

How I hope to face hardship

Written by Bill Perkins

On December 17, 1850, Captain Allen Gardiner and six companions landed at Patagonia on the southern tip of South America. They made that long journey to bring the gospel to a people so primitive that evolutionist Charles Darwin said they existed "in a lower state than in any other part of the world."

Gardiner had prepared himself and his crew for the mission. He had made two previous visits to the region and knew that the natives were ruthless cannibals and the weather treacherous.

The team included a doctor, carpenter, and a six month's supply of food and other goods. His supporters in England had committed to send a relief ship of food in six months.

No Ship

But something Gardiner hadn't counted on went wrong. The month after his departure a ship to carry the next six months provisions couldn't be found. No one wanted to make the dangerous journey.

On the frigid tip of South America, the missionaries carried out their work. As supplies ran low they began to scan the horizon for an approaching ship . . . it never arrived. At least, not while they lived.

A Terrible Test

Those men faced a terrible test. Alone, in a hostile environment, without food or other supplies, hunger and death taunted them. When a relief ship finally arrived, the disappointed crew found the missionaries dead of starvation. Clad in three suits and wool stockings over his arm to ward off the numbing cold, Gardiner's emaciated body was found lying beside a boat.

Beyond Expression, Happy

What had that English missionary thought during those first horrifying days? Had the horrible trial destroyed his faith? Were his dying days filled with nothing but pain? At one point he wrote, "Poor and weak as we are, we feel and know that God is here. Asleep or awake, I am, beyond all power of expression, happy."

Captain Gardiner lacked all of the things we so often associate with happiness. Yet, he said, he was beyond expression, "Happy."

He knew what we must learn. True fulfillment and happiness aren't tied to a life of luxury and ease.

The Crown of Life

James the half-brother of Jesus tells us that God gives true internal joy and abundant life to those who persevere through trials. He wrote, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).

The "crown" of life referred to the experience of abundant life. It talked about experiencing God's life in a special way during hardship. It also spoke of a reward given to believers in the next life. Those who trust in God during hardship will not only be able to experience God's life in the here and now but in the hereafter.

Allen Gardiner discovered the secret of true happiness, not in victory, wealth, or pleasure. He found it in the face of desertion and death. He knew that weak as I am, God is here.