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An Address by Mr. P.W.Heward

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Among subjects which are impressed upon us, beloved friends, one is entitled "How can we please God in awkward circumstances?" I hope I rightly say "impressed upon US", for it is well that our hearts should experience and should continue to enjoy FELLOWSHIP in prayer concerning all things. How can we please God in awkward circumstances? May I at the outset seek to feel just what your condition of heart is, and what my own is with regard to awkward circumstances? What do we mean by awkward circumstances? I take it we understand some of our own words but comparatively few of them. We understand little pieces of them. It would be well if we became more acquainted with the words which are used. What are circumstances? You know what the word "circum" means because of the word "circumference" and "stances" would give us the hint of "something which stands". Circumstances are the things which stand around us, the things which are all about us, on one side and the other; the various events which are met on our pilgrim path. And there are AWKWARD circumstances. The apostle in Heb. 12 refers to the sin that so easily besets us, and I think that the aspect of the word used there is somewhat of the same character. The sin which stands so very close to us. Moreover, we find the principalities and powers investing the Lord Jesus in Col. 2 and we see His mighty victory, and when we wrestle not against flesh and blood, when we wrestle against the power of Satan, our CIRCUMSTANCES are indeed the various workings of the evil spirits to hinder the glorious enjoyment of the work of the Holy Spirit. This is one aspect. Our circumstances depend on where we live. Spiritually the lines are fallen to us in pleasant places. We have a goodly heritage. I want you to realize first, and I want myself to realize, that our circumstances are in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and that there are no awkward circumstances there - THAT is our home-address. We are temporarily away on active service, but that is our home address and we have no awkward circumstances THERE. But we have two other places. I have already hinted at them both and if we seek to live in one we shall find in one sense VERY awkward circumstances. I mean that if we seek to wrestle

against Satan's power, and evil forces in heavenly places, if we seek to serve the Lord by the victories of triumphant faith, we shall not find our path an easy one. If we settle down in the world we may be living in what men call comfortable circumstances. "Oh", they say, "he is in very easy circumstances". Poor man, if he is a child of God. The believer is expected to live in the difficult circumstances of spiritual warfare against the force of Satan, and for this we need grace, since we know so little of all that it means. But the other place of our temporary living is on earth. If we live in the heavenly fellowship with God FIRST we are able to meet the problems of earth second, but if we enjoy the things of earth from a worldly standpoint, we are not equipped to enter into the fellowship with God, nor are we enabled to meet the trials whenever they come. Hence it is very important for us to find out <sup>^</sup>WHERE we live. I do not mean physically, but where we live as to our spiritual experience. I want that this evening we should rather meditate on the attitude of saints with respect to awkward circumstances upon earth. I hope we shall be kept from any spirit of complaint. We are encouraged by the Scripture to be neither irritating nor irritated. Indeed there is the threefold deliverance from being irritating, irritable, and irritated. - three aspects of failure. Our circumstances are a precious Divine appointment. "He shall choose our inheritance for us". There is a "needs be", as we saw last Lord's Day, for the trials and the problems and the difficulties which fall around and upon us. God does not afflict unnecessarily. Gold is unrefined if left without fire. Unrefined gold is gold in itself, but you cannot get at the gold. You cannot view the beauty of the gold nor can you use the gold because of that which is mixed with the gold. Unrefined gold is gold. We may view it as of the same intrinsic value as refined gold but it is comparatively useless gold, because its condition of admixture prevents <sup>^</sup>its use. There is a great deal of unuseable gold among the people of the Lord at the present time, and I suppose this is largely because we have sought to avoid the Divinely arranged method of training. God taught Isaiah through fire; God taught in the book of Daniel through fire, and God works now in connection with fire. "A fiery trial" - it is better to have the fiery trial now than to have the

works burnt up with fire in the day of Jesus Christ. The test now is a test with a purpose and God's purified gold will bring Him praise and honor and glory. Awkward circumstances therefore are not circumstances against which we should complain. How often people speak strangely. They complain of the things for which they ought to praise, and often esteem the things of which they ought to complain. They esteem their own arrangements to secure earthly comfort but they complain of the trials which are the true riches. When the grace of God lays hold of a man his gravitation is altered from earth to heaven. The consequence is that he views everything from a different standpoint. Instead of calling affliction heavy he calls it "our light affliction" inasmuch as it gravitates in its influence upon him the other way, and enables him to mount up as he is crushed down. The effect of trials is meant to be the reverse of that which we might ~~we might~~ anticipate. We often hear people speaking much about the weather, and they even say "Very bad weather today" and so forth. Now that is just a little key to the condition of affairs. A man's usual standpoint is self and he describes every thing from the bearing it has upon his own physical feelings. He does not like the weather, so he calls it bad. He does not consider at all what is the real object of the weather, but if it does not suit him it is bad. That is the inherent selfishness of the human heart. Now the whole Bible is written from God's standpoint - it does not fit selfishness. God describes the tabernacle beginning with His throne. God speaks of life, not from the standpoint of existence, but of fellowship with Himself, and death is not a bare non-existence but a separation from Himself. Everything has a Divine standpoint and from the Divine standpoint everything is to be understood. Ah, beloved friends, let us be clear upon this - that which God appoints is not to be called "bad". We are not to say what WE think from a natural attitude. Grace alters the whole tenor of life. There is many a paradox in Scriptures. The apostle says "Most sweetly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities - when I am weak, then am I strong". So we have brought before us many a precious contrast of words to bring before the Lord's people that they are carried to a new position. Strength is weakness, weakness is strength. Some of us are following out a few de-

