

MY COMFORT IN AFFLICTION

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“This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your Word has quickened me.”
Psalm 119:50.

IT is almost needless for me to say that, in some respects, the same events happen unto all men alike—in the matter of afflictions it is certainly so. None of us can expect to escape trial. If you are ungodly, “many sorrows shall be to the wicked.” If you are godly, “many are the afflictions of the righteous.” If you walk in the ways of holiness, you shall find that there are stumbling blocks cast in the way by the enemy. If you walk in the ways of unrighteousness, you shall be taken in snares and held there even unto death. There is no escaping trouble! We are born to it as the sparks fly upward. When we are born the second time, though we inherit innumerable mercies, we are certainly born to another set of troubles, for we enter upon spiritual trials, spiritual conflicts, spiritual pains and so forth—and thus we get a double set of distresses, as well as twofold mercies.

He who wrote this 119th Psalm was a good man, but assuredly he was an afflicted man. Many times did David sorrow and sorrow sorely. The man after God’s own heart was one who felt God’s own hand in chastisement. David was a king and, therefore, it would be folly on our part to suppose that men who are wealthier and greater than we are, are more screened from affliction—it is quite the reverse. The higher up the mountain, the more boisterous the winds. Depend upon it, that the middle state for which Agur prayed, “Give me neither poverty nor riches,” is, upon the whole, the best! Greatness, prominence, popularity, nobility, royalty bring no relief from trial, but rather an increase of it. Nobody who consulted his own comfort would enter upon dignities attended with so much labor and sore travail. Child of God, remember that neither goodness nor greatness can deliver you from affliction! You have to face it, whatever your position in life—therefore face it with dauntless courage and extort victory from it.

Yet, even if you do face it, you will not escape it. Even if you cry to God to help you, He will help you through the trouble, but He will probably not turn it aside from you. He will deliver you from evil, but He may yet lead you into trial. He has promised that He will deliver you in six troubles and that in seven there shall no evil touch you, but He does not promise that either six or seven trials shall be kept from you. One like unto the Son of God was with the three holy children in the fire, but He was not with them till they were *in* the fire—at least not visibly—and He was not so with them as either to quench the flame, or to prevent their being cast into it. “I am with you, Israel, passing through the fire,” may well describe the Covenant assurance.

May we realize the fire if only thus we can realize the Divine Presence! Gladly may we accept the furnace if we may but find the company of the Son of God with us there. Every child of God among you can, with the Psalmist, speak of *my* affliction. You may not be able to speak of *my* estate, *my* heritage, *my* wealth, *my* health—but you can all speak of *my* affliction. No man is a monopolist of misery. A portion of the black draught of sorrow is left for others. Of that cup we must all drink, little or much, and we must drink of it as God ordains. So far, then, one event happens to all.

My objective at this time is to show the difference between the Christian and the worldling in his affliction. First, Believers have in their affliction *a peculiar comfort*—“This is my comfort in my affliction.” Secondly, that comfort comes from *a peculiar source*—“For Your Word has quickened me.” And, thirdly, that peculiar comfort is valuable under very *special trials* such as are mentioned in the context.

I. First, then, Believers have their PECULIAR COMFORT under affliction. “This,” says David, “is my comfort in my affliction.” “*This*”—dwell on the word, “*this*,” as *different from the consolations of other men*. The drunk takes his cup and he quotes Solomon, “Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that are of heavy

hearts.” And, as he quaffs his cup, he says, “This is my comfort in my affliction.” The miser hides his gold, takes down his purse, and chinks it. Oh, the music of those golden notes! And he cries, “This is my comfort in my affliction.” Men mostly have some comfort or other. Some have allowable comforts, though they are but of minor quality. They find comfort in the sympathy of men, in domestic kindness, in philosophic reflection, in homely content—but such comforts generally fail—always fail when the trial becomes exceedingly severe.

