

THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HATH SPOKEN IT

We have, as usual, had a reading from the Prophets and one from the Apostles this morning. How greatly mistaken are the people who say that as believers in Christ, we have nothing to do with the prophets. The most superficial acquaintance with the apostolic writings is sufficient to cause any one to recognise the commanding position of the whole Scriptures of Moses and the prophets. In all these writings, there is the completest recognition of the divine character of the “Old Testament.” This character could not be more distinctly expressed than in Paul’s statement in Hebrews with which we are all so familiar:

“God, at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets.”

It is therefore a case of God speaking to us in the prophets, and when God speaks, shall we not listen?

He speaks by Isaiah 40 this morning. The speech is a comforting one, as all divine speech is, to those who follow after righteousness. It is in the express terms of comfort:

“Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God.”

Are we included in the phrase “*My people*”? This is the only point to settle in order to be justified in appropriating the comfort. We are not Israelites according to the flesh, though a good many misguided people are of that opinion. We are Gentiles by descent and physical constitution. But we may be among the people addressed as “*my people*” for all that,

“God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people.”

Peter was first employed in this work, and Peter writing to some of those so taken out, says,

“In times past, ye were not a people but are now the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10).

In times past, we were not a people; are we now the people of God? We are, if we have been the subjects of the process which changed those in Peter’s day from the no-people to the “people” state. Have we been the subjects of this process? This is only another way of asking, Have we believed and obeyed the gospel, for this was the process by which the Gentiles in Peter’s day became, “*no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God*” (Eph. 2:19). That we have believed and obeyed the gospel, we know, for this is a matter susceptible of demonstration. Therefore, we overstrain nothing in listening to these comforting words to Isaiah as though spoken concerning ourselves.

We certainly stand in need of comfort. Comfort is for those who mourn and are distressed; and that is necessarily the condition of everyone who, in an age like this, is in sympathy with divine objects and principles, and thus discerns the true position of things as they are. When we faint and languish by reason of that position—when we are oppressed by the constant effort to endure the prosperity of all that is opposed to God, and the weak and dishonourable and downtrodden state of everything identified with His name and honour, let us remember that that very experience is our qualification for the comfort which God Himself has condescended to proclaim for His people. Let us not think as if “*some strange thing had happened unto us.*” Weary and lonely and desolate as we may sometimes feel ourselves, we should only aggravate our affliction if we allowed ourselves to suppose there was anything

wrong in such a state in the Truth; or to forget that such a state is expressly arranged for those who are being prepared for divine use in the gladsome ages beyond. God commands us to be comforted in the midst of our distress. Therefore let us be comforted.

But it may be said, the comfort of Isaiah 40 is for Jerusalem, and not for us:

“Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins.”

Well, the comfort is for Jerusalem, but it does not follow that it is not for us. The Jerusalem addressed is not the merely architectural Jerusalem, but Jerusalem with her citizens, and not these in the statistical sense at any given moment, but in the sense of including all that belong to her by spiritual relation and ultimate association in the final purpose of God. These are scattered all up and down the ages, and have not all belonged to the literal Jerusalem. Multitudes of the literal inhabitants of Jerusalem have nothing to do with them—the population of the city at the present hour, for example, or at the crisis of her destruction by Titus. The complete and perfected Jerusalem, that will come out of the fires of affliction glorified at the coming of Christ, will include in her citizen roll, myriads who never saw the literal city in the days of their mortal existence. If we are among the saved, she will include us, and therefore we are entitled to recognise ourselves addressed in words addressed to her. “Comfort to Jerusalem and all her children,” is the purpose, as the opening symphony of Isaiah 40, considering it as a musical performance throughout, which it is in the highest sense.

But the execution of the purpose is an affair of work, and a work of such magnitude requires preparation, and so the next intimation concerns the preparation:

“The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord: make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

We know, on apostolic authority, that this has reference to the work of John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way of Christ, as a herald opens the way of majesty. He accompanied the work here figuratively described:

“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain.”

He accomplished this in a moral sense—removing obstacles, filling up gaps, and generally making a level way on which the Messiah might make his appearance:

“And the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed.”

So it was. All who looked on Christ saw the manifested glory of Yahweh—*“the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,”* said Paul (2 Cor. 4:6).

“We have seen his glory,” said John, *“the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.”*—

“All flesh shall see it together.”

