

THE STRATEGY IN FAITH

By: Norman P. Grubb

Now to the subject, on speaking the word of faith. If we are to do so, if we are to be bold in believing that in many circumstances or our daily life what we want is what He wants us to have, for "He is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure," then there remains one important prerequisite.

Nothing is easier in the rough and tumble of life than to remain on the natural level and never even to conceive of bringing spiritual forces to bear on a situation. Obviously no word of faith can be spoken, no investigation even made unto the will or plan of God as a groundwork for speaking it, unless it first dawns on the mind that there is some better condition than the existing one, that God can intervene and change things. That seems to go without saying. Yet it is a blank wall which hinders God from intervening as He would in a million instances.

Look only at the Scriptures. Why only an Abraham whom God could call out to start a new generation of faith? Why only a Moses who could get bread and water in the wilderness? Why only a David who could defeat Goliath? Or only a Gideon to destroy the Midianites? Or only an Elijah to turn the nation back to God? Was it because God has favorites, and will do for one what He will not for another? the answer to that is obvious. God's "Whosoever" and whensoever have no limits. The truth is that very rarely can God find an individual emancipated enough from his Norman outlook to glimpse even the possibility of change. "The eyes of the Lord turn to and frow throughout the whole earth," the prophet said, "to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him." The others in David's or Gideon's or Elijah's day just didn't see that God could and world do the impossible if someone would rise up and believe him. Blindness is the problem. Preoccupation with and resignation to the status quo. We are all guilty of it a thousand times.

To see things from the human aspect, to feel the weight of things, the apparent impossibility of any change, is not wrong. It is just natural. We should be sub-human if we did not. Indeed, as we pointed out in the chapter on temptation, the pressures of things upon us is the first step in an essential process

Why comes temptation, but for man to meet

And master and make crouch beneath his feet

And to be pedestal's in triumph?

It is the friction which kindles the flame of faith. Paul points this out when he says that in the ministry of the Gospel, trouble, perplexity, persecution, calamity come to us as an essential stage in the production of the spiritual harvest. The old life dies that the new may spring forth, we "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body." That resurrection life, Paul says, first wells up in the soul (the seed) itself in an unconquerable spirit of faith, which gives almost an india-rubber consistency to the soul. There is trouble, yes, but never panic; perplexity, yes, but never hopelessness; persecution, but never a sense of abandonment; knock-down, but never knock-out blows. And then it becomes the world's spiritual granary. "Death worketh in us, but life in you." The seed dies. The harvest rises. The world is fed.

But the trouble is that so often we just do not "see" this. Life is a constant series of glorious opportunities not grasped because not recognized. We just take the happenings of life for granted and leave them there. We are so used to judging by our natural senses, to seeing need, weakness, frustration, which the helpless, unbelieving out of world. We find it unnatural and difficult to carry out Christ's word, "Judge not by appearances."

There is only one remedy. In warfare no army can fight without a general staff. No battle is won right up at the front line. It is too close to the enemy to get a right perspective. Soldiers may make fun of the "the brass hats," as they nickname the staff, but they could not do without them. Back there at general

headquarters, away from roar of battle, the commander-in-chief has his maps and reports, holds his conferences and issues his orders. Tactics, the clash of regiment with regiment, tank with tank, are useless without strategy, the over-all plan of campaign.

Life's battle must also have its strategy. Blind tactics, desultory front-line shooting, is mere waste of ammunition. There must be that quiet spot, that G.H.Q. away in a wood, where the war is reviewed as a whole and the voice of the C.-in-c. is heard. Not just a blind "Stick-it, pressure? When can we counter-attack? What about a shift of the army? A sudden drive on this flank or that?"

See Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, when he was suddenly attacked by a confederacy of enemies, Ammonites, Edomites, Moabites. They were on him with warning. The first he knew was that they were only thirty miles from the capital. Common sense would say; "Mobilize, rush out and stop them," yet with little hope, for they vastly outnumbered him and were prepared for battle. But Jehoshaphat knew the secret of the spiritual strategist. Don't rush out. Rush in. Go to the C.-in-C. Have it out with Him. Get His outlook and orders.

Jehoshaphat was human. he feared, the record says. Quite right, quite normal. Necessary, in fact, for fear is faith in reverse; and faith, once roused to believe the worst, can be reversed to believe the opposite. Paul feared when he came to Corinth after his rough handling in Philippi and Thessalonica; but he converted his fear into a boomerang and made it the driving force of a greater determination than ever before to preach none other "save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." Even Jesus feared, but the fear aroused "strong crying and tears," and the crying an overcoming faith. he "was heard in the He feared."

