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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at "Galeed" Chapel, Brighton
Sunday morning, 23rd May 1965.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." Isaiah 40:1-2.

The Lord has a people. "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." (2 Timothy 2:19) He only infallibly knows who are His. He looks down from heaven. He looks upon this little company of people. He knows those among us who are His. I wonder who are? Do you wonder if you are? We are somebody's. We either belong to the god of this world and serve him, or we belong to God and serve Him – and He knows. He has a people, a people who are born the second time, a people who are created the second time. Not people renovated, but people regenerated. "But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine." (Isaiah 43:1) Blessed people that are inside that word! Solemn to be outside of it; and we are one side or the other.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." We cannot comfort the world – not with the things that we are occupied in, with the Gospel and the things of God – they would be no comfort to the world. There is a little consideration: are they any comfort to you? To find the Lord's people would be a very blessed thing. If you are entirely destitute of life and grace, then your troubles will be of such a nature that you can be comforted from nature; man can comfort you. But if you are the Lord's, and have the grace of God in your heart, you will have peculiar troubles. The Lord's people are a peculiar people. You will have peculiar troubles, peculiar fears, and therefore, you will need peculiar comfort. Be thankful if you know what it is to have trouble in your soul, in which only the Lord can comfort you, and from which the Lord alone can deliver you. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, MV people".

It just brings to mind that dear woman. She noticed the Prophet go by her house from time to time, and she concluded that he was a man of God, and therefore, she decided to set aside a little room, and put there a stool and a candlestick, and use hospitality toward him. And eventually he called her, and said, "What is to be done for thee (for thy kindness?) Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king?" (2 Kings 4:13) Could you give the same answer? She said: "I dwell among mine own people." I don't want to be mentioned to the king. Do you feel these things? They are evidences of belonging to the Lord. This people were given unto Him by the Father in the covenant of grace. Chosen of God they were, before time, according to His foreknowledge of them. His everlasting love was set upon them, and He gave those chosen people to His dear Son, to be His bride, for Him to redeem; and He bought them, purchased them with His own heart's blood. He also conquered them. They are His by conquest, and this is the first intimation that they belong to Him. The conquest of grace within conquered them, created them anew. "My people."

And it is the will of God that they should be comforted. But you notice this – and it is very discriminating – the whole of the text is discriminating – it says: "Comfort ye, comfort ye **My** people, saith **your** God." This was instruction given by God unto the Prophet. The Prophet could not comfort the Lord's people, unless that God was his God. So Paul, writing to the Corinthians, speaking of comfort, says that he would comfort them with the comfort wherewith he himself had been comforted of God. (2 Corinthians 1:4) It is a very searching thing for a minister, whether he delivers unto the people that which he first received from

the Lord; and I believe that it will enter into every part of the preaching of the Gospel. Not only will he comfort the people wherewith he himself hath been comforted of God, but he will warn the people with the warnings wherewith he himself hath been warned of God. It is a great thing to consider whether we receive things from God Himself. We may receive them in an intellectual way from the Scriptures.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." Well, to my mind, the ground of comfort is the whole of this chapter. Throughout the chapter the Lord declares who He is. Incomprehensible! He is. "To whom will ye liken Me?" repeatedly is asked through the chapter, and that is for the comfort of His people. That must be the ground of comfort, and some of you will feel that, and you will be brought to need comfort. The Lord's people are not always in a condition to receive comfort. They may need chastening, rebuke; but when the Lord chastens and rebukes, it is in love. But the ground of comfort is God Himself. I believe that each in their measure will feel this. You will be glad that God is God. Terrible thing to the wicked! I have often thought of it in reading the 139th Psalm; we read there of the omnipresence of God: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there" He would be. A terrible consideration is the omnipresence and the omnipotence and the divine sovereignty of God to the wicked. The wicked wish God was not, and wish that He was not what He is. The wicked would, if they could, dethrone Him, and de-God Him, if they could. Would you? This is the point: Is He the ground of your comfort, of your hope?

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." Why, sometimes my friends, it is the only thing that will keep you from despair. Indeed, a little lower down we read this: "O Zion, that bringest good tidings" – or: "O Thou that bringest good tidings to Zion ...lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" V.9) Previously he had complained that all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; and he was commanded to cry, to preach, to prophesy, as though he would say: Well, seeing the frailty of man, that he is but like withering grass, what can I cry? O "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" There is no withering there, no decay there, no death there. "Behold your God!"

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." Be thankful for this, my friends, if in your secret moments, it may be in deep distress, the very consideration of the Being of the eternal, immutable God is a comfort to you. Out of Christ He is a consuming fire, but the Holy Ghost reveals Him in Christ for the comfort of His people. And it is no small comfort to consider this, that all those divine perfections that would consume a sinner, and all those same perfections as they meet in Christ, constitute a refuge and a defence for His dear people. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever." (Psalm 125:2) And those mountains round about Jerusalem are round about every individual child of God. And they are the divine attributes of Jehovah. Sometimes you will be able to rest your weary head upon God in Christ.