Now, just as the wicked man and the worldly man can say of this or that, “*This* is my comfort,” the Christian comes forward and, bringing with him the Word of God brimming with rich promises, he says, “This is my comfort in my affliction.” You put down your comfort and I put down mine. “*This* is my comfort”—he is evidently not ashamed of it. He is evidently ready to set forth his solace in preference to all others. And while others say, I derive consolation from *this*, and I from *that*, David opens the Holy Scripture and cheerfully exclaims, “*This* is my comfort.” Can you say the same? “*This*” in opposition to everything else—this promise of God, this Covenant of His Grace—“*This* is my comfort.”

Now read, “*this*” in another sense, as indicating that he knew what it was. “*This* is my comfort.” He can explain what it is. Many Christian people get a comfort out of God’s Word, out of believing in Christ and out of religious exercises, but they can hardly tell what the comfort is. A rose smells sweetly to a man who does not know the name of the rose. A rose-grower tells me, “This is the Marshal Niel.” Thank you, dear Sir, but I do not know who Marshal Niel is, or was or why the flower bears his name. But I can smell the rose all the same. So, many people cannot explain doctrines, but they enjoy them. After all, experience is better than exposition. Yet it is a splendid thing when the two go together, so that the Believer can say to his friend, “Listen, I will tell you, ‘*This* is my comfort.’”

“I saw how happy you were, dear Friend, when you were in trouble. I saw you sick the other day and I noticed your patience. I knew you to be slandered and I saw how calm you were. Can you tell me why you were so calm and self-contained?” It is a very happy thing if the Christian can turn round and answer such a question fully. I like to see him ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, saying—“*This* is my comfort in my affliction.” I want you, if you have enjoyed comfort from God, to get it packed up in such a form that you can pass it on to a friend! Get it explained to your own understanding so that you can tell others what it is, so that they may taste the consolation with which God has comforted you. Be ready to explain to young beginners—“*This* is my comfort in my affliction.”

Again, “*this*” is used in another sense, that is, as having the thing near at hand. I do not like speaking of my comfort from God and saying, *that* is my comfort, *that* is the solace which I enjoyed long ago. Oh, no, no! You need a comfort that you can press to your bosom, and say, “*This* is my comfort,” *this* which I have here at this present time! “*This*” is the word which indicates nearness. “*This* is my comfort.” Do you enjoy it now? You were so happy once. Are you as happy now?—

***“What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!”***

Yes, that is very well, Cowper, but it would be better to sing—

***“What peaceful hours I now enjoy!
How sweet the present hour?”***

“*This* is my comfort.” I still have it with me—as my affliction is present with me, so my consolation is present with me!

You have heard, the classic story of the Rhodian who said that at such and such a place he had made a jump of many yards. He bragged till a Greek, who stood by, chalked out the distance and said, “Would you mind jumping half that length now?” So I have heard people talk of what enjoyments they once had, what delights they once had. I have heard of a man who has the roots of depravity dug out of him and, as for sin, he has almost forgotten what it is! I would like to watch that brother when under the influence of rheumatism. I do not want him to have it long, but I should like him to have a twinge or two, that I might see whether some roots of corruption do not remain. I think that when he was tried in that way, or if not just in *that* way, in some other, he would find that there was a rootlet or two still in the soil. If a storm were to come on, perhaps our brave dry-land sailor might not find his anchor quite so easy to cast overboard as he now thinks it is. You smile at the talk of modern perfectionism and so do I, but I am sick of it! I do not believe in it. It is so utterly contrary to that which I have to learn every day, of my own unworthiness, that I feel a contempt for it. Do have your comforts always handy—pray God that that which was a consolation years ago may still be a consolation, so that you may say, “*This* is my comfort in my affliction.”

Again, I think the word, “this,” *is meant as pleading it in prayer*. Let me read the previous verse, “Remember the Word unto Your servant upon which You have caused me to hope.” That is Your promise which you have made me to hope upon, Lord—fulfill it to me—for this, Your promise, is my comfort in my affliction and I plead it in prayer! Suppose, Brothers and Sisters, you and I are enabled to take comfort out of a promise. We have, in that fact, a good argument to plead with God. We may say, “Lord, I have so believed this promise of Yours that I have been persuaded that I had in my possession the blessing promised to me. And now, shall I be ashamed by this, my hope? Will You not honor Your Word, seeing You have caused me to rest upon it?” Is not this good pleading? “Remember Your Word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope, for this is already my comfort. And You will have given me a false comfort and led me into error if Your Word should fail. O my Lord, since I have sucked my comfort out of the expectation of what You are about to do, surely by this You are pledged and bound to Your servant—that You will keep Your Word!” Hence the word “*this*” is seen to be a very comprehensive word. May the Spirit of God teach each of us to say of our priceless Bible, “*This is my comfort in my affliction.*”

