

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE TENDERNESS OF GOD'S COMFORT.

A Sermon

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"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."—Isaiah lxvi. 13.

WE do not intend entering into a discussion of the context and its relationship literally to the Jewish people. We have never hesitated to assert our conviction that there are great blessings in store for God's ancient Israel, and that the day shall come when her comfort shall abound, when the glory of the Gentiles shall flow to her like a flowing stream, and she shall be comforted by her God as one whom his mother comforteth. But we believe that these passages are applicable to all the servants of God, that the comfortable passages of Scriptures are theirs, that whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, barbarian or Greek, we are all one in Christ Jesus, and all the promises are ours in him, for in him all the promises are "yea" and "amen." I believe, then, that this passage belongs to every child of God.

It is well that there is such a promise as this on record, for believers need comfort. They need comfort because they are men, and "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." There has been a great necessity for consolation ever since the time when man was expelled from Eden. Men need comfort because they are but men. Although favoured by God, elected by his sovereignty, and called by his grace into a peculiar state of acceptance, they are still in the body, and they are made to feel it, being tempted in all points as other men are, and in some points peculiarly tried. They are men, and but men, at the best. They need comfort, too, because they are Christian men; for if others escape the rod, Christian men must not, yea, *shall not*. The Lord may be pleased to give to the sinner a long prosperity that he may be fattened as a bullock for the slaughter, but his promise to his people whom he

calls by his grace is, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." We must needs, therefore, have special consolation, since as men, as only men, and as Christian men, we shall have constant occasions for comfort.

When I take a text like this, I know there are very many in the congregation who cannot enter into it; but, my dear friends, if you are Christians, it will not be long before you will. You may have to look back, perhaps, upon the words which I quote in your hearing, and say of them, "God sent them to me as a preparation before the trial came. He gave me food as he did Elias under the juniper tree, because he determined that I should go forty days in the strength of that meat." Despise not thou the consolations of the Lord because thou needest them not just now. Thou wilt require them. The calm will not last for ever; a storm is brewing. Say not, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved." He has but to hide his face, and thou wilt be troubled, and then thou wilt prize that which now thou dost lightly esteem; thou wilt long to be comforted "as one whom his mother comforteth."

But coming at once to the text, I think we may very well talk of it under three points; first, who comforts? secondly, how he comforts; and, thirdly, where he comforts.

I. With regard to the first point, WHO COMFORTS? "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

The work of comforting his saints is not too mean for God to be engaged in. It is true that he sometimes uses instruments, but all real comfort to a broken heart must come direct from God himself. He does not say, "I will send an angel to comfort you," but, "I will comfort you." Nor in the text is it said that the Christian minister shall comfort you. Alas, dear brethren, what are we often who preach the Word but broken cisterns that hold no water? But God says, "I will comfort you;" and when he undertakes the work, then we become as conduit pipes that are full even to bursting with the drink that you require. Your soul shall be satisfied even out of poor earthen vessels. But it must be God's work; he must do it, for when a soul is truly humbled, and heavily laden, and broken in pieces by God's hand, there is one only hand—the pierced hand—that can heal the wound.

When we read, in this passage, that God will comfort the soul, we are to understand, I think, that *God does so in the trinity of his person*. He is called "the God of consolation." The Father comforts us. The very use of that term "Father" seems to bring good cheer to our spirits. As long as I can call God my Father, I shall not be without a star in my sky. "My Father"—that sweetens all the sorrow that can come to me. It is a sword, but, my Father, it is in thy hand. It is a bitter cup, but, my Father, thou hast given it to me, so shall I not drink it? That word, "my Father," shall make my heart leap for joy in the midst of my deepest distress. As a Father, God does actively come to the comfort of his children; and when a filial spirit is shed abroad in us, our souls, leaning on all-sufficient grace, rejoice even in the

midst of deep distress. God the Son also comforts us, for is not his name "the Consolation of Israel"? When you stand at the foot of the cross, you find comfort there for all the ills that wring your heart. Sin loses its weight; death itself is dead; all griefs expire, slain by the griefs of the Man of sorrows. Only enter into the Saviour's passion, and your own passion is over. Get to understand his sorrows, and your sorrows find at least a pause, if not an end. And as for the blessed Spirit, he was given for this very purpose,—to be our Comforter. He dwells in all the saints to bring to their remembrance the things which Jesus spoke, and to lead them into all truth, that their joy in Christ may be full.

