

1086  
La 4692

1086

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton,  
Sunday morning 8th August 1965

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places; and He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Isaiah 51 v.3.

The preceding chapter concludes with solemn discrimination between those that fear the Lord and walk in darkness and have no light, and an exhortation for them to trust in the name of the Lord and stay upon their God; and also a doom upon those who trust in themselves, and kindle a fire and walk in the light of their own fire and in the sparks that they have kindled: "This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow." How faithful, solemnly faithful, and blessedly faithful, is the discriminating Word of God! It is indeed a sword, a two-edged sword, that divides asunder between the soul and spirit, joints and marrow, the thought and intents of a mans heart.

But in this chapter the Lord returns, returns to those that fear God, and says: "Hearken to Me." O what a voice! Do not some of you long to hear this? Those of you, perhaps, who have cried out of the very anguish of your spirit: "Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord my rock; be not silent unto me: lest...I be like them that go down into the pit." (Psalm 28:1) Some of you may know the pain of that silence of the Lord. O how your heart would rejoice to hear this: "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." It is very kind and merciful to be put this way, at could be said, Hearken to me all the election of grace, it could be said, hearken unto me all ye who are persuaded you are going T to heaven, or hearken unto me those of you who are assured that all your sins are forgiven; but "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness ye that seek the Lord."

Now, if we read the Word of God under the exercise of the Spirit, in reading the Word we shall also look into our own hearts and see if there is anything in our experience that compares with what is declared in the Word of God. It is a good exercise. You will be able, in your measure, if you thus read the Word of God, to discern whether your name is in the Bible. You look at this; this is the character: "Ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." It does not say 'those of you who know that you are righteous,' but "ye that are following after it." And to follow after righteousness is to follow after the Lord Himself, for the righteousness of the Lord Jesus is that righteousness which is by virtue of His Person and His finished work – the righteousness of a fulfilled law, the righteousness of Christ's perfect obedience to the law, the righteousness of His finished work. And this is the whole of the Gospel. Who are they that follow after this righteousness and seek the Lord? It must be those who have had their eyes opened, it must be those who have been quickened into life. A dead soul would never follow after righteousness; a natural man will never follow after the Lord, dead in sin, and the love of this world. Well, it is a mercy then, if we can find in our experience – not in our heads, but in our experience – this evidence of the life of God.

These chapters are very blessed. The 55th chapter, really, speaks to the same character: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." This thirsting is the same thing as following after righteousness and seeking the Lord; and it is indeed a mercy to have that evidence of the life of God in the soul. "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are

digged." It is observable, as I view it; the method of God in salvation makes it appear that it is difficult for Him to save a sinner. I say the method of it. There is nothing that is hard with the Lord. But you take it right from the time that He brought the children of Israel out of Egypt; it took ten plagues to bring them out. The Lord could have brought them out without any plagues at all, but what was His purpose? His purpose in everything is His own glory. He demonstrated to Pharaoh ten times His divine sovereignty and omnipotence; but O, the children of Israel were under the domination of Pharaoh. But we were born under a greater tyrant than Pharaoh, under the power and tyranny of the Devil himself. And here, for the comfort of His people, the Lord sets before them what appeared as impossible. "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." And to my mind it infers this: that you may feel that your case is beyond hope. You look at yourself; the Holy Ghost has given you to realise what you are, brought you to see that in your nature there is nothing better than sin and death and hell and confusion. But: "Hearken to Me," for by that knowledge the same Spirit has given you to see that here alone the remedy is, where the fulness is, if he has given you a glimpse of the remedy, the Saviour, and has brought you to follow after righteousness and to seek the Lord. But you think it is impossible that such as you could ever receive mercy. Well, look at this impossibility, at "the rock whence ye are hewn, to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged" – look unto Abraham your father, which is just an interpretation, really, of the rock and of the hole of the pit – look unto Abraham your father and unto Sarah that bare you, look at the hopelessness of their condition!

Paul speaks of it to the Romans. Concerning Abraham, he says: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb." (Romans 4:19) Just an impossible position; and the Lord presents this to His troubled people for their encouragement, who look at the two things together, and hear the voice of love and mercy: "Hearken to Me." And here is the character, and you know whether you do or you do not: "Ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord," but have many, many fears.