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definitions might be definitions contrary to human opinions. For example, we have already noticed the apostle's allusion to light affliction, and thus we learn that light and heavy are quite differently understood from contrasted standpoints. And what are reproaches? They are very great treasures. The reproaches of Christ are greater riches than the treasures in Egypt. This is a choice DEFINITION. What is weakness? What is strength? Here again we have these definitions from the contrasted standpoint, yet a standpoint of precious meaning so that when we speak of awkward circumstances we do not mean circumstances that are awkward in such a way that we rebel against them. We have just read the Scripture which says "I was not rebellious". Oh that we might be willing for anything which the Lord appoints and delight in whatsoever the Lord arranges. It is not without a meaning that even in our own language we write the word "I" with a capital letter. There is something in this which has a deep meaning. Grammatically we always call "I" the first person. There is an underlying current here. Perhaps it would be well for us to learn something from the Japanese grammar, for the usual word for "I" is simply "selfishness" - a continual reminder to the person who employs it with a sense of its derivation. We need to be careful as to this selfishness and self-centeredness which prevails over us before we are aware of it. Awkward circumstances are so characterized, but not with a sound in the voice when we utter the word "awkward" as if we protested against them. We must glory in tribulations also; take pleasure in infirmities, and realize that God's way is perfect even if it seems awkward to us. There are no mistakes with Him.

We pass, therefore, to ponder the important question "How are we to please God in the difficult, the perplexing circumstances of this life?" WE WANT to please God in everything. We want to use everything to His glory. Pleasing God is a wonderful privilege. You can please a child with a triviality, you want something more to please one who is grown up, but how much we should expect would be necessary to please God! There is one exception as to the general rule that it takes a great deal to please anyone who is great or intelligent, and the one exception is that love alters the whole aspect. The most intelligent parent is pleased with a very tiny thing of a loved infant, and therefore God's love accounts for

the fact that it is possible for those who are so small to please Him. And further, that which is ACCEPTABLE is "in Christ" and on this account well-pleasing. From any other standpoint we have a problem as to how we who are less than nothing in ourselves can please One over all God, Blessed for ever, before Whom all nations are as nothing, Who is from everlasting to everlasting, and Who upholds all things by the word of His power. Ah, beloved friends, it is delightful to realize God is pleased. Listen to the statement "A sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing unto God, working that which is well-pleasing in His sight", "He had this testimony that He pleased God". "How ye ought to walk and to please God", Such is the privilege brought before the redeemed. Now, how shall we please God and fit in with His will in awkward circumstances? What shall I say are the most awkward circumstances? Will you agree with me if we begin by a paradox? - reminding of what we saw at the beginning. The most awkward circumstances are those in which we find nothing awkward - comfortable circumstances are the most awkward. You know it. It is easier to pray when trials surround than when trials are removed. It is easier to step forward when circumstances perplex than when perplexities are taken away. The difficulties bring us to our knees, but a continuance of easy circumstances acts as a well or an over well prepared meal upon the physical frame. It sends to sleep. So comfortable circumstances send us to sleep. They are most awkward. Easy times are the most perilous; when we find around us difficulties removed and trials swept away, we do not hear the words sound out "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall in<sup>to</sup> easy circumstances". We have no Scripture worded in that way. You cannot find it from Genesis to Revelation. You can find ~~it~~ it written "Count it all joy when ye fall in<sup>to</sup> manifold temptations", when they surround - but the absence of trials is the greatest trial and the presence of continual comforts must be viewed as the most uncomfortable thing, for not only do we begin to doubt if we are like our Lord when we look at these things in the right way, but also, being unconsciously affected by these, we find it hard to shake off the sloth and to shakeoff the wish to have the things of earth and to use the world more fully than we ought to use it. Moab settled down because not emptied from vessel to vessel; and the most awkward circumstance is when we enter into the conditions which are brought before us in 1 Cor. 4 "Ye have reigned as kings without us; ye are wise; ye are rich," and so forth - not only

with earthly riches but with that settling down in the world which is most perilous. If the Lord allows us to be left alone, and if trials are held back, we may well wonder why we are thus chastened - chastened with a severer chastisement than the chastisement of pain, for the withholding of chastisement is the heaviest reproof, and the keeping back of trials the greatest problem.

