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SERMON

PREACHED BY MR L S B HYDE

AT

'SALEM' CHAPEL, CARSHALTON

Text
Isaiah 51, verses 12 & 13

Sunday afternoon
28th June 1981

I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?

What an application these words have so often to the experience of the people of God! For the most part, the people of God are troubled with the things that they see, and seem to disregard the things that they do not see. Now we read in the Epistle to the Corinthians Paul's wonderful words: 'For our light affliction, which is but for a moment . . . While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Whilst we behold the things that are temporal, then we are often in distress and often discouraged, and our afflictions become exceedingly heavy. But if we are able to look at the things which are not seen, and to remember what the poet says, that He lends an unseen hand and gives a secret prop, then how different does everything appear!

Now the words of our text this afternoon are such as to remind us of the greatness and glory of God, at the same time reminding us of the propensity which is in us to look at those things which appear to be so much against us. By the help of God, first of all let us look at the opening words: 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' Are you tempted, then, from whence your comfort comes? Do you think that it comes from another source apart from God? Why is it that you are concerned? Is it not because if your comfort comes from any other source than from God, then that comfort may well fail? But on the other hand,

if it comes from God it may surely be that spiritual comfort, that eternal comfort, which will be of great strength and benefit to the soul under all circumstances. In writing his second Epistle to the church at Corinth, the Apostle mentions this: 'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.' We need to take notice of that; there is no other comfort apart from that which comes from God. It doesn't say: the God of most of the comfort, or the God of a little of the comfort; but the God of all comfort. So all real comfort for soul and mind under distresses, afflictions, sorrow, persecution, and so on, is that comfort which comes from God. Therefore the Holy Spirit asserts here: 'The God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.'

'I, even I.' Sometimes we need the Holy Spirit of God to make certain things clear, that it is God that speaks. We have already mentioned in our prayer this afternoon the words of the spouse in the Song of Solomon, where she said: 'It is the voice of my beloved.' O then, that we might hear in these words this afternoon the voice of our Beloved speaking and saying: 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' One thing is clear, and that is that there will be no interest for your soul in this text unless you are one that needs to be comforted. In another part of this prophecy we have these words: 'As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.' The comfort that God gives, then, may be related, by way of illustration, to the comfort which a mother gives to a child. This is a peculiar gift which a mother has to comfort a child when that child is in distress, when that child is troubled. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' Now it may be that some of us might be able to remember, and do remember now, just what a mother's comfort means to us, has meant to us in the past, when there has been something so very difficult. Let us translate, or rather transfer, that to the situation of the soul that is troubled on every side and in distress. Who can comfort the soul that is thus troubled but God? 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.'

Just to look at the text, that we may draw therefrom why comfort is needed on this occasion, it says: 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?' There are many instances in the Scriptures and in the lives of people, christian people, godly people, that we may read about through the ages, who have been afraid of man. Some people try to brazen it all out and say they are afraid of no man; but those people may not always be honest, insofar that their actual feelings would not

support their loud words. Generally speaking, there are many occasions in people's lives when they are afraid. They are afraid of what man might do, they are afraid of what man might say. When men have done, and when men have threatened, then the people are afraid. Under all these circumstances there is only one source of comfort, and that is when we might look above all the men that have threatened, the women that have threatened, even the children that have threatened, and look up unto God, believing that He is above them all.

One or two instances in the Scriptures may well be brought to mind that would emphasize the ways of God with the people of God. We turn to the Acts of the Apostles. We read there of the occasion when the disciples were gathered together because of the threatenings of the people, and in their prayer to God we have these words: 'Lord, behold their threatenings', and when we can get on that spot, beloved friends, then we will be able to cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils. What happened on that memorable occasion? The Lord God brought an earthquake, and many people were disturbed. 'Behold their threatenings.'