Ah, some of you may remember – in my little way, I remember I could look at the people as I sat in the congregation, and I could feel that the Lord could save any of them; but however He could reach my case I did not know. But, "Hearken to Me." O what a Person to listen to! The infinite God in Christ, He speaks through His Son. "Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged." O this was the free grace of God. No power in that hole, in that pit – no power! "Look unto Abraham your father and to Sarah that bare you" – look where they were, among an idolatrous people – but I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. A wonderful thing that was! We read of it in the 13th Genesis. We read that when Abraham was separated from Lot, the Lord said unto Abraham: "Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art" – and there is this to remember: what He says to Abraham, He says to every son of Abraham. Remember that in reading the Scriptures. Don't read the Scriptures as though it is for Abraham's sake alone; what He said there He said virtually to everyone of His people: "Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art." I have felt that to be a comfort: "From the place where thou art." Why, Abraham was called to go forth to a place he knew not where; he was set on pilgrimage. And whatever place you are in, O those of you who are anxiously following after the Lord Jesus, seeking the Lord, "Lift up now thine eyes from the place where thou art" – from the very place – "For all the land that thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever." Doubtless the Lord

gave to Abraham a special sight by faith of his seed, that is, the Lord's election of grace. And the promise was that "In blessing I will bless thee...and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (ch.22:17-18) And he had not got a son, he had not got a child, and he was 100 years old. O poor sinner, those of you who feel there is no hope, who can see nothing but death, "Hearken to Me," says the Lord to a poor troubled sinner.

We would hearken to Him, would we not? Would we not with Samuel say: "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." But you may not be able to say that. I have said this: Speak, Lord, for this sinner heareth. "I called him alone." Good beginning, this was! And if the Lord calls you by grace, He will call you alone. The church of God is not formed by a mass production; it is an individual work in the hearts of individual sinners. And if we have Abraham's faith, and Abraham's God is our God, He will call us alone. "He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because He hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust; if so be there may be hope." (Lamentations 3:28-29) That is a good beginning. See this sinner with his mouth in the dust, keeping silence, called alone, separated. O a mercy to have a religion that separates you from self, from the world! And as he is called alone, and brought to put his mouth in the dust of self-abasement, he sees two things, as I view it; he sees the desperate condition that he is in by nature; universal and complete destitution is very solemn. He will see this, though, that everything beneath the sun is vanity and vexation of spirit. There is nothing that contributes the least thing to salvation beneath the sun; all must come from heaven. He realises this, and therefore there is set before him but one door of hope. I have felt much about this invitation: "Hearken to Me." Why, some of you may be wrestling with the Lord to speak, to hear His voice; and so as you go through this most blessed chapter you will hear this voice in the fourth verse: "Hearken unto me, my people." Not a different character – those in the first verse may think so. Those who can find no help in themselves, and yet who, under the teaching of the Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel, are given to believe – and it is a full assurance. Some of you who feel that you cannot claim any interest in Christ have this full assurance, that if you could but find Him, if you could but possess Him, you are persuaded that His precious blood is all-sufficient to take out the deepest-dyed stains of your sins – you are sure of that. You are assured that if His righteousness were but imputed to you, it would justify you.

But in the fourth verse, the same divine and glorious Person speaks: "Hearken unto Me, my people." So, if you are in the first verse, you are in the fourth. If you are following after righteousness and seeking the Lord, here is the same voice again: "Hearken unto Me, my people." Then you come to the seventh verse, the same voice: "Hearken unto Me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law" – not the law of Moses, but the glorious Gospel. And when that Gospel comes into the heart by the Holy Ghost, ~~it is the power of God. The power of God is in every part of~~ the Gospel. And then the effect of it: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in the ancient days...Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon?" Rahab is the God of this world. "Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep?" When the Lord divided the sea for His people to go over: "That hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?" And so, in a work of salvation in the soul, there is every kind of opposition, things look impossible, and what does this do? O what teaching to profit there is in it! But "He led them about and instructed them, He led them about to prove them, to know what was in their heart." (see Deuteronomy 32:10 & 8:2) Had the Lord seen fit, He could have guided His people straight through the wilderness to the promised land in a very short time. But O these

leadings about in the wilderness, these emptyings and fillings, these killings and makings alive, they all redound to His glory, and magnify the power of His grace!

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion." Zion needs a different comfort from the world. It will be a mercy if we need a different comfort from what the world needs. And why is it? Because the troubles of the Lord's people are different from the world's. His people are peculiar, they have a peculiar new birth, a peculiar life, they have peculiar sorrows, they have peculiar joys and a peculiar religion, they have a peculiar faith, they die a peculiar death, and they need peculiar comfort.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion." Zion is a most sacred place, the only place in this world that the Lord dwells in in a way of love. He rests in His love. "For the Lord hath chosen Zion: He hath desired it for His habitation. This is my rest: here will I dwell ; for ever I have desired it." (Psalm 132:13-14) "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing." (Zephaniah 3:17) O what a sacred thing it is to have the presence of the Lord in the assembly of His saints! He will only dwell in that assembly that is gathered together by the Holy Ghost. "Unto Him shall the gathering of the people be." (Genesis 49:10). And this gathering to Zion is very very precious; it takes in the whole of the providences of God in leading His people about, for "they wander in the wilderness in a solitary way, and can find no city to dwell in." (Psalm 107:4) You may depend upon it, if we are in the footsteps of the flock we shall find it to be so – wandering in the wilderness in a solitary way.