Further, how shall we please God in awkward circumstances in the USUAL acceptance of the word? Rom. 5, already quoted, is clear - "We glory in tribulations also" - not "We glory in tribulations" but "in tribulations ALSO". It is only as we rejoice in hope of the glory of God that we are competent to enter into tribulations also. There must not be a bare stoic bravado, there must be the glorying in tribulations also, because of acquaintance with the Lord and delight in the Lord. In accord with this, we are reminded that the Lord will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation make a way out, that we may be able to bear up under it. God will provide the way out. Here then is the encouragement. We are to go through it. God does not remove the temptation but He desires to enable us to bear up under it. Well, we see what we are to do - we are to GLORY IN tribulations, we are to rejoice and be exceeding glad because the Lord is thereby refining, and proving His word that "whom the Lord LOVETH HE CHASTENETH" and because "great is our reward in heaven". The present gain in fellowship and the future gain in reward alike make us esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for those treasures in and of Egypt are worthless in heaven's coinage, and we should not get hold of the debased coinage of earth, but seek grace to glorify God, and desire that He may be exalted.

We notice next that there are some awkward circumstances of another character- what I may call "Sudden Emergencies". Sometimes we expect a trial or expect some problem, but circumstances that Suddenly come upon us affect us in various ways. With some there is a natural tendency to nervousness. With some there is Another natural tendency, and Satan knows much of each temperament that he may act on our natural condition in order to hinder our spiritual progress. I do not want to speak upon the subject simply from the standpoint of personal experience. While speaking I feel my own need that the word should <sup>^</sup>effect my own life, conscious of need, weakness and failure and desiring that together with

you there may be on the part of all of us true wisdom in dealing with sudden emergencies. You have a good example in Nehemiah - "I prayed unto the God of heaven and I said unto the King". Here we have wisdom in a sudden emergency. The man who was in a condition of prayer was able to pray with an ejaculation of prayer, and before he spoke to the king he prayed to the God of heaven. Sometimes the Lord prepares His people beforehand. Jeremiah was told that his cousin would come and so he was ready to act. Samuel was told about Saul and was ready to act. But sometimes there are sudden perplexities, and we do not know which way to turn. It is then that we need to cast our burden upon the Lord; it is then that we need to be in a condition to meet the sudden emergency as our gracious God gives grace. The emergency for Daniel was somewhat sudden. He heard that the wise men were to be slain. He boldly went in to the king to inform him that he would make known that which was desired. There was no time for delay - the man who had walked with God in chapter 1 was able to serve in chapter 2. We often think that we want to do some big thing, or that we desire to have an "emergency-power". We must walk with God FIRST IN THE PREPARATIONS OF continued service. Many things which are very encouraging come "all of a sudden" are the result of months, and it may be years of painful preparation. I suppose there are hundreds of people who complain that certain opportunities do not come to them, certain advantages do not reach them, but they are waiting for the advantage to arrive instead of spending years in getting ready for it. The trials of the background, unknown, are the way in which the Lord prepares His people. When the stones are put in the heavenly temple, no tool of iron will be heard, no further shaping will be needed. But the Lord has His quarries in which He is arranging those who are to fit together in the temple wherein He will be glorified. There will be no missing stones and no ugly angles, God has His purpose, the trials have a "needs be". Let us be willing, therefore, for the strain of continued details of preparation, that we may have what we have sometimes called among ourselves "emergency wisdom". If we want to please God in sudden emergencies, we must be walking with God. Abraham illustrates that in Gen. 18 and we find again and again that the man who fails in an emergency is the man who has failed before an emergency. Take Saul for example. He failed - forced himself and offered a burnt offering because he was not walking with God beforehand, and therefore he took the thing into his own

hand and desired to deal with it in his own way. If we walk with God, then when we suddenly find an awkward circumstance, He Who promised to His people when brought before kings and rulers for His sake, a mouth and wisdom, will not fail nor forsake. He, Who can with the temptation make the way out, often permits us to be in the temptation before we see the way out, proving that if we go out as Abraham, obediently, albeit not knowing whither we go, He WILL guide our step. If we in ALL our ways acknowledge Him He WILL direct. The problem is that we often wish to see the end before we go along the path and desire to have the problem solved before we are happy in meeting it. "As for God, HIS way is perfect", and whether the circumstances be painful trials to awaken our praise, or sudden emergencies of another character, we shall need to commune with God in order that we may respond to the need, from a heart in fellowship with Him, Let us realize that it is possible to please God in awkward circumstances, that 1 Pet. 1 shows how trials will bring praise unto the Lord and the life of Paul has already illustrated this. Nor would we be unmindful of the way in which a sudden difficulty, as that already seen in Daniel, calls forth a manifestation of our condition before it arrives, and thus displays the gracious enabling of God in daily life. THEN God is honored, THEN His servant was brought to blessing. Indeed if Joseph had not been brought to the awkward circumstances of trials after trial, how would he have reached the glory? If Daniel had not been brought to the awkward circumstance of the king's meat and of the king's dream, how would he have reached HIS exaltation? In each case we have an awkward circumstance. In the case of Joseph, misunderstanding and misrepresenting and a painful experience for a long period, "until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him". He FELT the problem, but it was a stepping-stone to blessing. Oh that we may ~~be~~ be those who by grace praise the Lord for all these things, and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, seek to use everything to bring Him honor and glory!

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