All flesh has not yet done so. The bulk of mankind, living or dead, have never heard of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Has the prophecy failed then? By no means. There was no statement in the prophecy that all flesh would see the glory of God at the moment of its first and preparatory manifestation in Christ, but that the glory then manifested should ultimately be seen by *“all flesh.”* The prophecy has been fulfilled so far as the programme has been unfolded. John, as *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness,”* proclaimed the

impending appearing of him whose shoe latchet he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose. In due time, the Great One so heralded appeared, and presented himself as the bearer of the divine glory to the thousands of Israel; and in due time the glory so exhibited will be witnessed and rejoiced in by earth's uncounted millions, for *"the whole earth shall be filled with His glory,"* and he who was then in Israel's midst, crucified and raised from the dead, and exalted to the Father's right hand, returns at an appointed time, when every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father.

"The mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it."

This is the guarantee of its fulfilment. What a rock to rest on. If the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it, it cannot fail to come to pass. In view of what it is that has been promised, it is difficult to understand the prevalent indifference. Either people do not believe that the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it; or they have no heart for what has been spoken. It is probably a little of both. They doubt the divine authority of the written Word, and their relish is not in the direction of what God purposes to bring to pass. They "mind earthly things." The glory of man or the prosperity of man in a material sense they can appreciate, but the glory of God touches no chord. This state of mind is part of the barbaric condition of the world from which it will not be effectually roused till God show His existence and power and exclusive prerogative in a repetition of the visible acts of might that brought down the pride of Pharaoh, and by which we are informed, but this time in all the earth,

"The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be laid low, and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day."

That this is reasonable, the prophecy proceeds to intimate.

"The voice said, Cry, and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the godliness thereof is as the flower of the field . . . The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever."

There is no truth more evident and none more practically ignored in the world than this. A generation is sufficient to show the transient nature and intrinsic vanity of human existence; and every day's experience is burdened with a sense of the inefficiency of human power in every form, sense and direction. Man, as a self-manager, is a failure, and if God come not to his rescue, he must remain unblessed for ever. But God will come to his rescue. This is the pith of the "comfort" which God commands in Isaiah 40. The very next verse is an emphatic enunciation of it.

"O Zion that bringest good tidings" (or, "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion") "get thee up into the high mountain. O Jerusalem that bringest good tidings" (or "O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem"), "lift up thy voice with strength. Lift it up: be not afraid, say unto the cities of Judah, 'Behold your God'."

In what aspects are the cities of Judah invited to "behold their God"? The next verse answers the question, and shows us that it is in the practical interference of human affairs—no other than a practical interference would be adequate to the needs of the world. It is government we want, the application of compulsion to enforce that which is right and wise, and to restrain that which is foolish and wrong. The divine voice that leaves every man at liberty to obey it or not as he likes, is only sufficient to make a selection—a sparse selection—of fit men for divine use afterwards. It is not enough to keep or bring the world into harmony with divine wisdom. The world pays no heed to wisdom and follows the bent of unregulated desire. It therefore requires "coercion." The outcry against coercion is foolish. It is contrary to the universal habits and necessities of civilised life. It is contrary to the practices of the anti-

coercionists themselves. The enforcement of law is coercion disguised, and not quite disguised; and without the enforcement of law, the world would be in chaos in less than 12 months. Violence would have the upper hand everywhere, and the works of even what civilisation we have would disappear. Until the world is “coerced” by the strong hand of Omnipotence, we shall never see that universal deference to righteousness which is promised in the “*good tidings to Zion*,” and which will become the order of the day when—

“Yahweh shall send the rod of Messiah’s strength out of Zion, and he rules in the midst of his enemies.”

There is therefore a very natural sequence in the next declaration of the prophecy:

“Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand and His arm shall rule for Him: behold, His reward is with Him and His work before Him.”

The Spirit of God in the apostles identifies this with the second coming of Christ. Jesus himself says by John:

“Behold I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12).

It is impossible therefore that we make a mistake in concluding that the event contemplated in Isaiah 40:10 is the coming of Christ a second time, in power and great glory, from which it results that that coming is a coming, not only for individual judgment, but for the political coercion of the world of which we have been speaking—a coercion to which Jesus himself makes reference in saying:

“To him (the overcoming one) will I give the power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to pieces, even as I received of my Father” (Rev. 2:26).

There may not seem much connection between this and the next statement in Isaiah’s prophecy:

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

On reflection, there will appear to be the deepest and most natural connection. When the world is politically coerced—when the power of human governments everywhere is broken, and the Kingdom of God established over all, what is the next phase the divine administration assumes but just this very one: feeding, tending, guiding mankind everywhere, especially that portion of them directly related to him. We read that—

“Many nations shall be joined unto Yahweh in that day, and shall be His people” (Zech. 2:11).

