

Paul's Sources of Consolation

by Thomas Reade

The sermon emphasizes the sources of consolation for the believer, including the covenant titles of Jehovah, the immutability of the divine counsel, the sufficiency of the Savior's grace, the efficacy of His power, and the assurance of future glory.

Scripture: Psalm 139:17, Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 4:17, 2 Corinthians 5:20, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:11, Philippians 4:18

Topics: "Divine Consolation", "Christian Assurance"

Description

Thomas Reade preaches about the sources of consolation for Christians, focusing on the covenant titles of Jehovah, the immutability of God's counsel, the sufficiency of the Savior's grace, the efficacy of His power, and the assurance of future glory. He emphasizes the importance of meditating on the Divine Perfections displayed in our redemption by Jesus Christ and the work of grace in the heart through the Holy Spirit. Reade highlights the security, peace, and blessings that believers in Jesus experience, rooted in the everlasting Covenant and the unbreakable love of God. He encourages believers to find contentment, humility, and strength in Christ, to endure trials with joy, and to look forward to the eternal glory promised to those who love God.

Transcript

PAUL'S SOURCES OF CONSOLATION-
THE COVENANT TITLES OF JEHOVAH,
THE IMMUTABILITY OF THE DIVINE COUNSEL,
THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SAVIOR'S GRACE,
THE EFFICACY OF HIS POWER,
THE ASSURANCE OF FUTURE GLORY.

Nothing can be more interesting to a Christian, whose heart is filled with holy love, than the contemplation of the Divine Perfections, as displayed in our redemption by Jesus Christ; and of that work of grace, which is wrought in the heart of the sinner, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Well might David strike his harp with joyful notes "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God, while I have my

being. My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord."

Every other subject is light and trifling compared with this; for, however wonderful are the works of God, He, who made them, must infinitely surpass them all in glory. "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all those who have pleasure therein." But, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable."

What can be more ennobling to the soul of man, than spiritual meditations on that Infinite Being, who made, redeemed, and sanctified us; whose watchful care ever protects us, and whose love is engaged to preserve and bless us.

O! how delightful is the thought, that he who inhabits eternity, who clothes himself with light as with a garment, who rides upon the wings of the wind, before whom all nations are less than nothing and vanity, who beholds, at one glance, all things past, present, and to come, is our FATHER and our FRIEND. What can harm us, while sheltered under his wing! What can grieve us, while dwelling beneath his smile? He, who rules over all worlds, has promised to make all things work together for good to those who love him. If we love God, he will make good this sweet promise even unto us.

How secure, how peaceful, how blessed, is the true believer in Jesus. His heart can joyfully respond to these soul-reviving questions of the Apostle- "If God is for us, who can be against us? He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any tiling to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ who died; yes, rather who is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

With an eye fixed on the everlasting Covenant, the Apostle rose superior to every misgiving feeling. Happy Paul, who in the fullness of faith could thus triumph in Christ. When assailed by inward temptations and outward trials, can we strike a chord in unison with his, and in the full assurance of hope, exclaim, amid threatening dangers, "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

O glorious triumph of faith! Well might Jesus say, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." As there is no condemnation, so there shall be no separation between Christ and his people. Their union is firm as the everlasting hills- and unending as the days of eternity. What then can exceed the blessedness arising from a firm hold on the promises of God in Christ? All earthly supports shall finally forsake us, but the Word of Christ will never fail. He has himself given us this blessed assurance, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Must it not then be dishonoring to Jesus, for one moment to doubt his word, which is firm as the everlasting pillars which support his throne.

Earth would once more resemble Paradise, did the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ produce its full effect on every heart. The religion of Jesus is a religion of love; and love works no ill to his neighbor. It is a religion of peace, and peace would convert spears into ploughshares. It is a religion of purity, and purity, would banish every unclean passion from the earth. To extend the blessings of this heavenly religion was the heart's desire of Paul; to make known its riches was his delight, though his efforts were too often repaid by ingratitude, and attended with unnumbered sufferings.

Earth will not always groan under the weight of sin, as now alas it does! The page of prophecy unfolds an age of brightness to our view, when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the channels of the sea; when the wolf and the lamb shall feed together; and when they shall neither hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain. Then truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Violence shall no more be heard in our land; neither wasting nor destruction within our borders; for the Lord shall be our everlasting light, and the days of our mourning shall be ended. His people shall be all righteous, they shall inherit the land forever, that he may be glorified.

