

Comfort ye my people

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[0 : 00] ...the fears and the trepidations which rose within their own hearts. Indeed, as you know, one of the great names by which the third person is known is that of Comforter.

And it was our Lord himself who referred to him as such. When he, the Comforter, is come, he will lead you into all truth. He will take of mine and show it unto you.

Now, Christian comfort is not simply something that lies away somewhere over the distant horizon in that region of heavenly blessedness and delight above.

Certainly, the Comfort of the Child of God will then be full. It will be overflowing when he arrives at his desired haven. When every element that causes discomfort and distress to him here in himself and around him in the world, when all this is forever removed and banished, then his Comfort will be complete.

When every cloud that has smurred his view of Christ, when this takes flight, then he, and when he at last, beholds him and sees him as he is, his Comfort will need no further augmenting.

[1 : 23] And so, let me emphasize, when that blessed day breaks in upon the believing soul, its cup of comfort will be overflowing throughout eternity.

And indeed, as the Christian contemplates heaven, as he contemplates the hereafter with all its blessedness and all its joys, it brings unspeakable comfort to his heart.

This, you remember, is what the Apostle Paul tells in Thessalonians, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, where he is making reference there to those who die in Christ.

We shall not say that others who have no hope, for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then they also, which sleeping Jesus, shall God bring with them. And then he goes on to speak of the, that day, when he shall appear.

And he closes the chapter with these words, Quess for comfort one another, with these words. It is intended indeed to be a source of abounding comfort to the people of God, as they contemplate the glory of that goodly land to which they are going.

[2 : 41] But we have to remember that quite a part from this, from thinking about the glory of heaven, we have to remember that Christian comfort is a present reality in other directions.

This clearly is what God, I believe, is concerned with in his grand chapter. He is anxious that his people should know and experience comfort in their own hearts and in their own lives.

It doesn't give him any delight or pleasure to see them going around boring and sorrowful and cast down in mind and in spirit. He doesn't want them to be in his condition.

There are indeed many things in themselves, and there are many things in the world around them and to cast them into the deepest state of despondency and almost despair. But God is concerned that they should be comforted, that they should know the comfort wherewith they ought to be comforted, as those who belong to him, as those who are his.

I suggest that this is what we have in this beautiful chapter of Isaiah's prophecy. For one thing, I believe that God comforts his people here by reminding them of the glory and majesty of his own being.

[4 : 03] As we see, a large portion of the chapter is taken up with this very matter emphasizing the glory and the majesty of God's person. And I cannot believe that all this is unrelated to these opening words of the chapter.

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people. Say if you are God, it is God himself who is speaking. After all, what can possibly give greater comfort to the believing heart?

As contemplating the sovereignty and the glory of the God of heaven? In this direction, there is reference made to the glory of his creative activity.

This is done by asking a series of questions in the course of a chapter. Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and made it out heaven with a span and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

Who hath directed the spirit of the Lord or be his counselor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel and who instructed him and taught him in the path of judgment hath taught him knowledge and showed to him the way of understanding.

[5 : 23] verses 12 to 14. Give diligent and reason consideration to these questions, says God, in effect. Exercise your minds more in the contemplation of my glory and my power and my greatness in the things that you see allows you.

Ask yourselves a question, why did God bring all these things to pass? Why did he create the world? Why did he create man and place him in the world?

Did he not have a purpose in view in all that he did? Now, of course, when the ungodly looks around him on the world, he has his own material interpretation of these things.

And when he looks on man, he sees him only as a cog, a helpless cog in a tangled world that is carrying him inexorably to the blackness of despair and of oblivion.

There is no meaning and there is no purpose in anything for the ungodly and therefore he can derive no comfort from contemplating the world and from contemplating man in God's word.

[6 : 40] But for the Christian, is it not true that matters are entirely different? He knows that God had a great design in creating the world and placing man in it.

And while man himself sought to frustrate the purpose of God, yet God graciously intervened and in turn frustrated this attempt by the devil and so brought glory to his own name and eternal good to a vast concourse of men and women which no man can number.

And so there is comfort for a child of God in this matter in being reminded of the glory and the majesty and the power of God in his creative activity.

And then too, there is also surely comfort for the believer not only in contemplating the glory of God's creative activity but also in contemplating the glory of God's providential government.

Again, we have a series of questions being asked in the chapter in order to emphasize this matter. From verse 21, we read, Have you not known? Have you not heard?

