

Prayer Meeting Address
given at
Old Baptist Chapel, Chippenham
by Mr. G. D. Buss
on Wednesday evening, 25th April, 2012

Text: *“Are the consolations of God small with thee?” Job 15, verse 11.*

This was a question asked by one of the three good friends of Job. They were loyal friends, too, for they went to see him in his distress, and sat, we are told, for seven days and nights without speaking a word. They were so distressed to see the great change that had come upon their friend. They were godly friends, and I believe they knew the Lord. But you see, dear friends, we have also to remember that if we are to speak a word in season, then God must give the seasonable word and the season in which to speak. Although these friends spoke many right things; many good things, yet, in their misunderstanding of Job’s case and of the Lord’s dealing with him, they misapplied the Truth, and were unwittingly, in the hand of Satan, to add to Job’s troubles. In fact, in the end, Job said of them: “miserable comforters are ye all”, which was a sad reflection of the bitterness that had come between him and his three friends. True, the whisperer had separated chief friends, as the devil ever tries to do.

But, having said that, these three friends did state some very precious truths, and, scattered throughout their discourses, there are those things that have been of great benefit to the Church of Christ in times when God has used them seasonably and made them a “word in season.” This may be “a word in season” to one here this evening. “Are the consolations of God small with thee?” This may seem a strange question. It may be looked at in two ways.

First of all, it perhaps was a challenge to Job in this respect: had he forgotten what God had done for him? Had he forgotten the answers to prayer he had had; the deliverances that had been wrought in former days; those times of refreshing and sweet visits he had known in the days of his first love? Were they no longer of any consequence to Job? Well, I think, dear friends, every child of God, who has been in the way any length of time, knows this path. We may have been favoured to be on the mount; we may have been wonderfully blessed under the sound of the Truth; we may have been visited by Him who drew near to the two on the road to Emmaus. But, when *He* hides

His face, we read: “We are troubled.” A living child of God *is troubled* when God hides His face: then it is not a logical thing just to look back on past mercies and try and persuade ourselves, in our own strength, that all is well. No. We need the blessed Spirit, who so favoured us in those earlier consolations, to come again and make them spirit and life to us. Not that we make unbelief a grace; God forbid we should do that.

“But grace, though the smallest, shall surely be tried.”

J. Kent

This brings us to the other aspect of it; that is, sometimes God’s consolations do seem to be small with God’s people, in this respect: that they are not so favoured as they once were, and that may be where you are this evening. You are troubled by it, but what a mercy that there is a God of consolation; that there are such things as the consolations of God! Blessed be His holy name, sooner or later, for every living child of God in this path: where they perhaps seem to be searching for consolation and not finding it: the Lord will appear. I think godly Asaph was very much in this path in Psalm 77, where we read those oft quoted words: “Is His mercy clean gone for ever? doth His promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” Then the Holy Ghost came to Asaph’s relief. He said: “I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD.” God refreshed his memory with some sweet touches and reminders of what had gone before. It lifted the dear man’s spirit’s up, and consolation once more began to flow into his wilderness-like, desert-like, barren heart that he had been complaining about. One thing is certain, dear friends; a living child of God cannot rejoice without the consolations of God. The world can rejoice in its pleasures, lusts and entertainments. Even a professor of religion (dead in that profession) can entertain himself with notions and ideas, but, a living child of God, who has that aching void within, which the world can never fill, knows what he wants. He wants the consolations of Christ.

“Give me Christ, or else I die.”

W. Hammond

Now, if you go through the Word of God, you can see this principle wonderfully borne out. Take that godly man, Simeon, of whom we read in our reading, this evening, in Luke chapter 2. We are told what his character was.

He was “waiting for the consolation of Israel.” If you look at that spiritually, why does Israel need consoling? If she was not in trouble; if she was not disturbed; if there was nothing to rock the little boat she was in, comfort and consolation would be irrelevant. But, no, Israel often needs consoling. What with her felt guilt and the enemy coming “in like a flood”, and temptation; and then there is the crook in the lot and the “thorn in the flesh”, and those insupportable burdens that she is called to bear: consolation is just what she does need. She is waiting for it. Simeon was one of those waiting for consolation. We are not told how long he had to wait, but the Lord promised him that a day of consolation would come. In his case, it was a very precious one: he would live to see, with his natural eyes, the dear Saviour in the flesh. Now, friends, in one sense, all of God’s dear people will see Him in the flesh. That glorified body above –

“There shall we see His face,
And never, never sin;
There, from the rivers of His grace,
Drink endless pleasures in.”