II. We pass on to note, secondly, that this comfort comes from A PECULIAR SOURCE—“This is my comfort, *for Your Word has quickened me.*” The comfort, then, is partly outward, coming from God’s Word, but it is mainly and pre-eminently *inward*, for it is God’s Word *experienced* as to its quickening power within the soul.

First, *it is God’s Word that comforts*. Why do we look anywhere else for consolation but to God’s Word? Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I am ashamed to have to say it, but we go to our neighbors, or relatives and we cry, “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends!” and it ends with our crying, “Miserable comforters are you all!” We turn to the pages of our past life and look *there* for comfort, but this may also fail us. Though experience is a legitimate source of comfort, yet when the sky is dark and lowering, experience is apt to minister fresh distress! If we were to go at once to God’s Word and search it till we found a promise suitable to our case, we should find relief far sooner. All cisterns dry up—only the fountain remains. Next time you are troubled, reach down to the Bible. Say to your soul, “Soul, sit still and hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace unto His people.”

You read one promise, and you feel, “No, that hardly meets the case. Here is another, but it is made to a special character and I am afraid I am not that character. Here, thank God, is one that just fits me, as a key fits the wards of a lock.” When you find such a promise, use it at once. John Bunyan beautifully pictures a pilgrim laid by the heels in Giant Despair’s castle and there beaten with a crab tree cudgel till one morning he puts his hand into his bosom and cries to his brother, Christian, “What a fool have I been to lie rotting in this noisome dungeon, when all this time I have a key in my bosom which will open every door in Doubting Castle!” “Say you so, my Brother,” says Christian, “pluck it out, and let us use it at once!” This key, which is called Promise, is thrust into the first lock and the door flies open! And then it is tried upon the next and the next with quick results. Though the great iron gate had a rusted lock in which the key did terribly grate and grind, yet it did open and the prisoners were free from the vile durance of their mistrust! The Promise has always opened the gate and every gate—yes, the gates of despair shall be opened with that key called Promise, if a man does but know how to hold it firmly and turn it wisely till the bolt flies back.

“This is my comfort in my affliction,” says the Psalmist—God’s own Word. Dear Friends, fly to this comfort with speed in every time of trouble—get to be familiar with God’s Word so that you may do so. I have found it helpful to carry “Clarke’s Precious Promises” in my pocket, so as to refer to it in the hour of trial. If you go into the market and are likely to do a ready-money business, you always take a checkbook with you. So carry precious promises with you, that you may plead the Word of God which suits your case. I have turned to promises for the sick when I have been of that number, or to promises to the poor, the despondent, the weary and such like, according to my own condition, and I have always found a Scripture fitted to my case. I do not need a promise made to the sick when I am perfectly well. I do not need balm for a broken heart when my soul is rejoicing in the Lord—but it is very handy to know where to lay your hands upon suitable Words of cheer when necessity arises. Thus the external comfort of the Christian is the Word of God.

Now for the internal part of his consolation. “This is my comfort in my affliction, *for Your Word has quickened me.*” Oh, it is not the *letter*, but the Spirit which is our real comfort! We look not to that Book which consists of so much binding, so much paper and so much ink, but to the living Witness within the Book! The Holy Spirit embodies Himself in these blessed Words of God and works upon our hearts so that we are quickened by the Word! It is *this* which is the true comfort of the soul.

