

Night of Weeping

Why GOD's Children Suffer

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CHAPTER 14

THE CONSOLATION

"**TO BRING MANY SONS unto glory,**" was the end for which the Son of GOD took flesh and died. This was no common, no inferior object. So vast and worthy did Jehovah deem it that it pleased Him for the attaining of it to "**make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings**"! (Hebrews 2:10).

It was an object worthy of the GOD "**for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.**" It was an object glorious enough to render it "**becoming**" in Him to make JESUS pass through suffering and death, and to justify the Father in not sparing His only begotten Son.

They for whom GOD has done all this must be very precious in His sight.

He must be much in earnest indeed to bless them and to take them to be with Him forever. As He so delighted in Enoch that He could no longer bear the separation and the distance, but took him to be with Him without tasting death, and long ere he had run the common race of man, so with His saints. He is making haste to bring them to glory, for the day of absence has been long.

The glory which He has in reserve for them must be surpassing glory, for it was to bring them to it that He was willing to bruise His Son and to put Him to grief. Eye hath not seen it; ear hath not heard it; it is far beyond what we can comprehend, yet it is all reality. GOD is not ashamed to be called our GOD because He hath prepared for us a city. Were that city not worthy of Himself He would be ashamed to have called Himself by the name of "**our God.**" For that implies large blessings on His part, and it leads to large expectations on ours, expectations which He cannot disappoint.

He did not count this glory to be bought for us at too dear a rate, even though the price was the sufferings of His only begotten Son.

If, then, GOD thus estimated the glory to which we were to be brought, shall not we do the same? If He thought it worth all the sufferings of His Son, shall we not think it worth our poor sufferings here? Shall we not say, "**I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us**" (Romans 8:18).

This is consolation. It is that which most naturally occurs to us, and it is both scriptural and effectual. This is what is usually presented to the afflicted saint, and it is what he feels to be very precious and suitable. But though the most common and the most natural consolation, it is by no

means the only one. Let us suggest a few others.

1. JESUS weeps with us. "**In all our affliction he is afflicted.**" He knows our sorrows, for He has passed through them all, and therefore He feels for us. He is touched with the feeling of our griefs as well as of our infirmities. Man - very man - man all over, even in His glory He enters most fully into the fellowship of our burdens and sorrow, whatever these may be, for there is not one which He did not taste when He "**dwelt among us**" here. His is sympathy, deep, real, and true. It is no fiction, no fancy. We do not see His tears falling upon us; neither do we clasp His hand nor feel the beating of His heart against ours.

But still His communion with us in suffering is a reality. We may not understand how it can be. But He understands it; and He can make us feel it, whether we can comprehend it or not.

2. We are made partakers of CHRIST's sufferings. What honor is this! We are baptized with His baptism; we drink of His cup, we are made like Him in sorrow as we shall hereafter be made like Him in joy! How soothing and sustaining! If reproach, and shame, and poverty are ours, let us remember that they were His also. If we have to go down to Gethsemane, or up to the cross, let us think that He was there before us. It is when keeping our eye on this that we are brought somewhat to realize the feeling of the apostle when he "rejoiced in his sufferings" for the Church, as filling "**up that which is behind** [literally the leavings of CHRIST's sufferings] **of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church**" (Colossians 1:24). To be treated better than CHRIST was is neither what a thoughtful soul could expect, nor what a loving heart could desire.

3. Suffering is the family lot. This we have already dwelt upon, and we recur to it simply to present it more prominently as a consolation. The path of sorrow is no unfrequented way. All the saints have trodden it. We can trace their footprints there. It is comforting, nay, it is cheering to keep this in mind. Were we cast fettered into some low dungeon, would it not be consolation to know that many a martyr had been there before us, would it not be cheering to read their names written with their own hands all round the ancient walls? Such is the solace we may extract from all suffering, for the furnace into which we are cast has been consecrated by many a saint already.