The nations, then, will become “*His flock*,” whom He shall feed like a shepherd—“*like a shepherd*.” We would require to know the ways of shepherd life in the East to appreciate the full force of this. A shepherd in Western countries is little more than a drover—a rude, unsympathetic possessor and driver to market of animals reared for the slaughter. In the East, according to what we learn, shepherds are on affectionate terms with their flocks. The sheep know its shepherd, and he looks well after them. Such is the relation that will exist between the government of Christ and the nations of mankind. What a consoling prospect is this for the world—for the realisation of which we may well sigh and cry. The world is not guided by “a shepherd now” by any means, but with the rude, unfeeling action of machinery. So much is this the case that, outside the family circle, the world is felt to be cold and desolate and

dangerous. The authorities cannot listen to woe, however crushing, and appeals to reason or mercy or consideration, are addressed to deaf ears. "Law" and routine govern the action of the social machine, though hearts and bones break in the process. But all this will change when God, by Christ takes the world in hand.

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd."

This applies pre-eminently to the saints and to Israel, but also to *"all families of the earth,"* who will then be associated with them in the long-promised blessedness which, as rain on the mown grass, will descend on all mankind.

Then follows an appeal which is not at all superfluous or out of place, but that, on the contrary, comes in with peculiar logical power and appropriateness. I refer to the description of the greatness of God from verse 12 to the end of the chapter. To some this may seem to come in as a "pious" effusion that might as well have appeared among the psalms. If we will but consider the way in which the Gospel of the Kingdom is received by most people, we may see this in a different light. What is that way? Do they not say it is "too good to be true," "utopian, "idyllic," and the rest? And how are such suggestions to be met? Does not the answer lie in this, that *"the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it?"* If He has declared it, must it not come to pass?

"Is anything too hard for Yahweh?"

It is as if the rest of the chapter said "Consider! Behold the measureless waters of the ocean. Contemplate the awful arch of heaven's unutterable height. Realise the incomputable magnitude of the earth's vast body. What must be His power and wisdom who holds and measures all as a man deals with the limited quantities of merchandise?" To whom can this power and wisdom be attributed?

"Who hath directed the Spirit of Yahweh, or being His counsellor, hath taught Him? With whom took He counsel? And who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of judgment and taught Him knowledge and showed to Him the way of understanding?"

And if all this power and wisdom belong to Him, is it not a small thing for Him to manifest His glory before the eyes of all flesh, and with strong hand to bring down man's power and greatness, and take mankind in hand Himself with the beneficence and gentleness of a shepherd? Is it not merely a question of whether He purposes such a thing? And has He not purposed it seeing *"the mouth of Yahweh hath spoken it?"*

It follows most naturally and impressively from this line of thought that man is nothing in the reckoning, one way or other:

"Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket and are counted as the small dust of the balance. Behold He taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before Him are as nothing; and they are counted to Him less than nothing and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?"

The purpose of God may appear to be a thing of opinion and sentiment just now. It may seem the most inconsequential and inoperative of all the forces and elements at work among the calculations and affairs of men. But the course of time will show it is linked with the power that accomplishes the mightiest of operations in the universe.

“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold! Who hath created these things? Who bringeth out their host by number? He calleth them by names—by the greatness of His might. Not one faileth because He is strong in power.”

Why, then, should men think their way hid from God, or their systems beyond the power of His interference?

“He bringeth,” that is, He will bring, “the princes to nothing: He will make the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be sown: yea: their stock shall not take root in the earth. He shall blow upon them and they shall wither and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.”

He purposes this and He has declared His purpose; and when the Yahweh of hosts purposes, who can disannul?

“The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding.”

It is no mere “pious” flourish that pronounces blessedness on all who believe His Word and trust His promises. It will yet be seen that such are trusting One who has power to perform His will to the uttermost; and goodness to devise the best that loving-kindness can conceive; and faithfulness that cannot fail in the fulfilment of His covenants. Their trust is therefore not a vain trust. Trust in man is truly a vain thing, for man has no power to perform anything of any vital moment, and little reliability as to the performance of even what he can do.

“Blessed is the man that trusteth in Yahweh, and whose hope Yahweh is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green,” but, “cursed is the man that trusteth in man and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from Yahweh. He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh.”

This will be manifest to all at last. Wisdom lies in discerning it in advance. We do this on the understanding, and belief, and obedience of the gospel in all things. We are here this morning as a company of those who make a profession of these attainments. We realise a blessedness even in the profession of them; but how great will be our gladness when, having finished our course, we are included among those who receive the promises with which the chapter concludes:

“He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might, He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon Yahweh shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.”

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