"Comfort ye, comfort My people, saith your God." Then there is the promise of His coming: "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." (v.10) Now, what an encouragement that is to a poor sinner, whose hands are weakened and hang down, whose knees are trembling, whose heart is faint! And so from time to time we shall be gathered back by the Spirit from all our scatterings, from all our weakness, from all our backslidings, and faith will find rest in its blessed centre, and in its object, the eternal God. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God."

And then there are these questions asked concerning Him: "Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and meted out heaven with a span? Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being His counsellor hath taught Him?" (v.12,13) With what majesty is set forth His divine independence and sovereignty! God alone needs nothing. By Him all things were created, and for Him. He is the whole creation's Head. Ah, I do believe that there are, times when a poor distressed sinner, who feels to be sinking in deep mire where there is no standing, that a manifestation of God in Christ will lay such a foundation beneath his feet that will put a new song in his mouth, and establish his goings. And in the 27th verse we see there a case in which His people are often found: "Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God?" They were in a place where they felt that the Lord took no notice of them, was hidden from them, and that their judgement had passed over, that God would not take up their case, would not plead their cause. But here was the comfort: "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding." (v.28) There was the comfort. What a great thing it is to have a living faith in God! "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God."

Well, there will be many conditions and positions in which they will need comfort. A body of sin and death, together with the fiery darts of the devil, and the waste howling wilderness through which they are passing, make up the pilgrimage of His people. They are beset with snares on every hand. Everything is in opposition to a work of grace in the soul. Since the fall, all nature is against God, and their own nature too. O the distress! And then there are the united trials incident to this life: losses and crosses and sorrows and calamities. Some of our own dear friends are in deep distress and affliction, and the Lord knows how to comfort those that are cast down. They need Him as they feel the powers of nature sinking; some need Him as they have the prospect of hospital before them. The presence of the Lord is the greatest comfort – it is indeed. I feel it is warrantable to say that the worst condition you can be in will be relieved by the presence of the Lord in your heart. At such moments you would be able to say with the Apostle: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18) When the Holy Ghost sets one thing over against the other, then faith gets the victory. Faith sees that the glory of God in Christ, and the reward – that reward unto which Moses had respect – outweighs all the sufferings, all the losses and griefs of this poor life, and therefore, we live by faith and not by sight.

If we live by faith, we live upon an unseen and yet a known God, and that puts everything in its right place. We then see light in God's light – a very different light from natural light. Ah, my friends, even our state as sinners – and it is a sight! – if by the grace of God you are given to see yourself in Christ's light, "accepted in the Beloved", O what a blessed light that is! The true light shines, for you see your affliction, your weakness, your sorrows, your sufferings, and you look at the hospital in God's light. It looks a different thing, a different place from when you looked at it in natural light. "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." He is the comfort – all that He is – the blessed Trinity. We can never comprehend the great Three-One, but He is knowable. Some of you know Him by the Spirit. When you pray, the object of your prayer is God; the Mediator through whom you pray is His dear Son; and the influence, the inditer of prayer, is the blessed Spirit. And you will be conscious of all those blessed Three-in-One. O sometimes you will feel your soul blessedly captivated by the truth – and that is the Gospel! O what a comfort the Gospel is!

"The Gospel bears my spirit up;
A faithful and unchanging God
Lays the foundation of my hope,
In oaths, and promises, and blood." (Gadsby's 83)

Well, are these things any comfort to you? If a worldly person should make a mistake and think this was a theatre, and come in here, why, I should be like a barbarian, be as a stranger and a foreigner to him. He would wonder what I was talking about. Do you? Are you strangers and foreigners to these things? Do you sometimes feel your very soul drawn out to Him, and the arms of your faith stretch out toward Him? And as the Holy Ghost might reveal the fullness of love, and life, and merits and grace, and mercy and riches, and salvation that is in Him, does it bring out spontaneously from your hearts:

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
All in all in Thee I find." (Gadsby's 303)

If it does, you are one of this people. A mercy to be one of them, because glorious things are spoken of them in the Word of God. Look what belongs to them! If we are not the Lord's, nothing belongs to us. I have said sometimes – and I feel it is a very solemn assertion – and that is (we will put it in a limited sense) if you think that you would be rich to possess the whole of Brighton, it would be impossible for you to possess it, because if it was yours, it would possess you, you would not possess it. You look at that rich man who pulled down his barns and built greater. He had not where to bestow his goods. Did he possess them? They possessed him, and they sunk him lower than the grave, into hell., That is the point., The things of time, if we are covetous, will possess us and be our ruin. But O, if we are the Lord's, then says Paul: "All things are yours...the world, or life or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours," because "ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1 Corinthians 3:21-23)

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God." What a ground for comfort there is in every condition! "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." The margin says "speak to the heart." That is a great thing. It is a mercy if we have a heart to be spoken to. You cannot speak to a natural heart. You may speak to some people's heads; O but you will feel in your own case, it is your heart, and you want the truth to penetrate to your heart, to your soul! You want grace, grace to save you, to sanctify you. You will want a new creation: "a new heart will I put within you." O to have a new creation, to be made a new creature in Christ Jesus! It is to be possessed of faith; to have the ears of faith, the eyes of faith, the hands of faith, the feet of faith.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem" – speak to her heart. Well, have you that divine and spiritual faculty of faith to which alone the things of God can be spoken, faith which alone can receive it? That was just the difference between the good ground and the three hearers of bad ground. The difference was, the good ground had faith, that receptive faculty of the new man of grace. Do you find a reception of the truth? How are you to know it, whether you do or not? Because there will be a living response to the Gospel. If the Gospel is spoken to your head it will come in word only. O the distinction there is – very important! Paul said: "Our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thessalonians 1:5) That is, it came into your heart, not into your head.