Now, you know, there are many people that will threaten and they can do no more. They have no power to do any more. They may say: "I know what I am going to do, just what I intend to do, just what I will do." But whosoever they are, be assured that they will do nothing apart from God's allowance. An outstanding example of this is seen when the Lord Jesus Christ stood before Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate, when he saw that Jesus answered him nothing, said: 'Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.' Shall we be comforted, then, with these words: 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you' - with this knowledge, that man can have no power at all except it were given him from heaven. You may tremble, you may be greatly afraid, you might even lose some sleep because of what people have said they are going to do; but may these words be comfortable to you, if any of you should be in that place. God speaks clearly. Does He describe your character this afternoon when He says: 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?' Who are you? Why should you be afraid of a man that shall die? Who are you - one that is redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, one that is preserved by Jesus Christ, one that is held up day by day by the right hand of the righteousness of God, one that is sustained, one that is under the shadow of the Almighty, one that dwells there. Who art thou - being so covered with the protection of God, with the mercy of God, with the love of God - who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die? Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? Are we followers of that which is good? If we are followers of that which

is good, then it is God that has given us ears to hear, eyes to see, a heart to receive, hands to feel, and feet to walk in the ways of truth and righteousness, depending upon the power of God.

Gideon was in great trouble when he threshed his wheat behind the wine-press for fear of the Midianites. Gideon was in great distress. Why was he doing what he did in a secret way? Because he was afraid of the Midianites. The Midianites, being a judgment from God upon Israel, had had the dominion for some time. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' God virtually said to Gideon: "Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man? Thou shalt deliver Israel." And Gideon said: 'My family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.' 'Wherewith shall I save Israel?' God said: 'Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel.' Not the might of his own wisdom, not the might of his own self-importance, not the might of his own pride, but the might of absolute weakness, dependant upon God. When he went forth, you may remember he was to cry: The sword of the Lord and of Gideon. So with the Word of God in our hand, although it was a literal sword, doubtless, in Gideon's hand, we may strike through hosts of devils. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' There is a comforting by God through His holy Word. We may read many books, and many books which are supposed to contain factual truth - and as far as they can, it may be said that some do - but there is only one Book which we can really rely upon and say it is true, and that is a comfort. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you' - with this knowledge, that what is written in the Book of God, the Holy Bible, is the truth. And what does the Holy Bible say about the enemies of the Lord? 'The Lord has scattered the enemies of the Lord.'

You notice what is written in this same Prophecy about Sennacherib and Rabshakeh as they came and threatened. In their threatenings they degraded the God of Israel. Are you troubled because men have degraded the God of Israel? Are you troubled because it has been suggested that other people have been overcome and they have trusted in their gods, but their gods were not sufficient to deliver them from the power of Sennacherib. With Hezekiah, it didn't come to him and enter into his heart in such a way that he could brush it to one side; no. He had to pray unto God, he had to send for the prophet Isaiah, and he said: Do you hear what has been said? In his prayer unto God he mentioned the very thing that Sennacherib had said. Then the Lord sent His word that He would send Sennacherib back, He would put a hook in his nose and turn him back; and God did it. 'I am he that comforteth you; who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?' Sennacherib died, Rabshakeh died, the Midianites all died. But Hezekiah lived, and then he gave glory to God. Gideon lived to get

the conquest and to continue a judge in Israel for many years; and shall we not live through Him that has conquered for us?

'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' There is a great deal of importance in those two words that may seem to be unnecessary; those two words: 'even I'. It is as though 'I' is under-lined. If a word is under-lined, then our particular attention is drawn to it, and this word 'I' is under-lined by the addition of those two words 'even I', am he that comforteth you.

When we are in trouble, do we turn to the Word of God, and do we pray to God? Do we plead, perhaps, those words in John's Gospel: 'I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you.' 'I will not leave you comfortless.' Well, from where shall we draw comfort? We read of drawing water out of the wells of salvation. Now that will bring comfort to a thirsty soul, water out of the wells of salvation. You see, comfort is not always granted by speaking words. Sometimes it is actions which are performed. We read in the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ of those that have taken a cup of cold water in His Name. Has anyone taken a cup of cold water in the Name of Jesus? It has been a very simple thing, but because it slaked your thirst, then it meant a lot to you. Now sometimes God will send a person to help you, to send even a cup of cold water, whatever that might mean, to satisfy your thirsty soul. When we read in the Scriptures: 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God'; what is really meant? Well, surely it is this: "Some evidence that God is God, and that He will satisfy the longing desires of my heart." How does He do this? Would you be able to draw the path of your life's experiences, your soul's experience, and be able to say: Now this is how God does it? He does it by lending an unseen hand, He does it by sending help from unexpected quarters, He does it sometimes when that person or persons may be able to say: I have come because God has sent me.

