**THE SILVER LINING - MESSAGES OF HOPE AND CHEER BY JOHN H. JOWETT**

**15. COMFORTED IN ORDER TO COMFORT by JOHN H. JOWETT**

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."*

*2 Corinthians 1:3,4*

"Blessed be God!" The apostle begins with his usual doxology. He will have a great deal to say in this epistle about affliction, but he begins upon another note. He begins with the contemplation of the mercies of God, and from that standpoint he surveys the field of his own trouble.

Everything depends upon our point of view. I stood a short time ago in a room which was furnished with wealthy pictures, and I fixed my gaze upon a Highland scene of great strength and glory. The owner of the picture found me gazing at this particular work, and he immediately said, "I am afraid you won't get the light on the hill." And, sure enough, he was right. From my point of view I was contemplating a dark and storm-swept landscape, and I did not get the light on the hill. He moved me to another part of the room, and, standing there, I found that the scene was lit up with wonderful light from above. Yes, everything depends upon our point of view. If you are going to look upon your trouble, the primary question will be, "Where do you stand?" See where the Apostle Paul plants his feet. "Blessed be God!" That is the view-point in the life of faith! Standing there, we shall get the light on the hill. Paul takes his stand on the grace of God, and he gazes upon the ministry of mercies and comfort in the otherwise midnight wastes of affliction and pain. He begins, I say, in doxology. He sings a paean over his mercies and comfort, and lifts his soul in adoration to God.

Now where does the apostle find his comfort? This verse always rears itself before me like a mountain range, in which there is a valley through which there flows a gladdening, refreshing river of mercy and comfort. "Blessed be God!" That is the supreme height. The other end of the text describes the gladdening river of comfort and grace. You see to what elevation he traces his comfort; away up to God! And so his resource is no mere trickle, to be dried up in the day of drought, or swiftly congealed in the nip of the first wintry day. The apostle loved to proclaim the infinitude of his supply, and no wonder, when he found it upon the everlasting hills. It is a very pertinent question which any man can put to himself:--"Will my present comfort last?" It all depends upon where he gets it from. Does he get it from friendships? How grateful is the ministry, and yet is it a dependable supply? Even if our friends are not taken from us by death, can we absolutely depend on the supply of comfort flowing from them to us? Here is a man who had come to the days of drought, and he looked about among his friends, if perchance he might find the waters of sympathy. "I looked on my right hand, and on my left; no man knew me, no one cared for my soul." The river was dry.

Yes, it all depends where we look for our comfort. Do we seek it from books? Again how welcome the service; but it is amazing how the ministry varies. You go to a book one day and the river is full; you return on the morrow ands the bed is bleached and dry. We cannot depend on the gracious ministry of our books. Do we seek our comfort in Nature? Again how healing the ministry, and yet how uncertain! have known a June day deepen a sorrow! I have known a moonlight night throw a heavy soul into a denser gloom! I have known a little flower open out an old wound! We cannot depend upon the comforting ministry of Nature. These are all welcome ministries, gracious ministries, but they are minor ministries, and if we seek our comfort in these, then in the dark and cloudy day we shall be left disconsolate. And so the apostle turns away from the secondary supplies and seeks his resources in the eternal. He hies him away to the infinite and inexhaustible, and his river never fails in the dryest and most exacting season. "I will not leave you comfortless." Paul goes away to the heights, and sings his doxology there. "Blessed be God!"

"Blessed be God, the Father of mercies." The Father of pity, of compassion, the Father of that gracious spirit to which we have given the name "Samaritanism." That is the kind of mercy that streams from the hills. Mercy is the very spirit of Samaritanism. It stops by the wounded wayfarer, it dismounts without condescension, it is not moved by the imperative of duty, but constrained by the tender yearnings of humanity and love. It is not the mercy of a stern and awful judge,\* but the compassion of a tenderly-disposed and wistful friend. Our God is the Father of such mercies. Wherever the spirit of a true Samaritanism is to be found, our God is the Father of it. It was born of Him. It was born on the hills.

"It streams from the hills,

It descends to the plain."

Wherever we discover a bit of real Samaritanism we may claim it as one of the tender offsprings of the Spirit of God. With what boldness the apostle plants his Lord's flag on territory that has been unjustly alienated from its owner, and he claims it for its rightful King! "The Father of mercies."

"The God of all comfort." What music there is about the word! It means more than tenderness: it is strength in tenderness, and it is tenderness in strength. It is not a mere palliative, but a curative. It does not merely soothe, it heals. Its ministry is not only consolation but restoration. "Comfort" is "mercy" at work, it is Samaritanism busy with its oil and wine. And again let us mark that whenever we find this busy goodness among the children of men, exercising itself among the broken limbs and broken hearts of the race, the Lord is the fountain of it. He is "the God of all comfort," of every form and kind and aspect. Again I say, how boldly the apostle plants the Lord's flag, and claims the gracious kingdom of kindly ministries for our God.

"Who comforteth us in all our affliction." Let us note the word in which the apostle describes the condition of the wayfaring pilgrims. They are passing through "affliction"; that is to say, they are in straits, in tight corners. Their way has become narrowed; they are hemmed in by cares or sorrows or temptations, and they are in a tight place. "He comforteth us" in such conditions. The river of mercy and comfort flows our way. Sometimes the comfort comes to us in some secret, mystic ministry which we can never describe. We are feeling very "down," and life has become very tasteless and dreary. We fling ourselves upon our knees, and we expose the dreary waste to the pitying eyes of our God. And suddenly "the desert rejoices and blossoms like the rose!" We cannot give any explanation, but we can exult in the experience.

"It is the Lord who rises

With healing in His wings."

Sometimes a comfort is mediated to us through the ministry of one of our fellow-men. The apostle never allowed the human messenger to eclipse the Lord who sent him. He had a keen eye for his Lord's comings, even when He wore some lowly human guise. "God comforted me by the coming of Titus!" Happy Paul! to be able to tell by the fragrance of the message that the messenger had come from the King's garden. I would that we might cultivate this fine discernment in order that we might see through the agent to the real doer, and through the ambassador to the King. How often might we be able to say, "God comforted me by the coming of a letter!" "God comforted me by the coming of a kindly service!" "God comforted me by the coming of a friend!" "God comforted me by the coming of ...?" Fill up the blank for yourself, and recognise the goodness and mercy of God. "He comforteth us in all our affliction."

"He comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Then the Lord comforts us, not to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters. Thou hast received the gift of comfort; now go out and comfort others! "We take God's gifts most completely for ourselves when we realise that He sends them to us for the benefit of other men."

It is not enough for us to have sympathy. Sympathy can be exceedingly fruitless, or it may be exceedingly clumsy, irritating the wound It purposes to heal. There are many men who are exceedingly sympathetic, but they have not the secret ministry of those who have been closeted with the Lord. No, if we would be able to comfort we must ourselves be comforted. They are the expert comforters who have sought and found their comfort in the Lord. They are able to "speak a word in season to him that is weary." They who have been comforted in doubt are the finest ministers to those who are still treading the valley of gloom. They who have been comforted in sickness know just the word which opens the pearly gates and brings to the desolate soul the hosts of the Lord. They who have been comforted in turning from sin and wickedness, and becoming penitent unto God, know just the word to speak to the shrinking Prodigal when he is timidly approaching his father's door.

Let us get away to our God, let us bare our souls to Him, and let us receive His marvellous gifts of comfort and mercy. And then let us use our glorious wealth in enriching other people and by our ministry bring them to the heights.

"O give Thine own sweet rest to me,

That I may speak with soothing power

A word in season as from Thee

To weary ones in needful hour."