When you read the promise and it is applied with power to you. When you read the Law and it works with force upon your conscience. When you read any part of God's Word and it gives life to your spirit—*then* it is that you get the comfort of it! I have heard of persons reading so many chapters a day and getting through the Bible in a year—a very admirable habit, no doubt—but it may be performed so mechanically that no good, whatever, may come of it. You need to pray earnestly over the Word, that it may quicken you, or otherwise it will not be a comfort to you. Let us think of what our comfort is in the time of affliction from our soul's being quickened by the Lord. Comfort comes thus—God's Word has, in past days, quickened us. It has been a Word of Life from the dead. In our affliction we, therefore, remember how God has brought us out of spiritual death and made us alive—and this cheers us. If you can say, "Whatever pain I suffer, whatever grief I endure, yet I am a living child of God," then you have a wellspring of comfort! It is better to be the most afflicted child of God than to be the happy worldling. Better be God's dog than the devil's darling. Child of God, comfort yourself with this—if God has not given me a soft bed, nor left me a whole skin, yet He has quickened me by His Word and this is a choice favor. Thus our first quickening from spiritual death is a sunny *memory*.

After we are made alive we need to be quickened in duty, to be quickened in joy, to be quickened in every holy exercise and we are happy if the Word has given us this repeated quickening. If, in looking back, dear Friend, you can say, "Your Word has quickened me. I have had much joy in hearing Your Word. I have been made full of energy through Your Word. I have been made to run in the way of Your Commandments through Your Word"—all this will be a great comfort to you. You can then plead—"O Lord, while You may have denied me much of the joy that some people have, yet You have often quickened me. Oh, be it so again, for *this* is my comfort!" I hope I am speaking to many experienced Christians who can say that God's Word has very frequently refreshed them when they have been in the depths of distress and fetched them up from the gates of the grave. And if they *can* bear this testimony, they know what comfort there is in the quickening of the Word of God and they will ask to feel that quickening influence, again, so they may be of good comfort.

Brothers and Sisters, it is a very strange thing that when God wills to do one thing, He often does another. When He wants to comfort us, what does He do? Does He comfort us? Yes, and no. He quickens us and so He comforts us. Sometimes the roundabout way is the straight way. God does not give the comfort we ask for by a distinct act, but He quickens us and so we obtain comfort. Here is a person very low and depressed. What does a wise doctor do? He does not give strong drink to act as a temporary stimulus to his spirits, for this would end in a reaction in which the man would sink lower. No, he gives him a tonic and braces him up. And when the man is stronger, he becomes happier and shakes off his nervousness. The Lord comforts His servants by quickening them—"This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your Word has quickened me."

I speak to some of you who have endured long affliction and it is a joy to see you out, again, tonight. Has not God's Word often quickened you in affliction? Perhaps you have been sluggish when in health, but affliction has made you feel the value of the promise, the value of the Covenant blessing—and then you have cried to God for it. You may have been worried about worldly cares, but you have been obliged to drop them in the time of affliction and your only care has been to get nearer to Christ and to creep into your Lord's bosom!

Sometimes in prosperity you could hardly pray, but I guarantee you, you prayed when you were ready to perish and pined at death's door! Your affliction quickened your prayers. There is a man trying to write with a quill pen—it will not make anything but a thick stroke—so he takes a knife and cuts fiercely at the quill till it marks admirably. So we have to be cut with the sharp knife of affliction, for only then can the Lord make use of us! See how sharply gardeners trim their vines. They take off every shoot till the vine looks like a dry stick. There will be no grapes in the spring if there is not this cutting away in the autumn and winter! God quickens us in our afflictions through His Word. Our sorrows are made to have a salutary action on our souls. We receive by them spiritual revival and health and, therefore, comfort flows in to us. It would not be wise to pray to be altogether delivered from trial, though we should like to be. It would be a pleasant thing to have a grassy path all the way to Heaven and never to find a stone in the road—but though pleasant, it might not be safe. If the way were a fine turf cut every morning with a lawnmower and made as soft as velvet, I am afraid we should never get to Heaven at all, for we should linger too long upon the road!

Some animals' feet are not adapted for smooth places and, Brothers and Sisters, you and I are of a very slippery-footed race! We slip when the roads are smooth! It is easy to go down hill, but it is not easy to do so without a stumble.