Now we should not regard that which is written in the Scriptures as a thing of the past. If you say: "Well, of course we can find the occasions when a person was sent to alleviate the troubles of others, but that is a thing of the past," it isn't a thing of the past, and some of God's children will discover that God is ever watchful over them. Is this a source of comfort to us? 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you.' Not a word is spoken, but there is a sense of God's watchfulness; He careth for you. How is that going to be made a reality, He careth for you? It will be proved day by day. Now we go through many days in our lives. Has God comforted you? He careth for you.

This is wonderfully demonstrated in the small things in life, and that is why it is so important for us to observe the small things in life. At the end of the 107th Psalm we read these words: 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these

things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.' Now you see, we do not have to be a certain age before we may be an observer of the truth. I lost my father when I was seven years of age, and that necessarily completely changed our outlook. There were many occasions when times were very hard, and there is one thing that my childish mind always observed. You will all be aware of how quickly any boy's boots wear out, but I was amazed that my boots would still wear on. How is it that they wore on, and would only need mending once in six months? Well, I observed that God kept those boots like that. Now have we observed these kinds of things in such a simple way, to come to this conclusion: "The Lord careth for me, careth for me"? And He cared for my mother in that matter. But it is only to those that observe it. Has God done wonders for you in your life, and you have never observed it? 'I am he that comforteth you', caring because of others speaking by action. This emboldens a soul to wait upon God. Peter tells us this: 'Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.' Isn't that when you can call upon Him, when you feel and are assured, and you have proved that He careth for you, that He has looked after your interests?

Men in the world today are willing to take all sorts of advantage. Orphans and widows have often been some of their main targets. What shall we say if it should affect any of you here this afternoon? 'Who art thou?' Does this affect you, is God speaking to you? 'Who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?' As grass for His people. He is a Father to the fatherless and a Judge to the widows. 'Hear what the unjust judge saith,' we read in the Gospels, 'and shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?'

Then we look at the next verse, which enlarges upon the first part of this twelfth verse: 'And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.' Have we forgotten how great God is, have we forgotten the Lord our Maker? Now there is much to be said upon this expression: The Lord thy Maker. We find in one of the Psalms: 'It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.' What has He done in respect to His making? He certainly formed us in the womb, it was under His direction; and in due time He brought us forth, and then He has made us what we are today. But there is a deep spiritual signification here which we might mention. 'The Lord thy maker.' First of all, Who maketh thee to differ from another? This is the mighty God: "I, even I, am He that comforteth you, Who has made you to differ from another." You know, the children of God are not born children of God, they are the children of wrath, even as others, and it is a miracle of God's grace when we are made to

differ. Now can we attribute that difference to God being our Maker? The opposition of the natural mind is very strong, it is indeed. If you have an understanding of your natural mind as I have of mine, you will know that it is a rebellious mind, and the whole mind is set upon the things of this world. Religion? O yes, we will have a little bit of that, but the whole ambition of life is to make ourselves comfortable and to settle down in this world. If the suggestion should be made to us in regard to eternity, how easily we may brush that to one side. You may well show your hypocrisy if you say: "Of course that was very deep to me, a great concern to me." The thing that we have to consider will be: Did it stick? "Could I get rid of it?" If you cannot get rid of eternity, or if you could not get rid of eternity, it is because God is in the making, and He is in the making of a difference. He is performing that work which you could not perform, which mother and father could not perform, which the church could not perform, which the minister could not perform, and that is: to make you to differ.

Now we can attempt to do many, many things, and we are instructed in the Word of God to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, but we cannot make them to differ. If the outward signs are comforting to us, if we see that they still go to the House of God, then we are most favoured, but we cannot make them to differ. Why do they go to the House of God still? Is it because their heart is changed, or is it because they have taken up with religion? Well, the day will declare it, and I am sure that you who are godly will watch very, very carefully. You say: "How shall we see there is a difference?" Well, there will be a difference in spirit, and that spirit will be a humble spirit. The reason for that humble spirit is because God has spoken. 'Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you in due time.' What do we mean by being humbled under the mighty hand of God? Walking just in the same way as Gideon walked, when he felt he had no strength, felt he was not a fit person. But God said: "You are just the person, because you are a person who is dependant upon God." This experience can become yours early in life, as well as late in life. There is no age limit. There is none too young to receive the teaching of God; neither are there any too old.

The appointed time rolls on apace,
Not to propose but call by grace.

76

Calling means making different. If God hasn't make you different, then alas, you are still the same as you were.