[7 : 59] Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as the grasshoppers, that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in, that bringeth a princess to nothing, he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.

You know this, says God, to his people. You have heard it and has been told you from the beginning. God exercises his providential government in the world in spite of what men of evil principle may do or attempt.

He allows these evil principles to assert themselves but only within the circle of his own good pleasure because he sitteth upon the circle of the earth.

He holds on firmly to the reins of government and none can stay his hand or say unto him, What doest thou? Now what unspeakable comfort this brings to the believing heart, the knowledge and the assurance that God reigns, that he is exercising his providential government in spite of all that appears to be happening to the contrary.

Was not this the essence of our Lord's teaching, for instance, in the Sermon on the Mount? There he is calling upon his people not to be overwrought with anxiety and with fear.

[9 : 33] Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink or what ye shall put on. Behold, it is the fowls of the air, for they so not neither do they reap, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.

Are ye not much better than they? Chapter 6, verses 25 and 26, and then in verse 31, he goes on, therefore take no thought saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink?

For your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. He exercises sovereignly and graciously his providential government in the world.

He has a disposing of everything in his own power. He is the infallible being who stands behind the ordering of providence and he does all things well.

Providence is not in hands of blind, irrational forces leading the world on, irrevocably to its doom. God is the wise, sovereign disposer of all things and the regulator of all events.

[10 : 43] And so then, this ought to be a comfort, a strengthening to the faith of God's people, contemplating not only the glory of his creative activity but also contemplating and considering the glory of his providential government.

And there is reference in A2, I believe, and this is also intended to be a comfort and a strength to God's people, the glory of his redemptive love. Is this not surely what the opening verses of the chapter refer to?

That is, from verse 3, as a voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in a desert a highway for our God, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

These are the comforting words with which the Lord is comforting Jerusalem, namely, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, and that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

In other words, God is saying that he is going to visit his people in his redemptive love and grace. His glory is going to be revealed in the coming Messiah, when the day spring from on high would visit them, and they would behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth.

[12 : 17] The reference in verse 3 is, of course, to the forerunner, to John the Baptist, whose office it was, and whose ministry it was, to introduce or to foretell of the coming of the Holy One.

And you remember, my friends, the joy and the comfort which this brought to God's people when the event was about to take place.

You remember, for instance, how this is expressed in the song of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, where in Luke chapter 1 we read these words, these inspired words, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the days spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in a shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

What comfort comes through these words, and what greater comfort can come to any believing heart, than in the contemplating of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, meditating on the marvel and the wonder of the timeless and boundless love of the God of heaven towards the unworthy objects who spurned that love and who rebelled against him, herein indeed is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and gave his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

And so then is God not truly comforting his people by reminding them of his own glory and majesty and power in these various matters. Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God.

[14 : 26] But then too God is truly comforting his people in this chapter by demonstrating to them the wonder and the marvel of his own care.

You see, God is a caring God. God is a loving Father to his children and he demonstrates this practically and positively to them in the world, in his dealings with them, in his relationship to them.

Notice for instance how comprehensively this care is stated for us in verse 11 of this chapter. I think we have in a nutshell the great care which God is exercising over his flock, over his people.

And as by the grace of God we are able to look into this and know something of what these words imply and suppose, then we shall know comfort as God would have us be comforted.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd. Remember how emphatically Jesus speaks in John's Gospel chapter 10 of this relationship that exists between himself and his people, this shepherd-sheep relationship.

[15 : 49] At verse 27 he says, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

My Father which gave them he is greater than all and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. And remember the confidence and the comfort which the assurance of this relationship brought to the heart of the psalmist as expressed in that exquisite composition the 23rd psalm.

The Lord is my shepherd, he says, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.

He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

the assurance and the comfort which this knowledge brought to the heart of God's servant. Don't you know this aspect of his care, my dear believing friend?

[17 : 01] Have you not experienced again and again his condescending forbearance towards you? In life, in his dealings with you, in his shepherd care over your soul, he shall feed his flock like a shepherd.

The prophet goes on by the spirit of God, he says, he shall gather the lambs with his arms, those who are perhaps less able to fend for themselves.

to know and the who are able to fend for themselves as such or stand on their own two feet.

We are not for one moment implying or imagining that. All of them without exception have to lean on the beloved as they go on their way.

This is their posture. It will always be their posture if they truly know themselves and have come to realize their weakness as they go up from the wilderness they lean.

