

REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED

NO. 2578

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 10, 1898.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, MARCH 18, 1883.

“My soul refused to be comforted.”

Psalm 77:2.

WHEN you meet with a person in great distress, you feel at once a desire to comfort him. That is to say, if you have an ordinarily tender heart. You cannot bear to see another in trouble without trying to minister to that diseased heart. But supposing that the person refuses to be comforted? Then you are foiled. What can you do? It is as though you met with a hungry man and offered him bread, but he rejected it. You tried to give him daintier food, but he scorned it. You asked him what he could eat, but he altogether refused to accept any form of nourishment. Then what could you do? Your cupboard might be full and the door might be freely opened, but if the man would not eat, you could not remove his hunger. So, if a man in trouble refuses to be comforted, how are you to cheer and solace him? One man can lead a horse to the water, but a thousand cannot make him drink if he will not—and when a man in trouble refuses to be comforted, then lover and friend are put far from him—and his acquaintance into darkness. Indeed, they soon need to be comforted, for disquietude is contagious and, sometimes, those who come to comfort another, go away provoked by his perversity. Many a man, whose heart was full of pity, has, at last, become indignant, and so has increased the sorrow which he intended to comfort—he has grown angry with the man who willfully put aside what was intended to encourage him.

With those few prefatory remarks, let us come to the text. “My soul refused to be comforted.” Note, concerning a man in such a case, first, *possibly he may be right*. Secondly, *he is probably wrong*. Thirdly, *he may one day regret his conduct*, as did Asaph, for, while he tells us that his soul refused to be comforted, he writes it down—not as an example for us to follow, but for our warning!

I. First, then, when a man's soul refuses to be comforted, POSSIBLY HE MAY BE RIGHT.

He may have a great spiritual sorrow and someone who does not at all understand his grief may proffer to him *a consolation which is far too slight*. Not knowing how deep the wound is, this foolish physician may think that it can be healed with any common ointment. I have known men to say to a person in deep distress things which have really aggravated him and his malady, too. “As he that takes away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that sings songs to a heavy heart.” “Oh,” they have said, “there is really nothing the matter with you, after all!” When the arrows of God were drinking up your soul, they have said, “you are low-spirited.” Who would not be low-spirited when he has to face an angry God? “You are very nervous,” says another. “I am afraid you are going off into religious melancholy—you need cheerful society and amusement.” That is poor consolation for one who feels that he is ready to die and that his soul chooses strangling rather than life! Reduced as he is to such a point of agony in his spirit, it is no wonder that the man should put away these comforters and say with Job, “‘Miserable comforters are you all.’ Mine is not a sorrow that can be removed by the bowl or by the violin. Mine is not a grief that can be charmed away with your merriment, or laid to sleep by your ridicule. The wound is too deep and too severe for you to cure.” The man acts rightly when he puts aside these physicians without skill, of whom it may be said, “They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, where there is no peace.” You may send such comforters away from you, for it is right to refuse to be comforted by them. You will do well to say, with Toplady—

*“If my Lord Himself reveals,
No other good I want,
Only Christ my wounds can heal,
Or silence my complaint.
He that suffered in my stead,
Shall my Physician be.
I will not be comforted
Till Jesus comforts me.”*

So, too, it is equally right to refuse to be comforted *when the comfort is untrue*. When a man is under a sense of sin, I have known his friends say to him, “You should not fret; you have not been so very bad. You have been, indeed, a very good sort of fellow.” One says, “I can recollect how kind you were to So-and-So and how honestly you behaved under such-and-such a temptation. You have not committed any very terrible sin—God help the world if you are a great sinner! I do not know what will become of the rest of us.” Another says, “You have only to pray and go to a place of worship, perhaps be a little more regular in your attention to religion and it will all come right again. You are not so bad as you think you are.” Be off with you! Such talk as that is a lie and the man whom God has really awakened to feel his state by nature will refuse to be comforted by such falsehoods as those! However friendship may flatter, the man himself says, “I know that I have broken God’s Law and that I deserve His wrath.” Conscience will not be quieted by all the soft speeches of officious but ignorant friends! I charge you, before God, if the Spirit of Truth has begun to trouble you, never drink these sweet but poisonous consolations! Never think that you are good, or that you can make yourself good. Refuse to be comforted in any such way. That comfort which does not come from truth and from God’s Word, applied by the Holy Spirit, is a comfort to be rejected with scorn!