4. All things work together for our good. Nothing is unsuitable, unseasonable, or unprofitable. Out of all evil comes good to the saints; out of all darkness comes light; out of all sorrow comes joy. Each pang, sharp or slight, is doing its work - the very work which GOD designs, the very work which we could not do without. The bed of sorrow is not only like Solomon's chariot, all "**paved with love,**" but, like it, it moves on with mighty swiftness, bearing us most blessedly onward to the inheritance of the undefiled. The forces of earth, unless they all bear in one line, or nearly so, tend to counteract each other and arrest the common impulse. But the forces which GOD brings to bear upon us in affliction are all directly and necessarily impulsive. Come from what quarter they may, or from opposite quarters all at once, they still bear us successfully forward. "**All things work together for good.**" "**All things are ours.**"

5. There is special grace for every trial. As trials bring to light the weakness that is in us, so they draw out to meet the strength of GOD - new resources of strength and grace which we never knew before. In affliction we may be quite sure of learning something more of GOD than we

were acquainted with before, for it is just in order to furnish an opportunity for bringing out this and showing it to us that He sends the trial. How little should we know of Him were it not for sorrow! What fullness of blessing comes out to us, what riches of love are spread out before us in the dark and cloudy day!

6. Affliction is our fullest opportunity for glorifying GOD. It is on earth that He expects to get glory from us, glory such as angels cannot give, glory such as we shall not be able to give hereafter. It is here that we are to preach to angels; it is here we are to show to them what a glorious GOD is ours. Our whole life below is given us for this. But it is especially in sorrow and under infirmity that GOD looks for glory from us.

What a God-honoring thing to see a struggling, sorrowing child of earth cleave fast to GOD, calmly trusting in Him, happy and at rest in the midst of storm and of suffering! What a spectacle for the hosts of Heaven! Now, then, is the time for the saints to give glory to the Lord their GOD.

Let them prize affliction as the very time and opportunity for doing so most of all. Let them use such a season well. And oh, what consolation to think that affliction is really such a season! Ah, surely it is one which an angel might covet, which an archangel would gladly stoop to were that possible! They can glorify GOD much in Heaven amid its glory and blessedness, but oh, not half so much as we can on earth amid suffering and shame!

7. We are getting rid of sin. Each pain is a nail driven through some sin, another blow inflicted on the flesh, destroying the very power of sinning. As we entered on our first life, sin fastened its chain upon us, and link after link twined itself about us. When we commenced our second and better life, these began one by one to untwine themselves. Affliction untwined them faster; and though it is not till we are laid on a deathbed or till JESUS come that the last link of earth is thoroughly untwined or broken, still it is consolation to think that each successive trial is helping on the blessed consummation.

A lifetime's sufferings would not be too long or too heavy, if by means of them we got rid of sin and sinful ways and tempers, and became more holy, more heavenly, more conformable to the image of the Lord.

When first we believed in JESUS, we were "**delivered from a present evil world.**" Yet this deliverance is not complete. The world and we have not yet fully parted company with each other. And, therefore, GOD drives affliction like a wedge between us and the world; or He sends it like a plowshare right across our most cherished hopes and brightest prospects till He thoroughly wearies us of all below. "**He hath made me weary,**" said Job. Nor do we wonder at the complaint. Wearisome nights were his.

The "**ploughers ploughed upon his back,**" and drew many a long furrow there. He might well be weary. So with us. GOD makes us weary, too, weary all over-thoroughly weary. We get weary of a present evil world, weary of self, weary of sin, weary of suffering, weary of this mortal body, weary of these vile hearts, weary of earth-weary of all but JESUS! Of Him no trial can weary us. Suffering only endears Him the more. Blessed suffering - that makes Him appear more precious and the world viler; that brings Him nearer to our hearts and thrusts the world away!

8. We are preparing for usefulness while here. We have but a few years below, and it concerns us much that these should be useful years. We have but one life, and it must be laid out for GOD. But we need preparation for usefulness. We need a thorough breaking down, a thorough emptying, a thorough bruising. GOD cannot trust us with success till we are thus laid low. We are not fit to receive it; nor would He get the glory. Therefore He sends sore and heavy trials in order to make us vessels fit for the Master's use. And oftentimes we see that the heaviest trials are forerunners of our greatest usefulness. When we are entirely prostrated and crushed, then it is safe to grant us success, for GOD gets all the glory. And oh, what wonders has GOD often done by bruised reeds!

Yea, it is the bruised reed that is oftenest the instrument in His hand for working His mighty signs and wonders. What consolation is this! Suffering is stripped of half its bitterness if it thus brings with it a double portion of the Spirit, and fits for double usefulness on earth.

