

Refilling the Cup of Despair

John R Gavazzoni

"For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;..."--- "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within."---- "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"

Those statements by the Apostle Paul confront us with elements of the normal Christian life, and particularly of apostleship that we'd prefer to deny, ignore or, at the least, play down. But let's add the following before you decide what to do with this genre of holy (yes, I said holy)

experiences: "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong."

Then a little further in that chapter (2Cor.12), he makes the claim that "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance by signs and wonders and miracles." Obviously he's referring to weaknesses, insults distresses, etc as the sort of things that demand perseverance.

But the more popular sentiment might be expressed as: "Gee whiz, I thought the signs of an apostle would be more along the line of the ability to keep an audience spell-bound with anointed eloquence, having an adoring entourage, and the faith to keep oneself immune from such negative stuff, at least the faith to get out of such garbage quickly when it's dumped on you." Well, not according to my reading of scripture and my experience as a disciple.

I've found that the Lord regularly compels me to drink of the cup of despair, and I admit that, having drunk, I always seem to harbor the hope that I'll never have to drink anything so bitter again. Then, lo

and behold, the gentle, sweet, loving Jesus shows up with a full pitcher to refill my glass, commanding me to "drink all of it."

He refills the cup, time and time again, each time making sure that I have a sufficient supply of despair to insure that I get in touch with my weakness, so that I might experience His strength. It was this kind of pressure, this kind of horrendous taxing of the soul, this being overwhelmed with life-sucking, numbing affliction, that opened the way for those other signs of apostleship: signs, wonders and miracles.

Beloved, we seem to be almost clueless about our covert confidence in the flesh. God will have none of it.

There is an extant expectation that signs, wonders and miracles are about to burst on the scene as confirmation of the rich Word that God is releasing in our day, and that they will be proportionate to the grandeur of what God is revealing to and through his saints. I share that expectation. Did you hear me, I said I share that expectation. But I share it with the beloved Apostle John, as a "partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus..."

Watchman Nee observed that John had sandwiched the kingdom in between tribulation and perseverance. Yep, that pretty much says it. We ought not to be looking for signs, wonders and miracles apart from a true display of the kingdom of God, and God is becoming more stringent in His demand that the miraculous do just that, exhibit His rule in the affairs of men.

He has winked in the past at a mixture of the miraculous with all kinds of stuff that had more to do with the kingdom of men than the kingdom of God. No more of this being empowered to heal the sick and then go on to disgrace the Name of Christ. Now, He's heating up the purifying fire again, before granting a new release of His power against sickness and demons.

Some of us may not see the "greater works" that Jesus promised us "on this side," but our experiences of despair and the weakening of the outer man are helping to raise the corporate level of yet-unreleased power through weakness that will explode on earth's scene whether we be physically visible at the time or not.

I have "seen" and felt the presence of departed brethren in gatherings of the saints where I have been present several times. I fully expect, whether visibly or invisibly, to be a full participant in the manifestation of the sons of God that will fulfill what God began at the day of Pentecost.

I hold no superstitious imagination of individually escaping death because resurrection, incorruptibility and immortality belong to the Body of Christ, not to autonomous members. What we see as the death of our bodies is really the putting on of the Body of Christ with its immortality.

Since I have been a voice heralding "the finished work of Christ," you might wonder why I'm writing along these lines. There is no inconsistency in the spiritual mind, for "the suffering of this present time" has been completed in Christ. We suffer now the perfected and perfecting suffering in Christ Jesus.

It's a cup we drink now that we have already drunk in Christ, so there's no doubt as to whether or not it yields the "peaceable fruit of righteousness. The perfected "then" is "now," one in the same. There is no doubt about where it will bring us. It brought us in Christ to the throne and to glory. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him."

Once I was a young man with so many years ahead of me that I could not meaningfully confront the ending of "this life." Now I'm an old man and the fleeting nature of this 5-senses life compels me into a much truer perspective of My Father's Way with me. I know much more the truth that, "though the outer man perish, yet the inner man is renewed day by day.

Much Love
John R Gavazzoni