Now there is this temptation which moves in people's hearts sometimes. They say: "I have always been brought up to go to chapel; I have never known anything different." Then you will want it made all the more clear that God is your Maker. Be assured that God will make you to differ. There will be a radical

change, and the commencement of that radical change will be largely known in this: the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. A conflict begins in the soul which you never knew before. You can only know a conflict when you have two natures. If God hasn't made you to differ, you have only got one nature, but as soon as you are born again of the Spirit you will find that you have two natures, and the old one isn't going to give way. In this respect we can look at these words: 'Who are thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die?'

Looking now at oneself, Ishmael was the child of the flesh. He threatened, scorned, laughed at the child of the covenant, even Isaac, and you will feel just the same. You will not necessarily have to go into conflict with the outside world to prove the glory of these words in the text, no, you will not, because you will find that if the elder shall serve the younger, the elder will take exception to it. If the old nature, under God, will serve the new nature, which is the younger, then your old nature will take exception to it, and sometimes the old nature will show its teeth. Then you are afraid of a man that shall die. Your old nature is going to die, you know, but your new nature is that which will go to heaven, if you possess it. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you' - in your conflict. We find that Paul speaks some very important truths when he says this: 'For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake; Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.'

This is the conflict of the flesh and the spirit. Now this conflict will distinguish you. You can speak to a lot of people in religion, and if you speak about conflict they will look at you and it is very clear that they do not understand what you are talking about. And they never will, they never can, because they have not a divine nature and therefore there can be no conflict. In attempting to produce a counterfeit, a man said to me once: "Of course, that is weighing up the pros and cons." In other words, he got no further than his fleshly mind having a conflict in his spirit as to what was right and what was wrong. He didn't know anything about the true conflict, didn't know anything about Paul's experience when he said: 'For that which I do I allow not, for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I . . . For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not . . . O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

'And forgettest the Lord thy maker.' Have we forgotten the Lord our Maker? Because, you see, the Lord our Maker makes the new man of grace stronger

than the old man ever can be, though it may appear sometimes that:

The old man struggles hard to gain
The conquest over grace;
And oft he seems to gain the field,
When Jesus hides his face.

678

Nevertheless, will these words be directed to us: And forgettest the Lord thy maker? Therefore the things you have forgotten greatly lessen comfort. 'I am he that comforteth you' with this knowledge, that when you pray to the Lord thy Maker, then you will immediately receive comfort.

'That hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.' The account of creation is wonderful, but I wonder how often we read it. Amongst many people it is something which is accepted, and therefore never read. Let us just turn to it for a minute and see the wonder and the glory of God set forth in the creation. 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' A simple testimony to God's work. There is much opposition to this truth. Men have been spending a great deal of time in producing alternative schemes, but no, the Word of God says: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.' Now we come to a most important verse: 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' Now we can align that with the new creation: 'Let there be light: and there was light.' 'The entrance of thy word giveth light.' How did our religion begin? The work of God in the soul, was it something dynamic, or was it something that was not heard, but it appeared? Well, light is silent, but it is revealing, and it shows you things that you have never seen before. Notice, that we may be comforted thereby, that God said: Let there be light, and there was nothing that could stop it. When God comes to perform the work of grace in your soul, be assured of this, that God will say: Let there be light, and none can stop it. Your old nature, your infidel mind, your unbelieving heart, may do all sorts of things to quell it; but no, the light has come, silently, but it has come to stay. What it reveals at that time is not easily forgotten.

But the emphasis should be laid upon this: And there was light. The word of truth is full of power, it is full of comfort, it is full of support. Now you see, sometimes parents are anxious about their children; and as they look at them, they wish that they could give them light, they wish they could give them life; but they know they can't. Is there no consolation? Do you throw up your hands and say: "Well, there we are; what will be, will be." Well, we can't so easily dive into the sea of fatalism where our flesh and blood is concerned. What shall we want then? 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you,' the Lord Who is your Maker,

but also He that 'hath stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth.' This was the beginning of the laying of foundations: 'Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.' And so you can read all through the Book of Genesis, the first two or three chapters, and see the origin of all things. It doesn't need to be supported by a great deal of argument; it is a statement of fact, it is a statement of truth. When you are born again of the Spirit you will see just the same in the new creation as applied to the original creation of the earth, of the heavens, and of all things in the firmament.