9. We have the HOLY SPIRIT as our Comforter. He is mighty to comfort as well as to sanctify. His name is "**the Comforter**." His office is to console. And in the discharge of this office He puts forth His power, not only mediately and indirectly through the Word, but immediately and directly upon the soul, sustaining and strengthening it when fainting and troubled. It is consolation unspeakable to know that there is a hand, a divine and omnipotent hand, laid upon our wounded spirit, not only upholding it, but drying up, as it were, the very springs of grief within. In the day of oppressive sorrow, when bowed down to the dust, what is it that we feel so much our need of as a hand that can come into close and direct contact with our souls to lift them up and strengthen them? For it is here that human consolation fails. Friends can say much to soothe us, but they cannot lay their finger upon the hidden seat of sorrow. They can put their arm around the fainting body, but not around the fainting spirit. To that they have only distant and indirect access. But here the heavenly aid comes in. The Spirit throws around us the everlasting arms, and we are invincibly upheld. We cannot sink, for He sustains, He comforts, He cheers. And who knows so well as He how to sustain, and comfort, and cheer?

10. The time is short. We have not a pilgrimage like Seth's or Noah's, or even like Abraham's to pass through. Ours is but a hand-breadth in comparison with theirs. We have not many days to suffer, nor many nights to watch, even though our whole life were filled with weary days and sleepless nights. "**Our light affliction is but for a moment.**" And besides the briefness of our earthly span, we know that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

This is consolation, for it tells not only of the end of our tribulation, but of the beginning of our triumph; nay, and not only of our individual rest from trouble; but of the rest and deliverance of the whole Church together. For then the whole "**body of Christ**," waking or sleeping, shall be glorified with their glorified Lord, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

In the day of bereavement, the day of mourning over those who have fallen asleep in JESUS, this consolation is especially precious. Them that sleep in JESUS will GOD bring with Him. And if the Lord be near, the time of reunion may not be far off. They that lie down at evening have a whole night's slumber before them; but they who lie down toward morning have, it may be, but an hour or less till the dawn awakes them. So with the dead in CHRIST in these last days. They will not have long to sleep, for it is now the fourth watch of the night, and the day-star is

preparing to arise. What consolation! How it soothes the pain of parting! How it cheers the wounded spirit! "**Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in dust,**" is now our watchword every day. We take our stand upon our watchtower, and look out amidst the darkness of night for the first streaks of morn. We lay our ear to the ground and listen that, amid all the discord of earth, the uproar of war, the tumults of the nations, we may catch the first sound of our Lord's chariot wheels-those chariot wheels that are to sweep in vengeance over the field of Armageddon, crushing the confederate nations leagued against the Lord and His Anointed, and also to bring to the bosom of the long betrothed Bride, the Husband of her youth, the desire of her soul, for whom, amid tears and loneliness, she has waited for many a generation, many a century, in vain.

11. All is love. Affliction is the expression of paternal love. It is from the deepest recess of the fountain of love that sorrow flows down to us. And love cannot wrong us. It blesses, but cannot curse. Its utterances and actions are all of peace and gladness. It wants a larger vessel into which to empty itself, and a deeper channel through which to flow. That is all. It seeks to make us more susceptible of kindness, and then to pour that kindness in. Yes, love is the true, the one origin of the sharpest stroke that ever fell upon a bleeding heart. The truth is, there is no other way of accounting for affliction but this. Anger will not account for it, forgetfulness will not account for it, chance will not account for it. No. It is simply impossible to trace it to any cause but love. Admit this as its spring, and all is harmonious, comely, perfect. Deny it, and all is confusion, cruelty, and darkness. Chastising love is the faithfulest, purest, truest, tenderest, deepest of all. Let this be our consolation.

Beloved, "**it is well.**" It is good to be afflicted. Our days of suffering here we call days of darkness; hereafter they will seem our brightest and fairest. In eternity we shall praise Jehovah most of all for our sorrows and tears. So blessed shall they then seem to us that we shall wonder how we could ever weep and sigh. We shall then know how utterly unworthy we were of all this grace. We did not deserve anything, but least of all to be afflicted. Our joys were all of grace-pure grace-much more our sorrows. It is out of the "**exceeding riches of the grace of God**" that trial comes.

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