

TROUBLE NOW, POWER SOON

Paul speaks of the Scriptures having been given for our comfort. This implies that we are in need of comfort. We all feel this to be a fact as we come here Sunday morning after Sunday morning. It has been characteristic of God's people from the beginning that, while rejoicing in the Lord, they are subject to causes of depression and distress inseparable from this evil state. In the Psalms this is extremely expressed sometimes.

"Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord: hear my prayer. Save me, O my God; for the waters have come into my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing. I am come into deep waters, the floods overflow me."

None of us can ever be in a worse position than language like this describes. If such was the experience of David, and of Christ whom David represented, we may well reconcile ourselves to any little trouble that may come to us. We all have experience in that line more or less, if we are God's children. There are those no doubt who live in pleasure; Paul spoke of sisters who did that, and who were *"dead while they lived."* No one who is a true friend of God can find consolation in an evil world like the one in which we dwell. A true friend of God necessarily feels a stranger and a pilgrim, trying to bear desert life, yet feeling it to be an affair of patience and endurance. In this condition it is natural for us to desire comfort. It is according to the will of God that the heirs of salvation should be somewhat disconsolate now. It is almost a necessary condition of the case. We could not imagine God offering His comforting salvation to those who felt in no need of it, and were callous and indifferent on the subject. This susceptibility to distress is one of the ingredients of the process by which God is working out everlasting joy. The joy and comfort is placed as a great light at the end of the journey. While we are on the road; we see it afar off. Mortal faculty may fail in looking at it sometimes; our eyes grow dim with dust and tears. Therefore we need to press home, as closely as we can, the comfort of the Scriptures, for that is a present comfort, and a very real one if we lay ourselves open to receive it.

What comfort is there in them? Of what does the comfort consist? First of all, it consists of the tokens they exhibit of their absolute and extraordinary truth. Without truth there could be no comfort, for what comfort would there be in untruthful or doubtful words, however beautiful? The tokens are incessant and various, as we read from day to day. Take the one before us in the Psalm we have sung, which contains a prophecy of the continuance of David's house and throne through an illustrious son. We know of course that that means the establishment of his Kingdom on the earth in power and great glory. But look at the present moment; remember that that Psalm and the promise it contains were written nearly 3,000 years ago, many, many hundreds of years before Christ appeared. The most ingenious undermining critic is unable to suggest a denial of this. The evidence of it is altogether too solid to admit of such a suggestion. Josephus, who lived in Christ's age, and was not a believer, gives an analysis of the Bible (that is, the Old Testament), and in his analysis the Psalms of David appear as writings that had been at that time for centuries in Israel's hands. Look at this circumstance then: here is a prophecy of the fame and perpetuation of David's house in the hands of a son whose name should endure for ever. In Josephus' day, David's house was well nigh extinct, though the prophecy was hundreds of years old, but see—since then the name of Christ has filled the earth as the son of David. Look at it: 3,000 years ago a promise to David, and, a thousand years afterwards, this son of David, appears, whose name is now everywhere. This single case is a pledge of the truth of the Scriptures. We are witnesses that God's promise to David is already largely fulfilled. Looking over the wide gulf

of time, we see David and the Psalm, and midway between we see Christ. We see the Bible true; that is comfort indeed. If you attack the truthfulness, you attack the comfort. This is where we had to fight ten years ago. It was said parts of the Bible were not inspired, because containing error; but no ability was professed to distinguish the partly inspired from the wholly inspired. At the hazard of every possible consequence, we had to stand against that, and secure the comfort of the Scriptures for life and hope, in the certainty of their entire divinity and truth.

We are able to settle down with this comfort in the presence of the two chapters read this morning; they are full of comfort, Revelation as well as Isaiah; it is difficult to choose between them. In Isaiah God speaks to us, not Isaiah; the prophets never claimed the credit of what they wrote or said.

Some things they, Isaiah and John could not possibly say of themselves, such as this:

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, buy wine and milk, without money and without price . . . Incline your ear; come unto Me; hear and your soul shall live,” etc.

The invitation is renewed in Revelation,

“It is to him that is athirst.”

We are very thirsty, hungering and thirsting for life, true life, for righteousness, for love, for knowledge, for truth, thirsting for the well-being of the people, for the glory of God. We thirst, and we cannot get a drop of the refreshing water we desire. We are in a great desert where there is hot and dry sand everywhere, and bleached skeletons lying about. Let us not despair. Here is God’s invitation,

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth.”

He invites us to partake of the very things we desire . . . *“a feast of fat things for all people.”* But there is a process. There is first, the listening to the news about it, and giving attention, and believing and submitting. Faith first; without faith we cannot please God. Faith is putting forth the hand to take of the water that will pour down our thirsty throats by-and-by.

“Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye.”