It is something very delightful to consider that Father, Son, and Spirit all co-operate to give us comfort. I can understand their co-operating to make the world; I can understand their co-operation in the salvation of a soul; but I am astonished at this same united action in so comparatively small a matter as the comfort of believers. Yet the Holy Three seem to think it a great matter that believers should be happy, or they would not work together to cheer disconsolate spirits.

We must understand, when God says, "I will comfort you," that he intends that *there are divers ways by which he does it*. Sometimes he comforts us in the course of providence. We may be the lowest spoke of the wheel now, but by the revolution of time we may be the uppermost before long. We may suffer very acute pains to-night, but by the morning the Master may have assuaged all our pain. The pause between sickness and health may not be very long. If the good Physician shall put his healing hand upon us, we shall soon be restored. How often, when you thought you were coming to your worst, has there been a sudden brightening of the sky! It is a long lane that has no turning, and it is a long trouble that never comes to an end. It is when the sea ebbs as far as it can go that the tide begins to flow, and they say the darkest part of the night is that which is just before the daybreak. When the winter grows very cold and keen, we begin to hope that spring will soon come; and our desperate sorrows, when they reach their worst, are coming to their close. So let us be of good cheer. There will not be always such a rough sea, poor troubled saint. You shall be out of the Atlantic into the Pacific ere long; and you shall be out of the seas altogether, and away on the *terra firma* of eternal joy before many years have rolled over your head.

However, when the Lord is not pleased thus to comfort us in the way of providence, he has a means of doing it by his omnipotent secret working on the human heart. Not to speak doctrinally, but rather to give a particular instance, have you not found that, sometimes, when you were much burdened with trouble, a very peculiar calm came over your spirit? You had been vexed, almost distracted; but when you woke, one morning, you felt calm and peaceful; you had given up rebellion, left off murmuring, and you could say to your God,—

" 'Tis sweet to lie passive in thine hands,
And know no will but thine."

And have you not been even conscious, in times of the very severest trouble, of an unusual joy? You did not sing with your voice, but there was something that sang within you softly, silently, but still sweetly. You sometimes look back upon that sick chamber, (I know I do,) and almost wish that you were there now. The trial was sharp indeed, for—

“Sharp are the pangs that nature gives,”—

but, oh, the joy that came with them! It was so surpassing that, in the retrospect, you forget the pain, and only remember the sweetness. How was this? Was it the pain that did it? Nothing of the kind. God is like a watchmaker who knows, because he made the watch, how to touch the wheels, and regulate them. He made us, and therefore he knows how to deal with us so that everything shall go right where before everything went amiss. He can open the flood-gates of joy, and inundate our souls with bliss, even in our darkest days of trouble. “Only hope thou in me, my child,” he says, “for thou shalt yet praise me, who am the help of thy countenance and thy God.” Though the fig-trees do not blossom, and God does not take away the plague from the cattle, though still thy substance shall be minished, and fire shall devour thy household goods, yet thy God can make up for all this, and cause thy days of leanness to be fat days, and thy days of hunger to be days of feasting, and thy days of thirst to be days when thou shalt drink the wine on the lees well-refined.

It would not be well to close this point without remarking that *God has been pleased to make a previous provision for the comfort of all his saints.* When he comforts, he has not to invent a novelty to do it; he has only to bring to us stores which have been laid up, fruits new and old which have been ready for his beloved. If trouble comes, God has provided a strength by which you shall meet it, and provided a way through which you shall escape from it. There are promises in God’s Word suitable to every conceivable condition of the saints. Out of millions of God’s people, living in different countries, and under different forms of government, and in different ages, all of them of different temperaments and constitutions, their trials must take all kinds of shapes. As in the kaleidoscope, there must be a vast variety in the tribulations of the Lord’s people, and yet there never has arisen a single case in which there has not been a promise which, word for word, and letter for letter, met the case in hand.