"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished" – though so much remains to endure, though there is still the fight of faith to be fought – yet it is accomplished. And that refers us to the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was accomplished when He cried: "It is finished." I wonder how many here were inside of that last blessed cry of the Lord Jesus. When He died, He knew for whom He died: "When Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed." (Isaiah 53:10) It is a blessed truth – I would not attempt to limit it – that when the Lord Jesus died and bowed His sacred head, He, in His infinite incomprehensible prescience, saw every one of His dear people for whom He died. Do you believe it? If you don't, you would be limiting it. "When thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed." O how intimate the knowledge of God concerning His dear people! It is a different knowledge from His general omnipresence. It is a knowledge of love, and not only intimate of their individual persons, but His care for them is so intimate that even the very hairs of their head are all numbered. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." (Matthew 10:29-31) Comfort! Life's minutest circumstance.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." The Lord Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil, and He has destroyed them. He administered this comfort to His sorrowing disciples at the conclusion of that chapter, 16th John: "These things" – these things in this chapter, everything that He has said throughout the Scriptures, together with the things that are spoken in the 14th, 15th, and 16th John: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." The warfare is accomplished: "I have overcome the world" – overcome it for you, and you will overcome through Me. "More than conquerors through Him that loved us." (Romans 8:37)

"Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." And yet, O my friends, what a conflict there is, what a warfare within and a warfare without!

"I'll bear the unequal strife,
And wage the war within;
Since death, that puts an end to life,
Will put an end to sin." (Gadsby's 314)

But the Lord has put an end to sin for His people; He extracted the sting as He got the victory over the grave. Those two dreadful enemies, death and the grave – how terrible they are! But tell her "that her warfare is accomplished," Satan is a defeated foe, the sting is removed from death, the victory is gotten from the grave. O what a comfort if the Lord by His Spirit should say that to you! It is just those words: "It is finished" – and it was completely finished. The work of Christ was complete as well as perfect. Nothing left at all. And yet in experience, O what a lot is left, what conflict, what warfare, what groanings, what strugglings of faith! How often we feel that we shall be defeated! But the victory is won. O if the blessed Spirit would bring this finished work into the heart of a poor trembling, sinking sinner, what a comfort, a good comfort, it would be!

"Her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned." It is pardoned. A sinner still, but iniquity is pardoned. The precious blood of Jesus Christ removed the guilt, the sin of His

people, took away the iniquity of that land in one day, cast her sins into the depths of the sea. "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us." (Psalm 103:12) But we were speaking of this, I think, last Wednesday: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." (Acts 13:38,39) O grace is greater than sin; grace is greater than Moses; the Gospel is greater than the law. There is the comfort. So that "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." (Hebrews 7:25)

"For she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." I know Peter speaks of the righteous being scarcely saved, but that scarceness is not in salvation; it is in the method of it. You look at that word in the 33rd Job. There was a sinner, a dear man, ready to go down into the pit, and as though there was a messenger in the nick of time rushing in, and said: "Deliver him from going down into the pit. After all, I have found a ransom, just in time" – scarcely saved! O but it is plenteous redemption, double, bounteous salvation. O that redemption that is in Christ Jesus is infinitely greater than the sin that is in your nature and in your life. "Double." What is this double? It is this: not only forgiveness, but justification – that is double. He not only forgives sins, but justifies the sinner. O what a salvation this is! Do you need it? Do you understand it by your sense of a need of it? Is it made more to you than your necessary food? Can you do without it? Can you substitute anything else for it? "Double for all her sins."

There is another double: "The Lord will give grace and glory" – both of these. (Psalm 84:11) Grace here – O it is a gift, precious grace! "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (Romans 5:20) There is the double: "much more abound." It not only just covers, just fits; it swallows up, grace swallows up sin; the precious blood of Christ removes all guilt. Grace here, the kingdom of grace in the heart, the work of grace in the soul, the Gospel of His grace preached in the sanctuary here. And then glory. Double, double!

O there is nothing in this poor world to envy, my friends. It is sweet if for a moment to be gathered away from it. You may at times be surprised, and lie on the brink of despair, feel to be in the belly of hell – and I know that place, I know it well – and you may be brought up from where you are, away to the very gate of heaven, have a glimpse through that gate of the eternal glory. "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." O love, love divine! O grace, free and sovereign grace! O mercy, mercy which reacheth up to the clouds!

Amen.