[18:07] And the further they go the more heavily they desire to lean on their shepherd king. But yet those who are young in faith and perhaps lacking in experience and so perhaps more liable to wander from the fold will be afforded the special attention of the good shepherd he will gather them to himself this is what a shepherd does when exercising if you will a comprehensive care for his flock really resent his attention and anyone who knows anything about sheep will know that they will try to thwart the shepherd but the good shepherd will always persevere he will always press on until he has accomplished his task and so it is with a good shepherd of our soul he shall gather the lambs with his arms he will take special care of them because they are beset by special weaknesses and special difficulties but then says the spirit through the prophet he shall carry them in his bosom the care of the good shepherd still being expressed at times some of the flock become so weak do they not and so we may see it spiritually that they are incapable even of leaning they have to be carried by the shepherd it is significant

I think that in that great parable in Luke's gospel chapter 15 of the man who had the hundred sheep and lost one that after he had searched diligently for the one that was lost and after he had found it he laid it on his shoulders rejoicing I've often wondered as to the significance of what he said there that he laid it on his shoulders rejoicing why for instance did he not drive it before him or why did he not call it to follow after him as was a custom in eastern lands well may it not be because it was too emaciated to walk and too far gone even to respond to the shepherd's call and so he carried it in his bosom he placed it on his shoulders and he rejoiced that he did so remember what this very prophet says elsewhere in chapter 42 verse 3 in connection with the care and the compassion and the tenderness of the good shepherd a bruised reed shall he not break and a smoking flax shall he not quench when the apostle

Peter was you remember bruised and shattered because of his own shameful conduct Jesus did not break him utterly he broke him to the extent that he evidenced godly sorrow for sin but it was a godly sorrow that was intended to restore him to the favor of his lord and to the enjoyment of his blessing once again and so we have the care the tenderness and the care of the good shepherd so wonderfully expressed in his words he shall carry them in his bosom and also he shall gently lead those that are with young a good shepherd knows that there are times when his flock need greater consideration than at other times and so his practiced eye is more watchful at such times his footsteps are more measured his hands are more gentle in his dealings there are special reasons for this and he is cognizant of the fact that these things are true and as you know my dear believing friend the gentleness of

Jesus in his dealings with yourself how tender and how loving those dealings have been this is surely what the apostle Paul is thinking about in Philippians chapter 2 when he is exhorting God's people to have the mind or the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ in themselves he commences you remember that chapter with these words if there be therefore any consolation in Christ if any comfort of love if any fellowship of the spirit if any bowels and mercies he is of course assuming that there are that all these qualities are found in him in all their fullness and so he exhorts the people of God to be like-minded to have the same spirit of the same mind as Christ had and so we see the care of the Lord and the comfort that this brings to the

Lord's people he is then demonstrating I think in this verse in particular demonstrating the wonder and the marvel of his own care so as to bring comfort to the hearts of those to whom he is speaking in particular in this great chapter comfort comfort my people saith your God but then too I think also that God is comforting his people in this chapter by making known to them the riches and the wealth of his own grace the riches and the wealth of his own grace in verse 28 the question is posed 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 he he is put in that way so as to make it more forceful you have in other words you have heard you have known all this and because he neither he he neither thinks nor is weary he he gives power to the faint in verse 29 you see the wonderful thing about the word of

[24 : 39] God is that it furnishes us with actual instances of saints who fainted and saints who fell in the day of testing and he does this not in order that we might gloat over their faintness or over their failings but that seeing how graciously and how bountifully God dealt with them in his grace and mercy we ourselves might be strengthened and comforted and give a new hope one thinks at once of the mighty prophet of God Elijah how fearlessly and grandly he engaged himself you remember in the work of God it would seem that he was impervious to whatever threats were made against him by Ahab and by those in godly company who were with him and when we see Elijah standing alone on Carmel confronted by

Ahab and the prophets of Baal in their hundreds our admirational snow bounds of but then God shows us the other side of the coin the prophet denuded of power and running for his life but yet we see him there in all the glory of divine grace resting upon him with his promise so marvelously finding expression in his life he gives power to the wind for Elijah remember was a like man was a man like subject to like passions as we are it was God who empowered him to stand alone it would seem in the day of testing he gives power to the faint he gives strength to the weak verse 20 and to them that have no might he increases strength well he did this to Elijah afterwards too you remember after he fled from the threatening words of