"The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." (Numbers 23:9) And this is very blessed, to trace it out in individual experience. It would be very precious to observe it among some of our young people, for the Lord to call them by His sovereign grace, and call them just as He called Abraham, call them alone, separate them from an ungodly world, and give them to feel their danger, and to seek a refuge, and to lead them about until they are brought under the rod – that is, under the authority of the preaching of the Gospel, and bring them into the bond of the covenant. It is wonderful, in some instances, how the Lord has led about a people who have never been brought up to know the truth at all; and how they wandered from place to place, but could not find that which touched their case, until they were brought under the preaching of the Holy Ghost; and that constitutes Zion.

Therefore, the command we have in the 50th Psalm is: "Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." (v.5) In the most vital sense, that was a command to the Lord Jesus, when His Father sent Him: "Gather My saints together unto Me." It is the work of the Holy Ghost also to gather them together, and it is the purpose of the ministry to gather the Lord's saints together unto Him. It is a wonderful thing to have a congregation of people whose hearts the Lord has touched, who are brought to seek the Lord and to follow after righteousness. A great responsibility to speak to them.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion." They need comfort. One reason is because everything in nature is in opposition to the work of grace in the soul. O there is a wrestling toward heaven, and a body of sin and death is never eradicated! What a burden this is, and a trouble to one who is following after righteousness and seeking the Lord! Unbelief is still in our nature, we are still earthy and carnal, and there is that voice, the voice of nature; how it would hinder us in our pursuit of the Lord, hinder us in

running the race that is set before us. Do you know some of these internal hindrances? You may have some definite things in your experience. I feel this, with respect to myself, that the opposition that I feel in my own nature is far greater than anything outside; it is not so much now the allurements of this world. O there was no better place that I could choose than this world and all its tinsel; but I do trust that that is not the opposition now; it is a body of sin and death. We live to prove that the Canaanites still dwell in the land, that unbelief is not dead, that temptations of the devil are powerful, and we lean toward the earth in our nature. We are earthy and earth-bound.

Well now, such need a special kind of comfort; and so we find it in the 40th chapter: "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem." And what is the comfort? "Cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished," "Though so much remains to endure" (Gadsby 237) – there is the good fight of faith to fight: "Cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished." It was accomplished upon Calvary's cross when the Lord cried: "It is finished." It was finished for every individual without exception whose names are in the Lamb's Book of Life. O, if the Lord was to assure some poor trembling wrestling sinner: "that her warfare is accomplished, that... she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins!" Would it be any comfort to you? It would not be a bit of comfort to the world. It could not be said to the world; it does not belong to them. And look at the One who speaks, "Hearken unto Me" – this great ME. "She hath received double for all her sins" – and that double is forgiveness and justification. Forgiveness is great, but justification is double. And there is another double: He will give grace here, and glory hereafter. "For the Lord shall comfort Zion."

O to have this victory proclaimed in your poor heart, full of conflict, often you fear that you will never stand the trying day. We have some shameful defeats in ourselves, we constantly fall; but O at times when faith gets a sense of the greatness and invincibility of the grace of God, then we can sing:

*Our Captain stood the fiery test,  
And we shall stand through Him.*

(Gadsby's 312)

And this is His voice. Indeed, my friends, it is right to say that these first three words in this chapter can be applied to everything that He says to His people from Genesis to Revelation. He speaks it all to them; but what we need is for Him to speak it to our own case. There is no other voice. A minister cannot speak comfort, but the blessed Spirit can, through the ministry, convey this comfort. O what a mystery is the provision that God has made in Zion, and in Zion exclusively – nowhere else! We are speaking of Zion. "For the Lord shall comfort Zion." He comforts Zion by that spiritual provision that He has made. "Wisdom hath builded her house." (Proverbs 9:1) Divine wisdom builds the Church, builds it of living stones, and yet those living stones are but sinners. I would say it with reverence, but the materials with which the Lord builds the Church are sinners, saved by grace.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion". So He comforts Zion with the provision that He has made. The Church of God is a divine institution made up of human beings, but it is all divine; it is divine life communicated to their souls. It is a living, exalted Christ that is the Head of the Church; it is a living and eternal Spirit that quickens them into life, that communicates from the living Head to the members the blessings, spiritual blessings in heavenly places, that they possess in Christ. Now these are comforts. Are they a comfort to you? O what a comfort Christ is, as we were singing, the only

rest to a poor weary sinner! Do you feel Him precious? Can you truthfully say, "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand?" Is it not amazing to you, those of you who look back? I wish I could not look back upon a time when I would seek anywhere but the Chapel – a time when I was thankful to hear Mr. Popham say, "Amen," and shut the Bible as he used to – sitting in that back seat, glad enough to get out. O what a wonder if the Lord has made us to differ from what we once were, and that we can find our rest and our happiness where the Lord Himself finds it! He rests in His love, and His people rest in Him.