Blessed Jesus! why are your chariot wheels so long in coming? Make haste, my Beloved, and be like a roe or a young deer upon the mountains of spices. You have said, "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

How truly wonderful is the Spirit's operation in the heart of the believer. The more we meditate upon it as exhibited in the character and experience of the great Apostle, the more we shall admire the wisdom, power, and love, which shone forth in his conversion and establishment in the faith. His whole experience is profitable to us. We behold successively his conflicts, comforts, and his conquests. Perhaps no man ever suffered more in the cause of Christ, enjoyed more abundant consolations, or obtained more glorious victories over the powers of darkness. We have already seen an ample detail of his trials, as recorded by himself; trials which would have daunted the most courageous, unaided by strength from above.

With beautiful humility, so characteristic of his mind, he says to the Corinthians, "Jesus was seen by me, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the Apostles, who am not fit to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." So careful was this holy man to place the crown of glory upon the head of Jesus, whose power and love had been magnified in his conversion to the faith which once he destroyed.

The consideration of those sources of consolation, from where he derived so much joy, and which sustained him under the vicissitudes of his eventful life, will afford another proof of the blessedness of faith in Christ. During his abode at Corinth, at Jerusalem, and while traversing the ocean on his voyage to Rome, this faithful servant of Christ was favored with encouraging visions. "I am with you," were words of unspeakable comfort, when spoken in the hour of trial by the Savior whom he loved. The titles which are given to the Almighty in his Epistles to the different churches, contain within them the sweetest consolation.

When exhorting the Christians at Corinth, he says, "Finally, brethren farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you."

To the Romans he writes, "Now the God of patience and consolation, grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit."

In the fullness of his heart, he breaks forth into a song of praise, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God; for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ."

How endearing is the view here afforded us of our Almighty Creator; how blessed is the assurance of his good-will toward us through Christ Jesus.

It is peculiarly affecting to the heart of every contrite believer to be thus privileged to call upon his God as- the God of love and peace- the God of patience and consolation- the God of hope- the Father of mercies- and the God of all comfort. O that we could feel the overflowings of gratitude for such superabundant grace.

Nothing more awfully manifests the hardness of the heart, than insensibility to the loving-kindness of God, whose tender mercies are over all his works, and whose very chastisements are blessings in disguise.

The heart of Paul was deeply impressed by a view of the Divine Goodness. This made him exclaim, "O the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passes knowledge." To the wicked, he put this awakening question, "Do you despise the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" To the righteous, he used this affectionate entreaty "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

This view and these feelings of a Savior's love, enabled him to console the suffering saints. He could speak from sweet experience both of mercy and judgment. To the Christians at Corinth, the comforted Apostle thus unfolded the divine dealings, "So when we are weighed down with troubles, it is for your benefit and salvation! For when God comforts us, it is so that we, in turn, can be an encouragement to you. Then you can patiently endure the same things we suffer. We are confident that as you share in suffering, you will also share God's comfort." Blessed indeed is that shepherd, who can thus strengthen the faith, and encourage the hope of his flock, by revealing to them the sources of his own consolation, and by leading them into the green pastures, and beside the still waters of the Gospel of Christ.

It is the will of God, that in everything we should give thanks; that we should glory in tribulation; and count it all joy when we fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of our faith works patience. But alas! we live very much below our duty and our privileges. We love ease and an exemption from trial; we shrink from suffering, and cannot bear the weight and shame of the cross. And why are we thus? Because the world has struck its roots into our hearts, which, like the deadly cancer, is consuming the vital principle.

The deeply-tried Apostle had to weep over one whom he once reckoned among the saints- "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Jesus also gave this solemn warning, "Remember Lot's wife." May the all-gracious Spirit revive his work, as in the days of old, lest our end should resemble that of the seven churches, to whom John delivered the Savior's rebuke, and from whom the light of evangelical truth has long been removed.

The foundation of all that spiritual joy which animated the breast of Paul, was the immutability of the Divine Counsel. God's faithfulness was his best security. He knew whom he had believed, and through grace, enjoyed the full assurance of hope. This blessed truth the Apostle admirably unfolded to the Hebrew converts, to promote their stability in the faith- "God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. So God has given us both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, we who have fled to him for refuge can take new courage, for we can hold on to his promise with confidence. This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls. It leads us through the curtain of heaven into God's inner sanctuary. Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become

our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek."