We are in the act of coming. For the present it is coming to this hall in a town where the people despise us, and amidst many circumstances of trial and dishonour, but presently it will be sitting down at the King’s table. The present phase will be over in a short time; and when it is over, it will never come back. When it is gone, all the things we are thirsting for will be here. The spirit of heaviness will take flight, and we shall have the garment of praise instead, and an incorruptible body instead of this carcase of corruption. And then we shall be set free from the affairs that more or less distress everyone. Everyone has his own cross to carry. There are two or three hundred heads in this room just now. If we could lift the lids, as it were, and look in upon what is going on in the brain, we should see that everyone has a gnawing distress of some kind that they cannot get rid of. On that said glad morning all these mental toothaches will cease; the evil that depresses will take flight like the night before sunrise. We shall find ourselves in the presence of a noble King, vesting in himself the proprietorship of the whole earth, come from the God of the whole earth, who can say *“I live for ever;”* who can say,

“My Father hath given me glory everlasting, and the glory which He hath given me I give you.”

Think of being recognised by the gracious smile of such an one, not as a distant act of politeness, but as a close, personal, cordial friendship. That will be the beginning of many ecstasies, for Christ has many friends, and we shall know and rejoice in them all. They are hid away in darkness just now, but he will bring them up again—the salt of the earth, the pick of mankind, God’s jewels. We are to be introduced to them. We are to be made one of them. That will be “*receiving the right hand of fellowship*” worthy of having. We receive the right hand of fellowship among each other now, but God has to ratify it before it is of any value. If God receive us not, what does human recognition avail? But God will receive us then, if we please Him now, and will introduce us to delightful friends whom we shall never lose, and never tire of, or find any fault in. Rejoicing together with them, we shall be invited to bless a world in darkness. The promise embraces all the perishing world. All families of the earth shall be blessed. The immortal friends of God are going to be sent out on that errand, and to have power and plenty in their hands for that purpose. At present we can do nothing, though our hearts may break at the universal misery. All we can do is to wait for God, doing the little we can meanwhile. Think of going forth as Christ’s representatives, clothed with his authority, and supported by his power, to listen to all cases, and rectify all abuses, punish all crimes, and supply all needs. All democratic ferments and insubordinations will then be at an end. They are a mere upheaval of diabolism. They will be repressed as with a rod of iron. They are only a part of the night, these clamours of the voice of the people as the source of government. Republicanism is better than tyranny; but it is not in principle a reasonable form of government. The masses do not know what is right and good. Legislation should be from above—not from below. The wisdom of God should give law, the authority of God should enforce it. The world will never be happy till then. This is what is coming. The Kingdom that is coming will not be a kingdom of the people, but of God, whose Law shall go forth from Zion, through His friends who shall reign. Such a Kingdom will be a Kingdom of peace and holiness. This is one reason why the Truth is unpalatable to politicians of the present time. It would not be to their mind to see a righteous calm among men. They prefer the battle and the breeze. They like the turmoil and contention of parties. The Kingdom of God is not a desirable prospect to them.

“Without are dogs.”

Dogs are not governed by ideas, they are moved by impulse and like to make a noise; it gives them a certain satisfaction to bark, and this is why they bark. They can have no place in a righteous government. The real aim of government is to make people obedient to God, wise, well off and happy. The principles of such a government are very different from those of the long-winded speeches in the newspapers to which people are accustomed, and the talker-talkee of leading articles which make the writers seem so important. The saints of God can understand all these men, but these men cannot understand the saints. As Paul says,

“He that is spiritual discerneth all things, but is himself discerned of no man.”

It was the case of Christ in his generation. He was a puzzle to his carnal contemporaries, and they invented all kinds of absurd theories to explain him. The truth of the matter was beyond their reach. Jesus pressed it on them, but they could not receive it. He told them he was from above, while they were from beneath. The same is true in a sense of his brethren, in a mental and moral sense, and therefore they are unintelligible to the ordinary run of people.

“They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh,” and these things are the things of the Spirit.

Many feel that they are too evil to come and accept these glorious things of the Spirit. There is a certain amount of truth in that, yet we are invited not to stand back on account of it.

Gracious are the words of Isaiah 55. The wicked man is told not to stay away because of his wickedness, provided he forsake his way. He is assured that the Lord will have mercy upon him. God says,

“My ways are not your ways, they are higher than yours.”

Man is unmerciful; God is gracious and full of compassion. This is one of our comforts. If we are failing and shortcoming, we have to deal with a God who is slow to anger and ready to pardon. Of course there are conditions. A reasonable man would be eager to conform to the conditions. It would be terrible anarchy if there were no conditions, yet the conditions are simple. Let a man believe in Christ and obey him, and he will receive forgiveness of sins. Afterwards there will be fightings and overcomings. We must be doers of the Word and not hearers only;

“Faith without works is dead.”

If we do not always come up to the full mark of the attainment in Christ, we have a High Priest. Peter actually denied Christ, but was forgiven because Christ prayed for him, for he knew that Peter loved him. If we love Christ and are bending our strength to the doing of his will, he will ask God to pardon us, and God will pardon whomsoever Christ asks for. It is one of the objects of this breaking of bread to bring this to remembrance, that we may not be overwhelmed by the sense of our shortcomings, and that we may be emboldened to—

“Lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”

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