I. Watts

That is the consolation, the everlasting consolation that awaits God’s people. But Simeon was favoured with this: that he would live to see and hold in his very arms the dear Saviour, as his own, here below and we know that memorable day came after all those years of waiting. No doubt he was often tried, and wondered if it would come, or whether death would overtake him before the promise was fulfilled, but we know it cannot be so. If God has promised a thing in this life for you, dear friends, you will live to see it. The point is, the day came, when, by the Spirit (note that – *He* is the Consoler of the Church of Christ; *He* brings the virtue of a precious Jesus into the hearts of His people) – by the Spirit Simeon went to the temple that memorable day. He did not need anyone to point out which Babe was the precious Saviour. The Holy Ghost revealed it to him, and he took that dear Babe in his arms, saying: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” That was a wonderful blessing for him, was it not? In a spiritual sense, God’s dear, waiting people – those who are waiting for their first love; waiting for their first hope in Christ – they are like Simeon; they are waiting for it, and they are longing for it. Sometimes it seems as if it will never come. Then, this question: “Are the consolations of God small with thee?” is a very poignant question. They cannot answer it

favourably, as they would like to do, but, the Lord has promised: “They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.”

Again, we have another expression concerning this matter; in the Thessalonians, where the apostle speaks of “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace.” If you were on a stormy sea, what a comfort an anchor would be, wouldn’t it? If you let the anchor out over the side of your little boat, and it found a rock to hold it: what comfort that would be for your little ship and for those in it! So, dear friends, when God reveals a good hope through grace, and the soul’s anchor is in Christ – in His glorious Person, in His finished work, in His blood and righteousness, in His faithfulness and in His mercy – when the soul is enabled, by grace, to cast anchor there, it brings blessed consolation and sweet comfort. It was so, in another sense, when Paul was on the boat about to be shipwrecked. He knew the ship was going to break up, but God gave him consolation. It was a two-fold one. One was that he himself would get to Rome where God had decreed he should come. But the second thing was this: God would give him all that sailed with him, and this comforted Paul’s heart. He said: “Be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” They were comforted; they were consoled with the Word of God that had come so specifically to Paul, and he the messenger of God to them. It gave an anchor to their heart in this dread time of fear, and time of doubt, and time of difficulty. So, friends, an anchor like that “good hope through grace”, does bring consolation.

Then again, we read in another place: “strong consolation.” “That...we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” What is the “strong consolation” for a soul that is weighed down with guilt, burdened with sin, oppressed with all the difficulties of the way and Satan? What is “strong consolation”? On the one hand, dear friends, it is this: a sympathizing High Priest at the right hand of God the Father; One who understands, One who cares, One who knows and One who feels.

“So fair a face bedewed with tears;
What beauty e’en in grief appears!
He wept, He bled, He died for you;
What more, ye saints, could Jesus do?”

B. Beddome

When faith gets a glimpse of that, oh, what a comfort! Others may not understand, but, though no human arm can reach them, there is One who knows and there is One who understands. There is One who feels - that is “strong consolation.”

Secondly, dear friends, there is the ability of this great High Priest. “In that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted.” Oh, the ability of this One at the right hand of God to give consolation!

“Jesus is a wise Physician,
Skilful and exceeding kind;
Through Him sinners find remission,
And enjoy sweet peace of mind.

This Physician understandeth
All disorders of the soul;
And no payment He demandeth,
When He makes the wounded whole.”

R. Burnham

Dear friend, this precious Jesus has, in His treasury, just the consolation you need for the path you are in. There is a word in this blessed Book – and may the Holy Ghost reveal it to you – which will bring just the comfort, just the direction, just the anchor and just the solace that you need in the troubled path that you are called to walk in. The strange thing is that it maybe a word that you have read hundreds of times before, but it has never brought you consolation; it has never given you comfort. But when, by the Spirit, you read that word; when the Holy Ghost applies it to your heart, it becomes the living experience of your soul. Then you will know what consolation is; then you will know what comfort is. Some of us could take you to spots and places where comfort came like that. Just when we were sinking and ready to despair, the Lord spoke. “Where the word of a King is, there is power.” When He spoke like that, it brought comfort, it brought peace of mind, it brought a quietness of Spirit, it brought hope and it brought a blessed expectation. “My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.” Oh, this blessed consolation!

Again, we read of “the God of patience and consolation.” Those two things go together. They do in God’s account. How patient He is with His dear people! How patiently He comforts them, from time to time! He doesn’t always dandle them upon the knees, as He does in their early days, I know. We are on the battlefield, and it is with hardness we have to endure; but nonetheless, this “God of patience and consolation” is One who deals kindly with His people. Listen to this word: He “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Friend, that is “the God of patience and consolation.” Look at it the other way. He knows you are in a difficult path. He knows the thorn is sharp and the burden is heavy. He knows the perplexities and the darkness, and, He can give the patience to go with these dispensations. In fact, He must; otherwise you would not be able to walk the path, and, from time to time, to encourage that patience, God gives a consoling word; a comforting word to help His people on their way. He did to Moses, as we read in Exodus 17, when they spoke of stoning him, because they were so angry there was no water for them to drink. The Lord said: “Go on,” Moses.’ Just those two words were enough. He knew what to do and where to go – to the rock. The rock was to be smitten. What he saw there was enough to comfort his poor, troubled heart. He got a glimpse of the coming Saviour who would be smitten for sinners. He saw the cleft in the rock opened up and the waters gushing out. He got a glimpse of what Christ would do when He was to hang on Calvary’s cross for poor sinners. He entered into fellowship with Christ’s sufferings. That was consolation for dear Moses, and he could go on. “For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” “The God of patience and consolation.”