John Bunyan tells us that when Christian passed through the Valley of Humiliation, the fight he had there with Apollyon was very much due to the slips he made in going down the hill which descended into the valley. Happy is he who is in the Valley of Humiliation, for, “He that is down need fear no fall.” But his happiness will largely depend upon how he came down. Gently, you that are on the hilltops of delight and prosperity. Gently, lest, perhaps you slip with your feet and mischief come of it! Quickening is what we need and if we get it, even if it comes to us by the sharpest tribulation, we may gladly accept it. “This is my comfort in my affliction, for Your Word has quickened me.”

III. Lastly, and very briefly, there are certain PECULIAR TRIALS of Christians in which this peculiar comfort is specially excellent.

Kindly look at the Psalm and notice, in the 49th verse, that the Psalmist suffered from *hope deferred*. “Remember Your Word unto Your servant, upon which You have caused me to hope.” Long waiting for the promise to be fulfilled may make the soul grow weary—and hope deferred makes the heart sick. At such a time this is to be our comfort—“Your Word has quickened me.” I have not yet obtained that which I prayed for, but I have been quickened while I have been praying. I have not found the blessing I have been seeking, but I am sure I shall have it, for already the exercise of prayer has been of service to me—*this* is my comfort under the delay of my hope, that Your Word has already quickened me!

Notice the next verse, in which the Psalmist was suffering the great trial of *scorn*. “The proud have had me greatly in derision.” Ridicule is a very sharp ordeal. When the proud are able to say something against us that stings—when they laugh, yes, and laugh greatly, and treat us like the mire in the streets—it is a severe affliction and under it we need rich comfort. If at that time we feel that if man’s word stings, yet God’s Word quickens, then we are comforted! If we are driven more to God by being scorned by men, we may very cheerfully accept their contempt and say, “Lord, I bless You for this persecution which makes me a partaker of Christ’s sufferings.” I say it becomes a comfort to us to be quickened by the Word when the ungodly are despising us.

At the 53rd verse you will see that David was under the trouble of *living among great blasphemers* and doers of open wickedness. He says, “Horror has taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Your Law.” He was horrified at their vices—he wished that he could get away from and never see or hear that which distressed him so much. But if the very sight and sound of sin drives us to pray and forces us to cry to God, the result is good, however painful the process may be! If men never swore in the streets, we should not so often be driven to cry to God to forgive their profanity. If you and I could always be shut up in a glass case and never see sin or hear of it, it might be a bad thing for us. But if, when we are compelled to see the wickedness of men and hear their curses and reviling, we can also feel that God’s Word is quickening us, even by our horror at sin, it is good for us! We have great comfort in this peculiar species of affliction, though it is exceedingly grievous to tender-hearted, pure and delicate minds who dwell near to God.

Just read the 54th verse, and you will see another of David’s trials indicated. “Your statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage.” *He had many changes*. He had all the trials of a pilgrim’s life—the discomforts of journeying in places where he had no abiding city. But, “*This*,” he says, “has been my comfort in my affliction.” Your Word has told me of a city that has foundations. Your Word has assured me that if I am a stranger upon earth, I am also a citizen of Heaven. “Your Word has quickened me.” I have felt myself so strengthened by Your Word that I have been glad to feel that this is not my rest. I am glad to feel that I must be away to a better land and so my heart has been happy and, “Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”

Lastly, in the 55th verse, you see David was in *darkness*. He says, “I have remembered Your name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept Your Law.” Even in the night he could derive comfort from the quickening influence which often comes to the soul from the Scriptures—even when we are surrounded by darkness and sorrow. I will not go over that ground, again, but certain it is that when our soul is shrouded in distress, it often becomes more active and gracious than when it is basking in the sunlight of prosperity.

All along, then, dear Friends, your comfort and mine is the Word of God, laid home by God, the Holy Spirit, to our hearts, quickening us to an increase of spiritual life! Do not try to flee from your troubles. Do not fret under your cares. Do not expect this world to bring forth roses without thorns. Do not hope to prevent the springing up of briars and thistles. Ask for quickening! Ask for that quickening to come, not by new revelations nor by fanatical excitement, but by

God's own Word quietly applied by His own Spirit! So shall you conquer all your troubles, overcome your difficulties and enter into Heaven singing hallelujahs unto the Lord's right hand and holy arm which have gotten Him the victory!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 119:49-64.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—481, 119 (SONG III), 482.

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