Jezebel and threw himself down under the juniper tree and slept remember he was at length awakened by the angel who commanded him arise and eat for the journey is too great for thee and we read that he arose and did eat and drink and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God and is this not precisely what we are to understand by that new testament statement my grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in weakness and when this is born home to your heart and mine my believing friend by the spirit of

God it will have precisely the effect which it had on the apostle Paul when he said most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me you are perhaps feeling your own faint heartedness today more than ever your weakness you are beset by your weakness as never before you wonder perhaps how you are going to take one further step in the pilgrimage of life or look to the comfort which God speaks to you in his own word the comfort which his own grace brings to your heart my grace is sufficient nothing else will prove sufficient for you but his grace will and his strength will stand in the day of testing than his strength perfected in your own weakness and when

God gives power to his sainting people and strength in their weakness we are told what a salutary effect this will have on them in other words the comfort it will bring to them and how this comfort will manifest itself in their lives and in their witness we see that they will mount up with wings as an eagle in other words they will soar away into the spiritual atmosphere they will rise up above the mundane things of time and of sense these things will no longer be a concern and a burden to them they will be carried on the wings of faith to contemplate the king and his beauty and that you see it is God's own power that is effecting this it is his grace he giveth power he increases strength and so the affections are elevated towards themselves we are able to behold his glory what blessing and so what comfort this brings to the believing heart and life they will mount up with wings as an eagle they will run and not be weary another effect which it will have and what a comfort and a blessing this is when

[30 : 18] God withdrew his grace from Elijah he immediately became weary in well doing he ceased doing God's work at that precise moment he withdrew his hand from what he had been so courageously and so magnificently doing up until that moment remember the command is be not weary in well doing and the only guarantee that we shall not become weary in well doing is that we continue to draw out of his fullness and grace for grace remember my friend ask and it shall be given you seek and ye shall find knock and it shall be opened unto you this is the waiting to which reference is made here they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength this is the secret of their continuing to run and this is the only matter that will bring true comfort to them as they are running the grace and the power wherewith they are visited by

God himself they will mount up with wings as an eagle they will run and not be weary they will walk and not faint I don't know if there is any special significance in these references to running and to walking in scripture you know the call that is so frequently directed to the people of God the call is to run in this race of faith let us run with patience wherefore being surrounded with so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every wit and let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and the finisher not our faith we are to run says the apostle that we may obtain we are constantly told to run we are to exert ourselves physically for the

Lord as well as mentally and spiritually we are to call upon everything that is within us to do this but there comes a time when the mental physical and spiritual processes when they begin to slow up the earthly house of this tabernacle evidences will evidence clear signs of dissolution at one point in the lives of every one of us but the wonderful thing about God's grace is this that it is not restricted to the believers running if we can think of that running when his mental physical and spiritual manhood is at its best the grace of God is not restricted to that moment in his experience his promises that he will carry you to old age and to whole hairs that he will never leave you nor forsake you and when you are unable by reason of these infirmities of days and of years to run as you once run remember my friend that his grace still runs to you and that his grace will be perfected in you and will continue to sustain you even until the very end for his promise is

I will never leave you I will never never forsake you and so he is comforting his people by making known to them the riches of his grace the preciousness of his grace oh how precious is his grace and what how gratified we should feel how full of thankfulness we ought to be that this is true that while we may faint and fail by reasons quite out with our own power yet that he will never fail us and this ought to be a source of unspeakable comfort and consolation to God's people as they go on comfort ye comfort ye my people saith your God and they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as eagle they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint may we know day by day the sufficiency of that grace the sufficiency of that power that is perfected in our own weakness amen may may may may may may

God add his blessing to our meditation his word shall we pray oh lord our god we lift our hearts to thee in thankfulness and in thanksgiving for remembering us so marvelously and dealing with us so graciously it is in grace and by grace alone that we stand and we exult anew this day in the sovereignty and the wonder of thy grace and give thee thanks for it oh lord our god we bless thee that thy people have proved in their own experience again and again and again that thy grace is sufficient for them and that thy strength is perfected in their very weakness grant that we may increasingly know this increasingly know our own weakness so that thou would be glorified in strengthening us bless to us thy word seely to our hearts with power we beseech thee and grant unto us grace oh god to continue seeking thee and serving thee throughout the day minister to us again as we look forward to meeting together in the evening and glorify thy great name in the ministry of thy word and through the ministry of the gospel for jesus sake amen and lift you nah

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