

Tortuous Times Travel but Tediously

"Tortuous times travel but tediously", the Bishop of my home town Hans Adolph Brorson wrote in a hymn two and a half centuries ago (well, he wrote something to that effect; the translation is my own). At first glance, the hymn appears to be a poem about how the cold and dark of winter seems to drag on forever; the slow passage of winter, however, is but an imagery of the common experience that, well, "tortuous times travel but tediously". And obviously, since it is as a hymn, there is much more to it than merely observations of common human experience. The very first lines of the hymn reference the admonition expressed throughout Holy Scripture: to be still and wait for the Lord.

"Tortuous times travel but tediously." Most of us are used to the changing of the seasons. The hottest days of summer might bother us a bit, but we take comfort in knowing that there will be cooler days. Similarly with the cold and dark of winter. Although it drags on, we know that it will be ending. Nevertheless, to some, the slow passage of winter can be devastating. In their minds, it will actually seem as if winter will never end; or rather, the knowledge that it will seems not only useless, but also unreal, because it is not what I experience here and now.

And there are tortuous times that are almost certain to last much longer than even the longest winter. So often, what makes a burden unbearable will be this: that there is no end in sight, that it is almost certain to be with us all through life. This is what will make many to give up.

The Christian faith is quite realistic about this, because Holy Scripture is. It gives no promise that eventually your life in this world will be a life of worldly wealth and health and happiness.

The only true God, however, does give the promise to those who believe in Him that even the most tortuous times will indeed pass, even if tediously so. And the promise He sets before us is of so much more than any number of years of worldly wealth and health and happiness. He promises life that is eternal, which not only means that it is endless, but also that it is the fullness of life, His own heavenly life, untouched and unstained by evil. It is this life the Son of God has won for us by having borne eternal death for us, that is: the fullness of death which we have earned with God on account of our sin. And He calls us to take comfort in His promise through even the most tortuous times, however tediously they may travel; to do so is what it means to have faith in Him.

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