In the great bunch of keys in that good old Book, there is a key for every lock; and if it were not so, there are one or two promises like master-keys which will fit all. Such a promise is the one in Isaiah xli. 10, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God.” It will suit the youth and the hoary head, it will be satisfactory to you if you have to overcome difficulties or if you have to endure sufferings, in the calm or in the storm, lying in the trench or climbing the scaling ladder, that text will still be precious: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God.” We will fall back then upon the

consolatory truth that with God are the consolations of his children, that he is himself responsible for their comfort, having engaged to be their Helper; and so we may suck marrow out of our text, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

II. But now the second head is to be HOW GOD COMFORTS: "As one whom his mother comforteth."

This is a peculiarly delightful metaphor. A father can comfort, but I think he is not much at home at the work. When God speaks about his pity, he compares himself to the father: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." But when he speaks about comfort, he selects the mother. When I have seen the little ones sick, I have felt all the pity in the world for them, but I did not know how to set to work to comfort them; but a mother knows by instinct how to do it. There is placed in the mother's tender heart a power of sympathy, and very soon she finds the word or gives the touch that will meet her darling's case, and cheer its troubled soul. The father is awkward at it; our rougher, sterner nature hardly shines in the matter of consolation, but the mother can do it to perfection. How, then, does the mother comfort her child?

We answer, first, she does it *very fondly*. There is a way of administering comfort in which you stand apart from the patient, and you tell him, "There is the cup of cordial if you like to drink it." But the mother's way of doing it is to sip the cup, and then to put it to the child's lips; ay, and to do more than that, to take the child right into her bosom while she gives it. She does not talk to him at arm's length, but she talks with him at her heart all the while, and that probably is the secret of her power. And so, when God comforts any poor heavy-laden sinner or troubled saint, he does not talk to him at a distance, but he runs, and falls on his neck, and kisses him. The infinite, almighty God falls upon the neck of a repenting sinner, and gives him the kiss of his love; and he does just the same to a poor, troubled, and afflicted saint. He comforts fondly. May one venture to apply such a word as that to the great God? May we say that he has a fondness for his children? Well, at any rate, we know that, if there be a word more sweet, more dear, indicating a closer affinity and a deeper and purer love than another, we may use that word concerning our God. He loves us with a love that has no bottom, no summit, and no shore. Even as he loves his own dear Son, so he loves us. We are in his heart; we are graven upon the palms of his hands; and, therefore, when he comforts, it is in so fond a manner that we cannot but be cheered. With all the tenderness a mother feels, God feels for us, and so he comforts us as a mother comforts her child.

But there is more than fondness here. A mother comforts her child *very sympathizingly*. She always seems to feel the pain the child is feeling. To soothe that headache, she lays her cool hand upon the hot, throbbing little brow, and is herself pained as she thinks of the pain that must be there; or she looks at the hand that has been made to bleed by a fall, and her eyes seem as if they would bleed for the little one. She feels it all, and therefore she is sure to comfort well. And this is how Jesus comforts. We have

heard of a little child who said to her mother, "Mother, Mrs. So-and-so, the widow, says she likes me to go in to see her, for I comfort her so. When she sits and cries, I put my head in her lap, and I cry too; and she says that comforts her." Ah, yes, child, there is true philosophy in that. This is just the sort of comfort we need, and this is just what God does. Our Lord in human flesh still sorrows with his people,—hungers in their hunger,—thirsts in their thirsting,—and melts in their mourning. Though he reigns on high, he is not so high that he has no "respect unto the lowly."

A mother also comforts her child *very assiduously*. She is not satisfied with saying half a dozen words, and putting her child down; but she takes it up, and if it won't be dandled on one knee, she tries the other, and if that form of comfort will not do, she will try another. We have heard of a good mother who wanted to teach her child something, and when it was complained that she had to repeat the same thing twenty times, she answered, "Yes, I did that because nineteen times would not do." So God perseveres. Sometimes a mother may have to comfort her child when it is very sick and very fretful, and its poor little head and heart are out of order. She has to comfort it again, and again, and again, and again. The soft words are always on her lips. She can do nothing else but just console the little one, and she is not tired of it. Oh, those mothers of ours! They never do grow tired when we are sick and ill. They seem to be up all night and all day long; and if a nurse comes in for a few hours, they are up then, too, looking after the nurse, so that I do not know that much ease comes with the helper. Our mothers are so untiringly kind. Well, I say to you, to "you who unto Jesus for refuge have fled," that our God is kinder than any mother. His Book is full of attempts to comfort his children, and those attempts—blessed be God—are not without success.

