continue to do what they, at least, feel to be wrong, In order to avoid the appearance of judging others, where should we be?

Ah! no; my beloved reader, do you seek to pursue the steady, onward, upward path of pure and elevated discipleship. And, whether or not you, thereby, condemn others, is no concern of yours. "CEASE TO DO EVIL." This is the first thing for the true disciple to do. When he has yielded obedience to this golden precept, he may expect to "learn to do well." "If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light." When God speaks, I am not to turn round to see how my obedience to His voice will affect my neighbours, or to consider what they will think about me. When the voice of the risen and glorified Jesus fell upon the ear of the prostrate Saul of Tarsus, he did not begin to inquire what the chief priests and Pharisees would think of him were he to obey. Surely not. "Immediately," he says, "I conferred not with flesh and blood." (Gal. 1: 16) "Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." (Acts 26: 19) This is the true spirit and principle of discipleship. "Give glory to God, before he cause darkness, and your feet stumble upon the dark mountains." Nothing can be more dangerous than to hesitate, when divine light shines upon the path. If you do not act upon the light, when you get it, you will, assuredly, be involved in thick darkness. Hence, therefore, as another has said, "Never go before your faith, nor lag behind your conscience."

3. But, we have said, if our Nazarites refused to bow before the king's image, they had to encounter the king's rage, and the king's furnace. For all this they were, by the grace of God, prepared: their Nazariteship was a real thing; they were ready to suffer the loss of all things, and even life itself, in defence of the true worship of the God of Israel. "They worshipped and served their own God," not merely beneath the peaceful vine and fig-tree in the land of Canaan, but in the very face of "a burning fiery furnace." They acknowledged Jehovah, not merely in the midst of a congregation of true worshippers, but in the presence of an opposing world. Theirs was a true discipleship in an evil day. They loved the Lord; and, therefore, for His sake, they abstained from the king's luxuries, they withstood the king's rage, and they endured the king's furnace. "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." This was the language of men who knew whose they were, and where they were — of men who had calmly and deliberately counted the cost — of men to whom the Lord was everything, the world nothing. All that

the world could offer, together with life itself, was at stake; but what of that? "They endured as seeing Him who is invisible." Eternal glory lay before them; and they were quite prepared to reach that glory by a fiery pathway. God can take His servants to heaven by a chariot of fire, or by a furnace of fire, as seems good to Him. Whatever be the mode of going, it is well to get there.

But could not the Lord have preserved His beloved servants from being cast into the furnace? No doubt. This would have been but a very small matter to Him. He did not, however, do so: it was His will that the faith of His servants should be put to the test — should be tried in the furnace — should be passed through the most searching crucible, in order that it "might be found to praise and honour and glory." Is it because the refiner sets no value on the wedge of gold, that he puts it into the furnace? No; but because he does. And, as some one has beautifully remarked, "His object is not merely to remove the dross, but to brighten the metal."

It is very evident that had the Lord, by an act of *power*, kept His servants out of the furnace, there would have been less glory to Him, and as a consequence, less blessing to them. It was far better to have His presence and sympathy in the furnace, than His power to keep them out of it. What glory to Him in this! And what unspeakable privilege to them! The Lord went down and walked with His Nazarites in the furnace into which their faithfulness had brought them. They had walked with God in the king's palace; and God walked with them in the king's furnace. This was the most elevated moment in the entire career of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. How little had the king imagined the lofty position in which he was placing the objects of his rage and fury! Every eye was turned from the great image of gold, to gaze, in astonishment, upon the three captives. What could it mean? "Three men *bound!*" "Four men *loose!*" Could it be real? Was the furnace real? Alas, "the most mighty men in the king's army" had proved it to be real. And, had Nebuchadnezzar's image been cast into it, it would have proved its reality also. There was no material for the sceptic or the infidel to work upon. It was a real furnace, and a real flame, and the "three men" were "bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments." All was reality.

But there was a deeper reality: *God was there*. This changed everything: it "changed the king's word," changed the furnace into a place of high and holy fellowship — changed Nebuchadnezzar's bondmen into God's freemen.

God was there! — there, in his power, to write contempt upon all man's opposition — there, in His deep and tender sympathy with His tried and faithful servants — there, in His matchless grace, to set the captives free, and to lead the hearts of His Nazarites into that deep fellowship with Himself for which they so ardently thirsted.