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion." And when His gracious presence is felt, my friends, then you forget your misery, you may come into His courts bowed down, staggering to and fro like a drunken man, your poor mind agitated, and at your very wits' end, and then the Lord mercifully speaks. You may have hearkened to all kinds of voices; there are many voices which demand attention, and your poor mind becomes very agitated, you are very driven, but this voice is above every voice. You may sit in the pew, and for substance – if not in the word – yet for substance it is just this: "Hearken to Me. My name is above every name" – every name that we can think of. There are some great names that make you tremble – sin, the devil, hell, death – but "Hearken to Me. My name is above every name."

"For the Lord shall comfort Zion." And He only comforts those that mourn. It is a mercy then to be a mourner in Zion. Mourning is a very different thing from misery; mourning is very sweet. If you dissect it and see what there is inside of this mourning, there is real repentance there, godly sorrow; there is the love of God shed abroad in the heart. There is an abhorrence of sin, there is self-condemnation, self-abnegation. There is a reverence to the Lord, a fear of His great name. There is a desire after Him, a feeling if haply we might find Him. He is the object of the first desire of a poor mourner, and the Lord comforts such; and the comfort is spiritual comfort because their sorrow is spiritual sorrow; and this constitutes a part of the work of the Spirit in the heart, the exercise of the soul. We were speaking on Friday of looking into certain words that are so often used. We often speak about exercise. Well, look at what it means, and if the few feeble things I have said constitute the exercise and inward conflict and movements of faith in the heart, that is exercise. And why does the Lord lead His people in such a pathway? We noticed yesterday that word in the 5th chapter of Hebrews: "Strong meat belongeth to them that are of a full age." (v.14) We shall never come to a full age unless we are taught to profit by the things in which we are led about and instructed. "Strong meat belongeth to them that are of a full age, even those that by reason of use" – if there is no conflict, there is no use for faith. If the pathway of a pilgrim was mostly across a mossy park that you could walk in silver slippers, you would not need much faith nor prayer. "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of a full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." It is well to remember this, and all the inward conflicts which produce prayer by the Spirit. Prayer is a very severe exercise when it is real. It brings into exercise and activity every grace of the Spirit, brings a poor sinner before God to pour out his heart unto the Lord, concerning himself both in confession of sin, his fears and his desires, and in his humble praises. But how could we be brought to these things if we were never in any place and case to need the Lord? "Even those who by reason of use" – that is, close exercise with God from day to day – "have their senses exercised." If our senses, spiritual senses, are not exercised they become rusty, dull, and useless. But the Lord will comfort these people. "The Lord shall comfort Zion."

Then there are those who need comfort, who are under conviction of sin, the burden of guilt upon their hearts. It is a mercy to be convinced of sin; but O, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to Everlasting. "He will not always chide: neither will He keep His anger for ever." (Psalm 103:9) But wherever the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, He will never leave a poor sinner there – that is His work. But this also – He will lead to the atoning blood of the Lord Jesus. Ah, you will not only need it at the beginning, you will need it constantly through your pilgrimage journey. Sometimes it is so refreshing. I remember only about twelve months ago, coming in this pulpit door and feeling I should sink to rise no more. I did not know a thing – what I should do, what chapter I should read, or what text I should take. And our dear friend gave out that hymn:

*There is a Fountain filled with blood,  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.*

(Gadsby's 160)

It did it in a moment. The Lord can translate you from a sense of death to life in a moment. He can raise you from the dust, and lift you from the dunghill in a moment. "For the Lord shall comfort Zion." But there must be suitable sorrow for this suitable comfort. Now is there that within you that you can honestly say, not to me, but to the Lord, that there is

*No peace, but in the Son of God;  
No joy, but through His pardoning blood.*

(Gadsby's 771)

If you could go out of this Chapel and find that you were possessed of a large estate, would that take the place of the presence of the Lord in your soul?

I remember there was a young man, many years ago, in a path of adversity, and unexpectedly he had a cheque come for £500, and he laid it on the table, most acceptable; he felt most unworthy, and yet this came into his heart: "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour Thou barest unto Thy dear people – that is what I want!" It won't make you unthankful for blessings, but you cannot rest upon them; providence will reach your body, but you will want something to reach your soul. The things of this life can comfort the body; we can have warmth in our home, food to eat, and raiment to put on, but it won't reach the soul. Then, do you know you have got a soul? "The Lord shall comfort Zion," blessed be His name. A mercy, then, to be a true mourner.

Amen.