We have known others who have tried to comfort poor, mourning, repentant sinners *in an unhallowed way*. They have said, “You need to raise your spirits. I can recommend you some fine old wine which will do you a world of good.” Another will say, “You should really mix a little more in society and shake yourself up. You should get with some happy, lively people—they would soon take this melancholy out of you.” Have you ever heard the story which was current in Rowland Hill’s day, and which I believe was true, about a certain comic actor who, at that time, carried all the sway in London and made all laugh who went to see and hear him? The poor man, himself, suffered from depression of spirit to the very worst degree, insomuch that life had become a weariness to him. He went to consult a certain physician who was noted for dealing with hypochondriacs and melancholy persons. The doctor said to him, “Now, my Friend, you are evidently very low in spirits—you should go to the theater. I went the other night, hearing So-and-So, and he made me laugh at such a rate that I am quite sure, if you went and heard him, you would soon get rid of all your melancholy.” The patient took the doctor by the hand and said, “Doctor, I am that man. I have made all London laugh, but my heart is breaking all the while.” What said Solomon? “I said in my heart, Go to now, I will prove you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure. And, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad. And of mirth, What does it do?” I am sure that a person who is really troubled in spirit will increase his sorrow if he attempts to cure it in that way. It is only putting more fuel on the flame. It seems such a mockery to the spirit, when it is burdened with a sense of sin, to tell it to dance and make merriment! “Can I be merry on the brink of Hell?” cries the sorrowful man. “In danger every moment of death and certain that if death came, I should be lost, can I enjoy mirth? It cannot be!”

There was a certain king of Hungary, a pious, gracious man, who was, at one time, deeply cast down and depressed. He had a brother, a worldly courtier, who rallied him about his despondency and, as far as he dared, mocked the poor broken heart of the king. It was the custom in Hungary that if a man was to be suddenly executed, a trumpeter should stand under his window and sound a blast of a certain kind—and then he was taken away to be put to death. The king sent the trumpeter, at the dead of night, to sound that blast under his brother’s window. The courtier knew what it meant, so he arose at once, but he begged the executioner to first take him to the king—and there he stood, white as a sheet and trembling from head to foot. “Brother,” said the king, “what ails you?” “What ails me?” he said, “why, you sent your trumpeter under my window, and he sounded the death-blast, and I suppose that I am to die!” “Well,” answered the king, “you tremble now, yet it is only because you are to die, whereas I have heard the thunder-blast of God and I stand in fear of everlasting judgment! Now, dear brother,” he added, “perhaps you can sympathize with me. I only

sent the trumpeter that you might be enabled to look with a little more compassion upon me when I am in trouble before God.”

Ah, it is not laughter or mirth that will comfort the soul that has heard the voice of God saying, “You have sinned and I must punish you. You have lived a careless, godless life, and now you must come to judgment. Can you answer for one of a thousand when I shall set your *sins* before My face? When I shall bring forth a plummet to try you and to see how you stand, how will you endure that test?” No, no! Put aside all those hollow, unhallowed, empty comforts, and say, “My soul refuses to be comforted in that way.”

In a word, Brothers and Sisters, let me say that if your hearts are troubled on account of sin, refuse every comfort except that which comes through being washed in the precious blood of Christ which can make us whiter than snow! *Refuse every comfort short of being born again and made a new creature in Jesus!* Make this solemn resolve—“I will sooner die in prison than be let out except by His dear pierced hands. I will tremble before the wrath of God rather than I will dare to presume upon His mercy. I will wait till I have looked into the dear face of Him who died for me, and have read my pardon, there, before I will be comforted.” If you resolve not to be comforted except in that Scriptural way, you will do well.

