

Taking the Mountain Climb of Faith

“Expose yourself to the circumstances of His choice.”

This little phrase, which has stood by many a climbing soul, seems to have been coined for a picture I have of the Matterhorn surrounded by billowing clouds. In this picture, the confusion of the skies has been so wonderfully captured that I can almost see the movement and hear the wind that rushes past. The clouds in the picture are sunlit, but I realize that, were they real, they could with awful speed cover the face of the mountain with darkness.

Mist, rain, snow—the clouds may bring them all, and the precipice falls away at our feet. “But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy”(Acts 20:24, NKJV)—so speaks the spiritual mountaineer.

Of course no parable, including this one, shows everything: We know that no natural-realm climber among the precipices purposely exposes himself to stormy wind or willingly walks into clouds. But spiritual mountaineers must; and at such an hour there must be “some perseverance when we are tired, some resoluteness not to let ourselves off easily,” something akin to the spirit of the world’s mountaineers, “a spirit firm and tenacious and ambitious enough to drive on the body to its seemingly last extremity.”

There is no such thing as an easy or a sheltered climb. But “what know they of harbours who toss not on the sea?” And what know they of succor who have never ventured in difficult places? We shall press through the mist and the smothering snow; we shall climb and not give way; for there is One invisible with us, “and with every call of every hour His word

is, 'Let us go hence.'"

But notice the word is "us"; we do not go alone. And we take this word in faith, just as we take such words as "The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Ps. 34:7), in faith.

"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward" (Heb. 10:35). Cast it not away when Grief is a companion with whom you must become acquainted, as Jesus was. "Acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3): The words are made real when we encounter difficult circumstances.

Two friends are bound together in love. The call to go to the foreign land for Christ comes to one but not the other. There must be renunciation then, or eternal loss.

Or something even more poignant happens. Both hear the call. One goes abroad; the other prepares to follow. But the providence of God holds that one at home. Constraint that nothing can weaken holds the other abroad.

Who can measure spiritual pain? Who can weigh the exceeding and eternal weight of glory that is being wrought while the eyes of faith are fixed, not on the pain, but on that which lies beyond it? But of this good thing they see nothing yet, not even the shadow. They know only that they will not serve their Lord together now.

Very tender comforts are prepared for such as these. They will find them as they go on.

But at least theirs is a pure sorrow. It is not touched by the soiled fingers of earth. Some find themselves in the midst of clouds and darkness because of the sinful deeds of others.

And yet the wrongdoing of another should have no power to darken the way of a child of God. At such times our peace is found in believing that things that are not good can be caused

to work together for good. They are all subject to Him whose works are great and whose thoughts are deep.

This is true even when the trouble is the result of our own doing. A wrong turning was taken at the foot of the hill. A wrong decision was made that has affected the whole course of life.

The husband has been handicapped by a wife who can never enter into his deepest thoughts. The wife has been held from the highest she knew by the husband whose eyes were on the plains. Divided counsels in the bringing up of children tell upon the children. That means sorrow.

These circumstances were not the choice of God for those lives, but it is impossible to go back and begin again, and each day will bring its trials of patience and its private griefs.

View all this as a glorious chance to prove the power of God to keep you in peace and in hope and in sweetness of spirit. In that sense "expose yourself" to those circumstances. Do not fret against them. Do not fret by a dour countenance those who cause them to be. "Beloved, let us love" (1 John 4:7) is a wonderful word for such difficult situations. And love is happy, not dour.

Even if you seem to be pushing through some long trailing wisp of cloud, like that which lies on the face of the Matterhorn, be of good cheer. Your God has not forsaken you.

Often we find ourselves in precipitous, perhaps cloudy places because of some act of obedience. Such acts are called "ventures of faith," but there is no venture where faith is concerned. We walk on rock, not on quicksand, when we obey. But there is no promise that the rock will be a leveled path, or like the carpet of roses that Cleopatra spread for the officers of Mark Anthony.

Sooner or later God meets every trusting child who is following Him up the mountain and says, "Now prove that you believe this that you have told Me you believe, and that you have taught others to believe." Then is your opportunity.

God knows, and you know, that there was always a hope in your heart that a certain way would not be yours. "Anything but that, Lord," had been your earnest prayer. And then, perhaps quite suddenly, you found your feet set on that way, that and no other. Do you still hold fast to your faith that He makes your way perfect?

It does not look perfect. It looks like a road that has lost its sense of direction: a broken road, a wandering road, a strange mistake. And yet, either it is perfect, or all that you have believed crumbles like a rope of sand in your hands. There is no middle choice between faith and despair.

Read a companion devotional.

Amy Carmichael (1867-1951) was a missionary who labored in India for 56 years. She founded the Dohnavur Fellowship, which eventually became a large compound that included a hospital and a house of prayer, to provide care for needy children.