Again, a mother comforts her child *seasonably*. A true mother is not always comforting her child. If she is a silly mother, she brings up her child so delicately that it turneth out a viper in her bosom; if she is a wise mother, she saves her comforts till they are wanted. When it is sick, then she gives the cordials. Well, God does not always comfort his saints; but when they are in affliction, then they shall have consolation. As our tribulations abound so our consolations abound by Jesus Christ. There is a balance kept up. If there be an ounce of trouble, there will be an ounce of comfort; if there be a ton of trouble, there will be a ton of consolation. When the child has been doing wrong, and the parent has chastised it, if the little lip curls, if the proud foot is stamped, if there is a frown on the brow, the wise mother does not comfort it. But when the child comes and prays to be forgiven, the mother's heart is ready for it directly. "Sin no more," she says, "and the past shall be forgotten and forgiven." Well, this is how God comforts us. While we are proud and stand out against him, we shall feel his hand; but when we confess our faults, and come humbly to him for pardon, we shall have seasonable comfort, "as one whom his mother comforteth."

Again, a mother's comfort has this point about it, she usually

comforts in a most efficient manner, and the child goes away smiling, though it seemed to say before, "I shall never be happy again." Five minutes of a mother's wise talk and sweet comfort, and the child is as happy as before. "Ah," you say, "that will do for children, but it won't do for men." But God keeps his saints as children before him. May God grant us grace to be as little children, or we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven! Then, when our God comes to comfort us, I am quite sure he will do it more effectually than the most tender mother can.

But, once more, a mother comforts *all her life*. "A mother is a mother all her life," says an old proverb. There is no change there. "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb?" It seems impossible, but the Lord says, "Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." A mother casts not away her child; fathers sometimes have done such a thing, but mothers, I should hope, never. But even if they have;—

"Yet," saith the Lord, "should nature change,
And mothers monsters prove,
Sion still dwells upon the heart
Of everlasting love."

God will not cease to comfort his people. Perhaps there is a brother who is passing through very severe trial, and he thinks he shall never be comforted again. Well, but your mother will not forsake you, and do you think God will? "But," says one, "you do not know my difficulty; it is a crushing one." My dear friend, I know I do not know it, but your heavenly Father knows it; and do you suppose, if an earthly mother sticks fast by her child, that he will leave you? Go to him. His heart is as near to you now as when you were on the mountain rejoicing in the full sunshine of his love. The very shadow of a change is unknown to him. Go to him with confidence and humble faith, and you shall find the text true, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

III. Now I have just a little to say upon the third point, that is, WHERE GOD COMFORTS his people. The text says, "in Jerusalem."

Why, for his ancient people, that was *where they had their troubles*. The city had been besieged. O daughter of Salem, how wast thou made to weep! What sorrow rolled over thy head, to see the city dismantled, and her palaces become ruins,—wild fowls and bitterns inhabiting the place where once the assembled tribes were glad! O Jerusalem, what grief is in thy name to thine inhabitants as they remember thee, thy glory all departed, and thy sorrow lasting still! Yes, but God will comfort his people in the very place of their trouble. This will be fulfilled on a large scale in the millennial glory when this, our world, which has been the scene of the saints' sorrow, will be also the scene of their triumphant reign with Christ Jesus.

Meanwhile, you, his servants, must not suppose that, because you have trial, you are in the wrong place. The vine is not in the wrong place because the vine-dresser often uses the knife; it may be the best place for that vine where it gets most of the

vine-dresser's pruning. Beware, young friends, especially, beware of self-will in seeking to change your troubles. Some of you think, when you are single, you have peculiar troubles; do not be in a hurry to incur the troubles of married life. And you who are servants think you are very hardly done by, do not be so wondrously fast to wish to be masters. I sometimes find my cross not just what I like it to be, but I should be very much afraid to attempt to alter it. "Twere better in all wisdom "to bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of." That man, whom you envy, you would probably pity if you knew more about him. Be content to stop in Jerusalem.