II. But now, in the second place, with brevity, I want to show when this refusal is wrong. PROBABLY HE IS WRONG who says, “My soul refused to be comforted.”

It is quite wrong *if it is a temporal matter that causes your sorrow*. Why do you refuse to be comforted, my Friend? “I have lost one who was very dear to me—my beloved mother.” “I have lost my child,” says another. “It is my husband who has been taken away,” says a third, while a fourth cries, “I have been bereaved of my dearest friend, and my soul refuses to be comforted.” What, then, have you nobody left? “No, nobody.” And has God done you a wrong? Did not your mother belong to Him? Was not your child His? He has only taken back what He lent you for a while—and because you have lost this one cistern, will you never drink of the fountain? Because the star is gone, will you never enjoy the sunlight? O dear Friend, I pray you, talk not so!

“Ah,” says another, “but I have lost my health! I found out, but a few days ago, that I have a deadly disease which will take me off, before long and, therefore, I refuse to be comforted.” What? You will go down to your grave rebelling against God? Why should you not be sick? Better people than you have gone Home by consumption, or cancer, or by some other malady. Would it not be well to make your submission to God about that matter and ask that you may have a Heaven to go to, and a place of joy when death comes? “Ah,” cries another, “but all my earthly prospects are blighted. I thought that I should get on in the world, but now I find that I cannot, the door is locked against me. I can never be comforted.” Are there no other doors? Are you sure that what you call your prospects would have been blessings to you if you had realized them? Does not God know better than you do and will it not be wise for you to pluck up courage and, as the world’s poet says—

*“To take arms against a sea of troubles,
And, by opposing, end them”?*

Better far is it to act like that than to sit down in sullen gloom, or in fierce wrath against God!

“Ah,” says another, “but mine is a very peculiar trouble. My love has been slighted. One whom I loved very dearly has proven faithless and discarded me.” Yes, and your heart is broken, and well it may be. But, my Friend, will you therefore refuse to love Him who never forsakes those on whom He once sets His affection? Would it not be wiser to turn the current of your heart’s love towards Him who is faithful and true, and who loves even to all eternity? That would be a wiser course of action, surely! Refuse not to be comforted, I pray you—you are only driving the dagger deeper and deeper into your wounds. You are making the bitter waters more bitter. All that you do in this direction is but increasing your sorrow. You are like sailors pumping the seawater into the ship instead of pumping it out! You are heaping on another burden, much heavier than God has put there, by refusing to be comforted. Instead of doing that, think of the mercies that you still have, think of how God can bless your troubles to you, think of the shortness of life, think of the glories of Heaven, think of the sufferings of your Lord who endured much more than you are called to bear—and no longer refuse to be comforted, for, if you do, worse troubles may come to you.

I heard a woman say to her child, as I passed her door, “If you don’t leave off crying, I’ll give you something to cry about.” And I have known that to happen with some of the Lord’s children. They have had very small troubles and they

have fretted and rebelled against God until they have had a much greater sorrow—they have had something to cry about! Oh, do not refuse to be comforted, but yield yourself to God! Willingly submit to the discipline of your dear Father's hand.

But now I will suppose that yours is a *spiritual trouble* and yet you refuse to be comforted. Listen to me, I pray you, for a few minutes, for I am sure that I shall describe some of you. The Gospel is meant for sinners, for guilty sinners, for Hell-deserving sinners. It is meant for persons just like you, yet you put it away from you and refuse to be comforted. It would be such a comfort to you if you accepted it—you would have such joys as you never knew before. But no, you will not touch it, you turn aside from it. There are kind friends who, at one time, encouraged you to cast yourself upon Christ, but now you try to avoid them, you get out of their way if you can. You feel so sad that you do not want to be cheered, you scarcely desire to be encouraged. Perhaps I speak to some who have gone so far astray that they say, “We cannot go back to the House of Prayer now.” It is a horrible thing when people fall into such depths of sorrow that when they most need to come and hear, and be comforted, the devil says to them, “Don't go there any more—you will hear nothing for your comfort. The preacher will only confirm your condemnation,” and so he tries to keep them away from the means of Grace. “Oh,” says one, “I used to delight in the Prayer Meeting, but I dare not go to it now! I feel that no prayers will ever be any blessing to me. I used to love to hear Pastor's voice, once, and I have laughed for very joy while hearing it. But now I do not want to listen to it any longer.” No, you are refusing to be comforted.