'And forgettest the Lord thy maker, that hath stretched forth the heaven and laid the foundations of the earth.' The foundations of the earth. Now the foundations of the earth are laid upon God's sovereign purposes. The poet says:

Sovereign Ruler of the skies,
Ever gracious, ever wise;
All my times are in thy hand,
All events at thy command.

All my times shall ever be,
Ordered by his wise decree.

64

We can take those words back to the first creation; it was all ordered. The earth is going along according to God's divine purposes. The foundation of God is in the ancient mountains; that is, in the ancient and eternal purposes of the Almighty God. 'And laid the foundations of the earth.' Now could we just pass on to another view of this? One verse in the 8th chapter of Proverbs has a reference to the earth, and that earth is referred to as being a place which God inhabits. 'Rejoicing in the habitable part of his earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.' Now the habitable part of His earth can only be in one place, and in the 57th of Isaiah we are told where that place is: 'For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' Now that is God's habitable part of His earth, and that is the only place where He dwells. Does He find in your heart part of His habitable earth, where He dwells?

Now what is the foundation of that habitable part of God's earth? We turn to the Epistle to Timothy, where it says: 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.' Because He knows that, He makes His dwellingplace in the heart of this sinner, and the heart of this sinner, without giving any reason why, then becomes the habitable part of His earth. He lays the foundation there in his election, in his predestination, in his calling, in his justification, and in his glorification.

He now raises a question, does the prophet: 'And hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy?' If we consider the oppressor here as the devil himself, there is one thing that we lost sight of very often, and that is, with all the devil's threatenings, he is never ready to destroy, because he has no power to destroy the church of the living God. Nevertheless, his threatenings may be very real, which is described very forcibly in these words: And hast feared continually every day. Now in the Hebrews we read this, of those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. There are people that are afraid of physical death. Well, we can freely say, as the poet says, who can look this monster in the face, except Jesus shines within? But there is such a thing, which the people of God know, and that is spiritual death. When they are aware of this solemn truth: No man can keep alive his own soul; and all their evidences seem to be dark, they cannot see their signs, then they are just in the condition where the oppressor will arise. Satan will never arise when you are strong in faith, but he will arise, the devil will take advantage of you when you are low and in a low place. But God is the same yesterday, today and for ever; He doesn't change, and the darkness and the light are both alike to Him. Therefore, what makes you afraid? The devil's lies, and the lies of the old nature to which I have made some reference.

'And hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor.' And what fury there is, sometimes! 'Esau vows my death.' There is a reality in it. Jacob was a sinner, and he knew that he deserved the vengeance that Esau could wreak upon him. That made him fear. Here was the oppressor, referring to Jacob again, here was the oppressor coming with four hundred men. What an evidence of oppression, and it made Jacob tremble. These words may well apply to that situation when Jacob trembled, when his sin came to his remembrance. 'I, even I, am he that comforteth you,' in these circumstances. "Who art thou, Jacob, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die? What words have I spoken unto thee?" Jacob reminded the Lord of what He had said: 'I will be with thee in all places whithersoever thou goest.' But then God came to Jacob. It is important for us to notice this, that 'there wrestled a man with him'. An angel wrestled with him. People sometimes make a mistake in this, that whenever trouble comes, they turn to God in prayer. Now it is quite true that that which is born of the Spirit will cry unto God most High, to God Who is able to perform all things for us. On the other hand, there is another nature which says: "Now how can we get out of this? It is right to do what we can to deal with the situation." But there was Jacob sitting on his own, and the Scripture does not tell us that he was praying. But then God in His great mercy, the Comforter, came to him and

began to wrestle with him; and that stirred up something in Jacob. 'I will not let thee go, except thou bless me; and he blessed him there.' What did he bless him with? Something that completely shut his eyes to Esau and his four hundred men, the oppressor, and all that the oppressor meant. 'As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.' Where was the fury of the oppressor then? You see, God had gotten him the victory; not in an engagement with Esau so that Jacob could say: "I distinguished myself and beat my brother." No. What happened whilst God blessed Jacob? He also took the enmity out of the heart of Esau; and so Jacob could not boast and say: How good I am and how well I dealt with this case. God dealt with it and got glory unto His great Name.

'I, even I, am he that comforteth you;' and it will be a comfort when you can say: 'Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth's sake.'

Amen.