And, my beloved reader, is it not worth passing through a fiery furnace to enjoy a little more of the presence of Christ, and the sympathy of His loving heart? Are not fetters, with Christ, better than jewels without Him? Is not a furnace where He is better than a palace where He is not? Nature says, "No!" Faith says, "Yes!"

It is well to bear in mind that this is not the day of Christ's *power*; but it is the day of His *sympathy*. When passing through the deep waters of affliction, the heart may, at times, feel disposed to ask, 'Why does not the Lord display His power, and deliver me?' The answer is, This is not the day of His power. He could avert that sickness — He could remove that difficulty — He could take off that pressure — He could prevent that catastrophe — He could preserve that beloved and fondly-cherished object from the cold grasp of death. But, instead of putting forth His power to deliver, He allows things to run their course, and pours His own sweet sympathy into the oppressed and riven heart, in such a way as to elicit the acknowledgment that we would not, for worlds, have missed the trial, because of

the abundance of the consolation.

Such, my reader, is the manner of our Jesus just now. By and by He will display His power; He will come forth as the Rider on the white horse; He will unsheath His sword; He will make bare His arm; He will avenge His people, and right their wrongs for ever. But now His sword is sheathed, His arm covered. This is the time for making known the deep love of His heart, not the power of His arm, nor the sharpness of His sword. Are you satisfied to have it so? Is Christ's sympathy enough for your heart, even amid the keenest sorrow and the most intense affliction? The restless heart, the impatient spirit, the unmortified will, would lead one to long for escape from the trial, the difficulty, or the pressure; but this would never do. It would involve incalculable loss. We must pass from form to form in the school; but the Master accompanies us, and the light of His countenance, and the tender sympathy of His heart, sustain us under the most severe exercises.

And, then, see what glory redounds to the name of the Lord, when His people are enabled, by His grace, to pass, triumphantly, through a trial! Read Daniel 3: 26-28, and say where you could find richer or rarer fruits of a faithful discipleship. The king and all his nobles, who, just before, had been wholly engrossed with the bewitching music and the false worship, are now occupied with the amazing fact that the fire, which had slain the mighty men, had taken no effect whatever upon the worshippers of the true God, save to consume their fetters and let them walk free, in company with the Son of God. "Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, YE SERVANTS OF THE MOST HIGH GOD, come forth and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, *saw these men*, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them."

Here, then, was a noble testimony — such a testimony as would never have been rendered, had the Lord, by a mere act of power, preserved His servants from being cast into the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar was furnished with a striking proof that his furnace was no more to be dreaded than his image was to be worshipped by "the servants of the most high God." In a word, the enemy was confounded; God was glorified; and His dear servants brought forth unscathed from "the burning fiery furnace." Precious fruits, these, of a faithful Nazariteship!

And, observe, further, the honour put upon our Nazarites. "Then Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be *the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego*." Their names are intimately associated with the God of Israel. This was a high honour. They had identified themselves with the true God when it was a matter of life and death to do so; and, therefore, the true God identified Himself with them, and led them forth into a large and wealthy place. He set their feet upon a rock, and lifted their heads up above all their enemies round about them. How true it is that "them that honour me I will honour!" And it is equally true that "they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." (1 Sam. 2: 30)

My beloved reader, have you found settled, divine peace for your guilty conscience, in the perfected atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you simply taken God at His word? Have you set to your seal that God is true? If so, you are a child of God; your sins are all forgiven, and you are accepted as righteous in Christ; heaven, with all its untold glories, is before you; you are as sure of being in the glory as Christ Himself, inasmuch as you are united to Him.

Thus, everything is settled for you for time and eternity, according to the very utmost desire of your heart. Your need is met, your guilt removed, your peace established, your title sure. You have nought to do for yourself All is divinely finished.

What remains? Just this: LIVE, FOR CHRIST! You are left here for "a little while," to occupy for Him, and wait for His appearing. Oh! seek to be faithful to your blessed Master. Be not discouraged by the fragmentary state of everything around you. Let the case of Daniel and his honoured companions encourage your heart to seek after an elevated course here below. It is your privilege to enjoy as much of companionship with the blessed Lord Jesus, as if you were cast amid the palmy days of apostolic testimony.

May the Holy Ghost enable the writer and the reader of these lines to drink into the spirit — walk in the footsteps — manifest the graces — and wait for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ!

C.H.M.