

Comfort

Psalm 94: 19

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There have been moments in the experience of each of us when our hearts have longed for comfort. The word most frequently used for "comfort" in the Old Testament would imply something of this deep inward desire, expressing itself so often in a sigh.

The first mention of the word is found on the lips of Lamech as he named his son — Noah. His utterance in Genesis 5: 29 intimates that he was feeling the sorrows of a cursed earth, and looked forward to something in which he could find rest or repose, as the name Noah signifies. Alas! the world in Noah's day was morally unaltered; it was unable to afford any comfort to the hearts of men; even after the flood it lay under the divine indictment "the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth," (Genesis 8: 21).

The history of God's earthly people shows very plainly the forlorn and comfortless condition into which they came as turning their backs upon God. "How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! . . . she hath none to comfort her" (Lamentations 1: 1, 2). "The comforter that should relieve (or, revive) my soul is far from me," (v.16). To this day they remain bereft and comfortless, but we see from Isaiah, Zechariah and other Scriptures that God has "good and comfortable words" in view for them, and when their "day of salvation" (Isaiah 49) shall have come, brought by the "beautiful . . . feet of Him . . . that announceth salvation" (Isaiah 52), then shall they "break forth into joy" singing "the Lord hath comforted His people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem."

In Psalm 23, which has been a solace to the people of God throughout the centuries, the Psalmist says "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The rod (or, sceptre) conveys the thought of correction and the staff that of support, but the comfort itself is experienced because both correction and support are known as in the *company of the Shepherd*, for the verse reads, "Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." As we pass through a scene unable of itself to yield any element of comfort, and filled as it is with all kinds of moral dangers, how comforting it is to know that the "Sceptre shall rise" and destroy all that is found in opposition to God and to His people (Numbers 24: 17), and will also maintain that which is right and consistent with His own nature (Psalm 45: 6).

There are many Scriptures which convey the thought of comfort as connected with the rod of the Lord. In Ezekiel 20: 37 we read, "I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." Again in Jeremiah 33: 13, 14, Jehovah speaks of His flock as counted under the rod, saying "I will perform that good thing which I have promised." Then, too, in Micah 7: 14, we have the words, "Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Thine heritage." As we contemplate the comfort which God has in mind for His earthly people as passing them under the rod, dealing with them thus because *they are His*, shall we not value with increased appreciation the grand objective which the Lord has in view for His people in *our own day* as He passes us under the rod of correction, removing in the chastening that which is inconsistent with Himself in order that "we might be partakers of His holiness," (Hebrews 12). What positive comfort such words are to the heart that truly loves the Lord, and desires to be here for His interests.

In his second letter to the Corinthian believers the apostle Paul speaks of God as the "Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." This is a most precious title, and whilst the word used carries

with it more the thought of encouragement, the two meanings are not unrelated to each other. Our source of comfort and of encouragement is in God Himself. What perfect understanding the blessed God has of all our needs, and what infinite resources from which he can meet those needs, ministering comfort to our hearts in doing so. As encouraged by Him it is our happy privilege to act in like manner towards others, and how extensive the circle of those needing comfort is! "Who comforteth us in all our tribulations, that we may be able to *comfort them which are in any trouble*, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." How precious a service! perhaps rendered in obscurity, but valued by God who is Himself the Source of all encouragement. A letter to a bereaved saint; a visit to the sick-bed; a word of cheer to the depressed; a helping hand to the harassed and weary; a word of encouragement to the young in the faith. In many and various ways the comfort wherewith we ourselves have been comforted can be ministered to others.

In Romans 15: 4, we read of the "comfort of the Scriptures." Here again the word has the force of encouragement. In Psalm 119, in which we have some 174 verses containing references to the word of God (expressed by several different words, but all referring to His word), the Psalmist in verse 50 uses the usual word for comfort, "This is my comfort in my affliction; for Thy word hath quickened me." Again in verses 76 and 82 the thought of comfort is connected with the word of the Lord. In a world so full of perplexity and uncertainty, where men's hearts are surely "failing them for fear," how thankful we are to have recourse to the Holy Scriptures. What comfort and encouragement is ours as we see in them the mind of the blessed God revealed, and the outpourings, too, of His eternal heart of love. The evil rampant in the world is all under the eye of God; nothing is out of control, all will be judged and removed for ever. Our souls can rest in His love and His power.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," (Psalm 119: 105). "Truly the light is sweet" says the Preacher (Ecclesiastes 11: 7), and in this scene of moral darkness what comfort there is in possessing the pure light of the unalterable word of God, a lamp for *each footstep*, and our *whole pathway* illumined by the light of God.

The word of God is food for the soul; it is refreshment to the thirsty; it is the source of strength for the overcoming of the "wicked one" (1 John 2: 14). Untold comfort and encouragement is to be found in the Scriptures.

In Acts 9: 31 we read of "the comfort of the Holy Ghost," He who is Himself the "Comforter." This was something known and appreciated by the early believers in a very practical sense, it was no mere theory or doctrine, they "were *walking* in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost." As indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God untold wealth is available to us in this the Spirit's day. Many Scriptures speak of the service of the Holy Spirit, but the words of the Lord Jesus Himself in John 14, 15 and 16 as He speaks of the Comforter, manifest His tender consideration for His own during the time of His absence from them. That which He predicated of the Holy Spirit is for us to enjoy, a divine Person with unlimited power and affection abides with us for ever. He knows our every thought and desire, and is ever ready to engage our affections with the glories of Christ. Thus immeasurable comfort is ours as we are found walking in the power of an ungrieved Spirit.

1 Corinthians 14: 3 refers to a ministry of comfort, or encouragement, which is to characterise the service of those who serve the saints of God. "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men in edification, and exhortation, and comfort." This is a challenge to each of us. Fleshly zeal and human wisdom could never effect this. How necessary then to be ourselves in the enjoyment of the "comfort of the Scriptures," and to know in reality and power the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit of God, the Comforter, in order that any service rendered by us may be for the encouragement of those whom we

serve.

Finally, we have the precious verse in 1 Thessalonians 4: 18. The apostle in that chapter had been enlarging upon the details in connection with the Rapture, that wonderful moment the thought of which thrills the hearts of all who love the Lord, and he concludes by saying "Wherefore comfort (or, encourage) one another with these words." Beloved brethren, what a ministry of comfort is open to each of us, as we take up this exhortation. This world is moving with increased acceleration towards the day of judgment; the spirit of anti-Christ is already abroad; persecution is the portion of "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus;" "evil men and seducers" are waxing "worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived," but the end for the believer is sure and glorious. "The Lord Himself shall descend . . we . . shall be caught up . . and so shall we ever be with the Lord" .

Thus the position abounds with comfort. Many things of necessity occupy our minds, but let us in reality say with the Psalmist, "In the multitude of my thoughts within me *Thy comforts* delight my soul," and as thus delighting in what God is *to us*, may we be able in power to comfort others "by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."