Remember, the comfort which God gives will be a comfort to suit your present place and position. "In Jerusalem," where you have seen the furnace of God placed, for his "fire is in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem," even there shall you have your comfort. It is a joy to think of Daniel in the lions' den; I believe that Daniel never had a sweeter night's rest than he had when he had some old lion for his pillow, and the younger lions to be his guardians. And in the case of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the Master did not break down the furnace walls, and take them out at once, but he was with them in the fire, and cheered them in the midst of the flames. So shall the comfort of God come to you in your time of need.

Take another view of this matter. God will comfort you who are here below. "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!" says one. Now what would you do if you had them? They would be a very awkward equipment for a man; but suppose you had the wings of a dove, what would you do? Would you fly away? Well, you would hardly dare to do that, for to fly to God without a permit would be taking the matter into your own hands. Why cannot God comfort you where you are? "Ah," says one, "I expect to have my happiness in another world." So do I, but I hope to have some here too. "One heaven will be enough for me," says one. But why not have heaven here and heaven hereafter too?

"The men of grace have found
Glory begun below;
Celestial fruits on earthly ground
From faith and hope may grow.

"The hill of Sion yields
A thousand sacred sweets,
Before we reach the heavenly fields,
Or walk the golden streets.

"Then let our songs abound,
And every tear be dry;
We're marching through Immanuel's ground
To fairer worlds on high."

It is true that the fairer worlds are on high, but it is equally true that we are on Immanuel's ground even now. "In Jerusalem"—the place of your trials—"will I comfort you," saith the Lord.

And now, to come to another meaning of the passage, "in Jerusalem," that is, *in the Church of God*. The richest comforts

are reserved for those who, fearing the Lord, speak often one to another, and are not ashamed to own his name. And I think, dear friends, the place of comfort is the assembly of God's people. Therefore live, "not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is." There are people in the world who never go out to a service in the week-evening, and never think of doing such a thing. They get by the fireside after the day's business, and there they sit, and say, "We are full of doubts and fears. We cannot rejoice as we used to do:—

"What peaceful hours we once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!"

and so on. Now, those people expect God to go to their house, and comfort them. By what reason should they expect any such thing when they refuse to go to God's house for the comfort? Our Lord will sometimes withhold a sense of his presence from us in order to make us feel our wrong-doing in staying away from the use of the means which he has appointed for our comfort and consolation. I would that all congregations came out as well as you usually do. I must not say anything to *you* about not coming out on a week-night, for you do come; and anything I might say about people not coming would be like Dean Swift's sermon about those who go to sleep in church. When he finished it, he thought he had done no good, "for," said he, "only you who were awake have heard it."

I would rather propose to you that, whenever you meet a friend who is greatly in lack of comfort, and is complaining that he has not got it, you would give as judicious a hint as you can that it may be that they miss the comfort who miss the means of grace. He who will not go to the shop and buy cannot wonder if he has not any oil for his lamp. He who will not take the trouble to go to the stream must not marvel if he has to suffer thirst. O let us, dear friends, as often as we can, gather together with the Lord's people for praise and prayer! No doubt, "in Jerusalem" we shall find our comfort. There are those among you to whom it does one good to listen when you speak of your enjoyments in this house. Of course, there are some who are not edified by the ministry here; but if that is the case, why do they not go somewhere else? Their seats could be filled by others who would be edified. But there are some who say, "Master, it does us good to come here, and we can bless the Lord that he here makes the place of his feet glorious. We long for Sunday to come round again, for we feel the place to be like an Elim." In your case, God always makes his house to be a fountain of living waters to your souls and streams from Lebanon.

To that end, I pray the Master to help all his servants. Pray for your ministers, but remember that the comfort cannot come from them. It may come *through* them, but it must come from the Master himself. With that exhortation, we will come back to the words of the text, and the gracious promise, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

May God add his blessing, and bring troubled sinners to look to Christ, and Christ shall have the glory! Amen.