Jehoshaphat also used his fear aright. He did not allow it to give him spiritual paralysis by flooding his mind with counsels of panic and exhausting his energies on futile preparations. He did not allow it to hold him a captive in the power of appearances. He took the way by which the panic-stricken soul struggles up

from the grim dungeon of satanic threats to the bracing highlands of God's deliverance, from the cry of terror to the laugh of faith, from shoulders bowed beneath the load of care to bruising the enemy beneath the feet. he called the nation to a day of fasting and prayer. not to front-line action, but to staff consultations. It was the strategist at work; the day of tactics had not yet come. It was the general calling his staff together to meet the threat of invasion.

But now note the contents of his prayer which the record quotes in full. he did not reach his specific request until the last sentence. All the rest was asking obvious questions of God, the affirmative answer to each of which was equally obvious. "Art not Thou God in heaven?" "Rulest not Thou over all?" "In Thine hand is there not power and might so that none is able to withstand Thee?" Then, a little closer home: "Art not Thou our God Who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham. Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham. Thy friend forever?" "And didst thou not say that if, when evil cometh, we cry unto Thee, Thou wilt hear and help?"

What was Jehoshaphat really doing? Not persuading God, but himself! Piling up in his own mind in God's presence an overwhelming weight of evidence that god had given him a right to appeal to Him in this case. Finding, in fact, a foothold for faith. And that brings us to the real roots of effectual prayer. It comes from God first to me, and then back from me to God. It is God Who has purposes to fulfill, in the destruction of the devil's work, in showing forth His glory and grace to men; it is God who permits this or that experiences to come to us: and then, if we will listen, it is God who tells us how He will glorify His Name and confound the devil by getting us out of it. We may appear to be crying to Him to deliver; but what really is happening is that, as we reason and plead and present His promises to Him, the Spirit is getting through to us and conveying to us the sure fact that God has long ago planned the answer. He knows what we have need of before we ask. he responds before we call. In other words, while we are busy persuading god, in reality He is

persuading us! For what He wants is our faith; but faith is not easily attained in times of stress and bewilderment, for faith is hearing God's voice and believing Him, and the troubled mind may need to pour itself out with many a groan and a tear and struggle, before it is in a fit condition of release to hear that ever-speaking voice.

So Jehoshaphat "set himself to seek the Lord," separated himself by fasting from all that would distract, publicly reasoned with God as to why He should help, and with a final admission of helplessness and bewilderment, asked God to work.

The rest now followed just in the way we would expect, resulting in almighty national exploit of faith. Up arose a prophet who assured the king and people by the word of the Lord that there was no need to fear or fight in this battle; they were just to march out to-morrow, stand still when they came in sight of the enemy, and see the Lord's salvation. (Prophets were God's messengers in those days, because the Spirit and the Word were not yet given to the Church.) But such a word would have been to Jehoshaphat as the voice of one who mocked, if his heart had not been first prepared to take it. By now, by fearing and fasting, reasoning and groaning, the soil was ploughed up ready to receive the seed of faith.

King and people accepted, worshipped, prayed. Then, next morning (what sort of a night does a man have who has already believed in a crisis?), Jehoshaphat spoke out the word of faith. The mountain top was reached. "Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established; believe His prophets (His Word), so shall ye prosper." And so complete was his faith that it had reached the laughing stage, and in place of setting the battle in array, he proposed sending forward a choir! And so intoxicated with faith were the people that they agreed. Was there ever such a marching out to battle?

The end is well known. How, as Judah sang and praised, the three armies got fighting among themselves, till they had

completely destroyed each other; and how, when Judah arrived, they found them all "dead bodies fallen to the earth," and it took them three days to gather the spoil.

Upon what did it all hang? Upon Jehoshaphat giving time to get God's mind upon it. Without this, such fantastic behavior could never have entered the mind of a level-headed ruler. With it, a glorious victory was won without a casualty.

Look at the great crises of faith in the Bible, and the same two facts are constantly outstanding; first, a period of preliminary consultation with God, a staff-meeting away from the firing line; then, a sweeping victory with remarkably small output of energy or loss of life. See Moses at the Red Sea, Joshua at Jordan, Joshua at Jericho, Jonathan and the Philistines, David and Goliath, David at Ziklag, Hezekiah and the Assyrians, Paul and the shipwreck..

Those who would walk in any degree a sure path of faith must learn to do the same. The habit of retirement must be acquired. No matter how busy the life, time must always be found, and can be found, for men will always find time for what they really want to do. And in that quiet corner each situation must be weighed. We may appear to do the talking and God the listening, as with Jehoshaphat. We may spread the matter before God. We may reason as to why He should act for us. We may search into motives. We may make supplication. But really it is God getting His own mind through to us, the Spirit helping our infirmities, for we know not what to pray for as we ought; until gradually or suddenly assurance is ours. Boldness is ours, heaven is open to us, the throne is a throne of grace, and we are seated with Him in the place of plenty and authority. the Spirit has prayed through us according to the Father's will. The circuit is complete: from the Father to our minds by the Spirit; from our minds back to the Father by the Spirit. The hidden power is released.