

Comfort

Isaiah 40:1.

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"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, **saith your God.**" Isaiah 40:1.

The book of the prophet Isaiah has been referred to as "a miniature Bible," the first 39 chapters suggesting the atmosphere of the 39 books of the Old Testament, and the last 27 chapters that of the 27 books of the New. Whether that is a correct appraisal of the book or not the fact remains that chapter 40 commences with the precious thought of God's affections set upon the comfort of His people, a theme recurring some 11 or 12 times in the succeeding chapters until we reach Isa. 66: 13 where we read those beautiful words — "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted." Chapter 40 stresses two important points in this ministry of comfort — the complete inability and weakness of the flesh (vv. 6-8), and on the other hand the glory and majesty of God — a pardoning God (v. 2); a God of glory (v. 5); whose word abides for ever (v. 8); a God of power (v. 16); affectionate and full of tenderness (v. 11). The magnificent section of the chapter from verse 12 tells of His creatorial power and greatness, His uniqueness and surpassing understanding, and withal His condescending gentleness as He imparts strength to all that wait upon Him. The setting of verse 31 is delightful — strength for moments of *ecstasy*; for *running* the race, and for the day by day consistent *walk* in the midst of opposing elements! The order is truly divine!

In the New Testament God is spoken of as "the Father of mercies and the *God of all comfort*" (or, encouragement) 2 Corinthians 1: 3. The glorious and mighty God, who desired the comfort of His earthly people, is known to us as "Father." Precious truth! He is to be known as the Source of all that is good. James in his Epistle tells us that "every good gift and every perfect gift . . . cometh down from the *Father of lights*, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What comfort there is in the knowledge that despite the constantly changing conditions around (generally for the worse) the blessed God is unceasingly engaged in ministering that which is good and perfect to His own. He is the "*Father of glory*" (Ephesians 1: 17), the Source of every ray of true glory is in Himself; and the following verses shew His desire for our hearts to be opened to an understanding of "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." What rest of heart is found in turning away from the tarnished glory of man's world, and in "the spirit of wisdom" being enabled to appreciate that which has been secured in Christ and His saints for the eternal glory of God. He is the "*Father of spirits*" (Hebrews 12: 9). Comforting indeed is the thought that God, in His patient chastening would refine us in our spirits from the coarse impulses of the flesh, having in view "that we might be partakers of His holiness." "What immense and perfect grace! What a means! It is the means by which to enjoy God Himself perfectly" (J.N.D.).

In writing to the Roman believers the apostle Paul desires "that we through patience and *comfort of the Scriptures* might have hope." What abiding and unshaken certainty we have as we allow the power of God's word its true place in our hearts! In the same chapter (Romans 15) Paul continues — "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing." Blessed indeed is the sphere of peace and comfort available to those whose faith rests upon the God who has been pleased to reveal Himself in His word. In a scene of change and decay that word abides impregnable; amidst the evil influences around the purity of *God's* calling and "the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe;" to know, too, the blessedness of *our* calling as related to the realm in which our "God and

Father . . . is above all, and through all, and in you (us) all" (Ephesians 4).

The Scriptures reveal the "hope laid up for us in heaven" (Colossians 1); a "living hope" (1 Peter 3); the "hope of eternal life" (Titus 1 and 3); and, supremely amongst many other references, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1: 27). Blessed indeed is the comfort borne in upon our souls as we realise from God's own word that our hope is not related to conditions around us but to "Christ Jesus our hope" (1 Timothy 1: 1. N.T.)

Acts 9: 31 speaks of "*the comfort of the Holy Ghost*", with its accompanying blessings of edification, walking in the fear of the Lord, and of spiritual increase. In His many references to the "Comforter" in John's gospel the Lord Jesus plainly indicates the value and importance of all that is available to His disciples in the "comfort of the Holy Spirit." In our witness, in fruit-bearing, in our knowledge of the truth, as in many other exercises, we need the comforting presence of the One "alongside us," He who would ever refresh our affections as He speaks of the glories of Christ. By Him we are "sealed" — we belong indisputably to God; we are "anointed" in view of the fragrance and grace of *the Anointed* manifesting themselves in some measure at least in our pathways; He is the "Earnest" — our hearts are comforted as we allow His testimony in regard of the coming glory to illumine our minds and thoughts. The love of God, in all its eternal blessedness and power is deluged into our hearts by Him; He helps in our weaknesses by His intercession; His fruit is "love, joy, peace" and other precious features the evidence and power of which would lift our hearts above the restlessness of present happenings into the peace and tranquillity of the scene where Christ is supreme. There is immeasurable comfort to be found as we breathe the atmosphere where Christ's rule is supreme — where "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" are experienced.

Finally, we have the Apostle's word in 1 Thessalonians 4 — "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore *comfort one another with these words.*" What precious content fill these verses! — "*Asleep in (through) Jesus*"; "dead in *Christ*"; eventuating in being "for ever with the *Lord*". Every earthly link broken — social, domestic, commercial; but the link with Christ in virtue of His redeeming blood, unbroken — gently loosed from earth (cf. Ecclesiastes 12: 6).

There Christ has our dwelling-place won,
And we in His glory shall be,
With Him everlastingly one,
His glory and bliss we shall see.
All tears shall have passed from our eyes,
When Him we behold in the cloud,
And taste the full joy of the skies,
The love of our Father and God.

The *God of all comfort* — whose mercy and grace, whose love and kindness are ever towards us, surrounding us with blessing, bestowing every good and perfect gift.

The *comfort of the Scriptures* in which the heart and mind of God are fully made known — the theme of which is Christ — He who though "over all, God blessed for ever." His inscrutable Person

known only to the Father, would say — "Come unto Me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

The *Comforter* — *the Holy Spirit* — who fills our hearts with the eternal blessedness of God's love — and thrills our affections with His testimony to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as He brings the word of God home in power to our souls.

The *Rapturous comfort* of our eternal portion with the Lord — worshipping Him as the Centre of an adoring universe.

May the power of these things be experienced in our pathways so — "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

Beloved brethren, let us ever remember that every feature of comfort and blessing reaches us through the sacrificial love of our beloved Lord, of whom, in the days of His sojourn on earth, it could be prophetically said He "looked for comforters, but . . . found none."