Our finite capacities cannot comprehend the fullness of grace which is contained in these sublime words; for, "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" We must die, to know the vast extent of redeeming love! Here, we can only see as through a glass darkly, but in heaven we shall have a full view of that covenant of peace, which is from everlasting to everlasting.

How wonderful is the divine condescension. Surely a simple promise from the lips of Eternal Truth ought to fill our hearts with joy. But so slow of heart are we to believe all that the Lord has spoken, and so weak is our faith in seasons of darkness, that God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath. Thus, when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by Himself, saying, "Surely blessing, I will bless you, and multiplying, I will multiply you." And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Can we then doubt, after such a confirmation as this? Is not Jehovah in all ages the same covenant-keeping God? Are not his promises as lasting as the days of heaven? Has he said, and shall he not do it? Has he spoken, and shall he not make it good? O! the desperate vileness of our ungrateful unbelieving hearts! With tears may each say, with the father of the poor afflicted child, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief;" and with our Christian Poet-

"Why should I shrink at your command

Whose love forbids my fears?

Or tremble at the gracious hand

That wipes away my tears?

Wisdom and mercy guide my way,

Shall I resist them both?

A poor blind creature of a day,

And crushed before the moth.

But ah! my inward spirit cries,

Still bind me to your sway;

Else the next cloud that veils my skies,

Drives all these thoughts away."

We resemble mariners, navigating a tempestuous ocean, the waves of trouble are ever rolling around us; deep calls unto deep, while the tempest-tossed believer, like Peter, is compelled to cry out, "Lord save me, or I perish;" and with David, "All your waves and billows are gone over me."

But in the midst of this tossing, how consoling is the assurance, that in Christ Jesus the soul is as safe as if it were crossing a sea without a wave. While the worldling is driven by fierce winds here and thither, and is at length engulfed in the mighty waters; the true believer, secured by the Anchor of Hope, is firmly

moored to the Rock of Ages.

Can we then be surprised that the delighted Apostle, thus preserved by the strength and faithfulness of his Savior, should feel exceeding joyful in all his tribulation? Blessed indeed was his Christian Experience. None can understand it aright, none can feel it fully, but those happy souls in whom Jesus takes up his abode, and manifests himself as he does not unto the world. Reader, can you participate in this Gospel blessing? Do you cast anchor within the veil?

The knowledge of ourselves is a most difficult science, owing to the vanity of our minds, and the influence of self-love. We are blind to our own faults, but quick-sighted to the failings of others. The mote in our brother's eye is readily discerned, while we are unconscious of the beam so apparent in our own.

Humility is the basis of Christian excellence. It is a grace of peculiar beauty in the sight of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and who has declared, that "he who humbles himself shall be exalted." Those people, therefore, who imagine, that they have obtained such a victory over their corruptions, as will free them from the trouble of watchfulness and circumspection, have attained unto a higher degree of sanctification, than ever the holy Paul professed to have done. Let us learn humility and self-knowledge by the experience of this eminent servant of Christ.

We have a beautiful instance of this Christian state of mind, recorded by himself in his second epistle to the Church at Corinth; "I knew a man in Christ," writes the Apostle, "whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell, God knows; such a one was caught up to the third heaven, into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." Paul was this man, although with admirable humility he endeavored to cast a veil over himself. He could have revealed a scene of wonders, which would have raised him still higher in the estimation of the churches; but, says he, "I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or that he hears of me."

Could any spark of pride or vain-glory exist in such a lowly bosom? Could he, who as a sinner, declared himself to be the chief, and as a saint, less than the least, be in danger of the swelling of high-mindedness? Let us hear what he says of himself, "Lest I should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the Revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."

Surely no one, after such a confession, will dare to say- I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin; I am removed from the fear of evil. Was it needful for the humble, self denying Paul, to have a thorn in the flesh, to keep him in the valley of humiliation, and to remind him that he was still in the body, and therefore subject to temptation? Then where is the Christian, who has reached to such a height of perfection, as to be wholly removed from the buffetings of Satan, and the lustings of the flesh? "For this," said the Apostle, "I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me." This trial, whatever might be its nature, was distressing to him. It was a thorn. He felt its painfulness, and prayed earnestly for its removal.

Was he left without a word of comfort under this unexpected trial? O! how compassionate is Jesus to his suffering servants. With infinite loving-kindness, he opened to him this source of consolation- "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

So contented was the happy saint with this Divine answer to his prayer, that although the thorn was not removed yet the assurance of receiving a sufficiency of grace in every time of need, enabled him to say with feelings of exultation, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of

Christ may rest upon me; for when I am weak, then am I strong."