But then we read of a man whose name meant ‘consolation’ –Barnabas. He was called “The son of consolation.” It would seem that the office of Barnabas, as a gospel minister, was to be a comforter to God’s people. Now, friends, God has a different work for each of His servants. Some are sent more to bring home to people’s consciences the word of conviction and the law. With others it is that of which Isaiah speaks: “Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,” and so on, in that beautiful word. Of course, a pastor needs the grace to walk in both paths. But Barnabas, it seems, was called to be a “son of consolation.” Many years ago in Scotland, there was a man who was very much equipped, by God’s grace, to proclaim the

law. He sent, by God's grace, many arrows into the hearts and consciences of his hearers, so much so, that many were in deep conviction of sin. But they heard of a minister, about ten miles away, who was more like Barnabas: a "son of consolation". Many of these wounded sinners went to hear this 'Barnabas' and they were healed in their souls. This 'Barnabas' was a little concerned about it. He did not want to steal another man's congregation. So he went to see his fellow minister, and said: 'I am a bit concerned about this.' The other minister said: 'You need not be concerned. God is equipping me with the arrows and you with the consolation. We are both labourers together in the harvest. Let me shoot my arrows till my quiver is empty, and you keep applying the consolation until your vessel is empty. Let us do what God bids us.' What grace that man showed! Oh, dear friends, how we need to remember that!

But Barnabas was a man of consolation in another sense. We need to be like that with other people: weeping with them that weep, and mourning with them that mourn; entering in to other people's sorrows. We should not be indifferent to them. We should not walk around this world as if others sorrows do not concern us; especially when a believer is in trouble. Do you ever, with God's help, put a prayer up for him or her? Do you ever feel for him or her in their distress? Remember Job. In the very last chapter of Job, what do we read? "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." 'Oh,' you say, 'they had wounded him!' They had indeed. Eliphaz had: he said some cruel things about Job. He had wounded him deeply. Yet, Job had to pray for his friends, even though they had spoken spitefully to him. "And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends." He was a 'Barnabas', was he not? May God give us much of that grace. "Are the consolations of God small with thee?"

One final word on this matter: is there one dear friend here tonight, and you look at your religion; you examine it and weigh it up and it seems so small compared with other people's religion. You read of great experiences and deep experiences, and yours seems so different; so unusual. You cannot ascribe to great heights or great depths. You know you need conviction. You know you need Christ: but you cannot boast of things so deep, perhaps, as others can. Friends, the great point is reality. We need to grow in grace – don't mistake me. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" – we need that exercise; we need the work deepened. So, what I am saying is not that we should not pray for that. God forbid that

you should cease to pray for that. But, on the other hand, you are not to despise “the day of small things.” You are not what you once were.” You were once careless and indifferent. You were prayer-less and God-less. Though you cannot boast of anything (and nor should you) there is a change. There is an aching void the world cannot fill. You know your soul needs Christ. You are like Simeon, waiting and watching for Him to come, though as yet He has not come with the consolation you want. Do not despise “the day of small things.” Wait on the Lord yet. Depend on Him yet, because, just like the little cloud that Elijah saw, “like a man’s hand” – so small, it was a consolation to Elijah. It was an answer to prayer and he believed more would follow. God has more to give yet, and, in due season, He will give it. “Are the consolations of God small with thee?”

“Does Satan tempt you to give up,
And call no more on Jesus’ name?
Cast not away your little hope;
Come hither, and *behold the Lamb.*

H. Fowler

“Are the consolations of God small with thee?” Friends, they will not be small in heaven. Then, our cup, God willing, will run over. Then, in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ, we will see Him as He is and we will begin to praise Him as we ought.

“Are the consolations of God small with thee?” I believe it can be rightly said, if ever we have felt a little of the consolations of God, by living faith in heart, this side of the grave, we will, one day, be everlastingly consoled. God promises it. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” You think of it! That is consolation; everlasting consolation. Then:

“Cheer up, ye travelling souls;
On Jesus’ aid rely;
He sees us when we see not Him,
And always hears our cry.

J. Hart

May God add His blessing.

Amen.