What can any suffering or tempted believer want more, for strength and comfort, than the all-sufficient grace of his Savior? Having this, he has every thing; lacking this, he is poor indeed. Delightful promise! "My grace is sufficient for you." Jesus gives strength equal to our day. However dark the dispensation, or difficult the path; whether we be in the sun shine of prosperity, or amid the storms of adversity- in the activities of life, or on the bed of death, the promise is never failing- "My grace is sufficient for you." May every reader enjoy in all its fullness this source of consolation, so highly valued by the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

While laboring with all cheerfulness in the vineyard of his Lord, Paul had to endure many privations. We have seen how he suffered in the course of his ministry, both hunger, and cold, and nakedness. Yet none of these things moved him. He was willing to endure all things for the elect's sake, that they might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. When the Gentile churches manifested their affection towards him, by ministering to his necessities, he received the expression of their love with thankfulness. This grateful feeling he strikingly exhibited in his Epistle to the Philippians, "How grateful I am, and how I praise the Lord that you are concerned about me again. I know you have always been concerned for me, but for a while you didn't have the chance to help me. But even so, you have done well to share with me in my present difficulty. As you know, you Philippians were the only ones who gave me financial help when I brought you the Good News and then traveled on from Macedonia. No other church did this. Even when I was in Thessalonica you sent help more than once. I don't say this because I want a gift from you. What I want is for you to receive a well-earned reward because of your kindness. At the moment I have all I need--more than I need! I am generously supplied with the gifts you sent me with Epaphroditus. They are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable to God and pleases him. And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."

Such was the Christian spirit which displayed itself in the conduct of this holy man under every trying circumstance of life. Humility, patience, faith, and love shone brightly in him at all times; and more especially when under the pressure of affliction. No repining ever escaped his lips; for his heart cheerfully acquiesced in all the will of God, and suffering was converted into pleasure, when endured for the Gospel's sake. If he spoke of his necessities, it was not with the view of compelling the churches to relieve them. His soul abhorred so mercenary a motive. He therefore says to the Philippians, "Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need."

What an antidote is divine contentment to the ills of life. This rare attainment can only be made in the school of Christ. Happy indeed is the man, who under every changing scene, in humble dependence upon a Savior's grace, has learned to be content.

It was not human power nor human reasoning which thus enabled the apostle to support with lightsome heart the burden of the Cross. Faith in the power of Christ was the great secret of his consolation, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Have we attained to this happy state in our Christian experience? Can we say in sincerity and truth, I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content?

Few, as Bunyan expresses it, descend into the Valley of Humiliation without a slip or two. However much we may trust to the strength of our principles, we shall always find, by experience, that it is easier to talk about resignation than to be resigned. Paul could say, "I know how both to be abased and I know how to abound. I am instructed both to abound and to suffer need." Blessed instruction! invaluable knowledge! which thus enabled him to bear prosperity and adversity with a Christian spirit. Those who know themselves the best, know how difficult it is, because of the pride and earthliness of their hearts, in whatever state they are, therewith to be content. The Spirit of Christ alone can teach us the art of divine contentment. If He instruct us, we shall be able to learn the hardest lesson. Let us then sit daily at the feet of Jesus, where, imbibing his Spirit, and receiving his grace, we shall rise superior to every trial and be enabled to unite with Paul in his assurance of faith, "I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."

The prospect of death, so terrible to many, was to the Apostle a scene of brightest expectation. The man who could say, "I die daily; I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; being willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord;" -must have rejoiced at every approach towards the consummation of his wishes. When death knocks at the door and shakes his dart, the sinners tremble for fear. So did not Paul. While his outer man was daily tending to decay, his inner man was advancing toward perfection. He could triumph over death in its most frightful form, and find, in the worldling's terror, a source of the highest consolation. The opening grave, with its accompanying gloom, may sadden a heart wrapped up in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, but all its darksome horrors vanished before the bright assurance of the Apostle, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

Faith is the eye which pierces the clouds and fixes itself upon the hidden glories of Emmanuel's kingdom. This faith, ever in vigorous exercise, upheld the great Apostle, and like the pillar of fire in the wilderness, shed a brightness over all his path. Possessing this gift of grace, which is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen, he felt his affliction to be light, and its duration momentary. With steadfast faith, he looked, not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, and are eternal; he therefore gradually advanced in a fitness for heaven, and gloried in those tribulations, which, through the Spirit, wrought out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

What a blessed gradation there is in the scale of mercy! For affliction there is glory. For light affliction a weight of glory. For light affliction which is but for a moment, an eternal weight of glory! Here then we perceive another source of the Apostle's consolation, for the joy of the believer, passing the boundary of time, reaches into eternity.

Like a true pilgrim, this apostolic missionary had no certain dwelling-place. He renounced those treasures which engross the worldling's mind, for a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. He gave up all, to possess all. He became poor, that he might be rich. "We who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened," was his experience. "We look for the Savior, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body," was his earnest expectation, and his hope.

How different is the state of unconverted men. They hug their chain, though they sigh under its weight; they cherish the viper, though it may sting them to death. True happiness cannot possibly be found in any of those earthly things which so much occupy the time, and captivate the hearts of dying mortals. Pleasures may fascinate, riches may dazzle, honors may inflate; but what can these sources of supposed

comfort yield in the hour of death and judgment?

Miserable comforters are they all at such a season of real anguish. The Gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can alone impart genuine happiness. A heart, wholly given to God through faith in a crucified Savior, is the truly happy heart. If there be a pleasure in this lower world, which can impart a sweet without an excess, it is the pleasure of communion with God through Christ. If at God's right hand, there are pleasures for evermore; if in his presence there is fullness of joy; then every approach to Him must be an approach to happiness; and communion with Him must be the foretaste of eternal bliss.

"This world", as Hooker has feelingly expressed it, "is made up of perturbations." The curse has made the cross. Had man never sinned, he would never have suffered. No thorns or thistles would have sprung up beneath his feet. Now, they cover the earth, as perpetual emblems of man's misery, and of God's displeasure. In every thorn and thistle we may read the fall of man. Through Christ, the promised seed of the woman, the curse is now removed from every believing sinner; and though the cross remains, yet its bitterness is extracted, and it is made to yield the wholesome fruit of patience, self-denial, and deadness to the world.

The covenant love of God sweetens every cup of suffering, and lightens every burden of affliction. Hence, the way, though thorny, is rendered pleasant; and trials, though sharp, are gloried in, for Jesus' sake. Who then is the truly happy person, in this world of sin and sorrow? It is the genuine believer in Jesus; he, whose faith is not speculative, but practical; whose love is not transient, but abiding; whose hope is placed, not upon created things, but on Christ the sure foundation.

From Jesus, he receives pardon and peace, righteousness and strength, grace and glory. Streams of mercy are ever flowing around him. He sees love inscribed on every dispensation; and like the martyr, can kiss the faggot prepared to consume him, crying "Welcome Cross-Welcome Cross."

The great Apostle of the Gentiles, was honored of God to proclaim this blessedness to the world. Being taught by the Spirit to know the Truth, and to feel its power, he saw with unclouded vision the glories of the Gospel, and daily lived under the consoling influence of its heavenly light.

To the Corinthian church, he poured forth his stores of Gospel tidings, "All this newness of life is from God, who brought us back to himself through what Christ did. And God has given us the task of reconciling people to him. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others. We are Christ's ambassadors, and God is using us to speak to you. We urge you, as though Christ himself were here pleading with you, "Be reconciled to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ."

With such divine supports, such sources of consolation, Paul was enabled to encounter the fiercest opposition; and at midnight, to sing praises to his God in the dungeon at Philippi. Have we attained to this height of blessedness? Can we extract sweetness from the bitterness of death- and consolation from the worldling's source of sorrow?

While meditating upon these riches of sovereign grace, these abundant consolations provided for suffering saints let us strike our harps with David and sing, "How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them. If I should count them they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with you. How excellent is your loving-kindness, O God, therefore the children of men put their

trust under the shadow of your wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house, and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures. For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light, we shall see light."

"When the world my heart is rending

With its heaviest storm of care,

My glad thoughts, to God ascending,

Find a refuge from despair.

There's a hand of mercy near me,

Though the waves of trouble roar;

There's an hour of rest to cheer me,

When the toils of life are o'er.

Happy hour! when saints are gaining,

That bright crown they longed to wear;

Not one spot of sin remaining,

Not one pang of earthly care.

O! to rest in peace forever,

Joined with happy souls above;

Where no foe my heart can sever

From the Savior whom I love.

This the hope that shall sustain me

Until life's pilgrimage be past;

Fears may vex, and troubles pain me,

I shall reach my home at last."

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