It is also a terrible thing when Satan leads men to neglect the private means of Grace. They shut up the Bible and do not read it, being afraid that every Word should turn out to be a curse that will only make their sorrow deeper. Or, if they do read a promise, they say, “That is not for us. It may be true to everybody else, but not to us.” As to private prayer, such a man says, “I cannot pray. God would not hear me, anyway, I am such a hypocrite. I have been such a backslider, I am so false, I am so guilty. It is no use for me to try to pray.” That which ought to be the channel of sweetest consolation is neglected by those who refuse to be comforted! Some of them will even go so far as to deny the testimony of God. He says that He is merciful—they say that He is not. God declares that there is a propitiation for sin in the blood of Christ—they say that there is none. Jesus says, “Him that comes to Me I will in no wise cast out”—they say that He would cast them out if they came to Him. He invites them to come—they say that they cannot come. While He bids them to come near to Him and warns them that there is nothing in their way but their own evil hearts—yet they give God the lie and reject the only Savior!

They also refuse the testimony of those of us who are God's witnesses—though this is but a small matter after refusing God's own testimony! We come and say, “Friend, if you will believe, you shall see the Glory of God. If you will simply cast yourself upon Christ, you shall live.” Yet they do not believe us. There are some of you who would not doubt anything that I told you, I am sure that you would not—your esteem and affection would lead you to receive almost anything that I stated as fact—and yet you have put away from you, you have refused and rejected that glorious testimony which it is my life's work to tell to you, namely, that Jesus Christ will receive you and cleanse you from every sin, if you will but come to Him just as you are and put your trust in Him! No, you refuse to be comforted. But how wicked this refusal is! What a wrong you do to our honest love! What a wrong you do to the matchless love of God!

Do you not remember the story of the good man who wanted to teach his little girl what faith was? He went down into the cellar, took away the ladder by which he had descended, and called to his child. “Ruth,” he said, “jump into my arms.” It was very dark down there, so she said, “Please, father, I can't see you.” Then he replied, “you do not need to see me, I can see you—jump down.” With a merry laugh she sprang into the dark and was, in an instant, resting on her father's bosom. Now, God bids us do just that! Can you not, by faith, take a leap in the dark, into your Heavenly Father's arms? This is what you will do if you are really His child—but you will not do it unless you can say, “I will trust and not be afraid.”

I will tell you why people sometimes refuse to be comforted. One says, “I have been depressed such a long time.” Yes, but when the night is long, is that any proof that the morning will not come? It looks to me to be a good argument that the daylight is not very far off. “Oh,” says another, “but my depression is so deep! You cannot conceive how miserable I am.” Can I not? I think I have been in that dark dungeon where you now are and in the very corner where you are hiding. But even if I could not fully sympathize with you, the depth of your distress is to me an argument for your comfort, for God will first help the most helpless—and where there is the most misery, there will His mercy most swiftly come. So I

look upon you with great hopefulness! If you are so thoroughly broken down, the Lord will surely speak comfort to *you* among the very first. “Ah,” says another friend, “but I am under the impression that I shall never be saved.” Perhaps you are, but I am under another impression, namely, that you *will* be saved! And I am under another impression, which I know is true—that is, if you will only cast yourself upon Christ by a simple faith, you shall be saved at once! I know that impression is true because here is the seal that made it—“Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” These are the words of Him who cannot lie or change! Do you still refuse to be comforted?

“Oh,” says one, “but if you knew me, Sir, you would not talk so, for I have been such a great sinner!” I think that is very likely. “Oh, but I mean it, Sir!” I hope you do. I trust you are not adding lies to your other sins. “But, Sir, I have been *such* a sinner!” Yes, I know what you mean, and I believe it. And I will tell you something about yourself that you probably do not believe—you are a worse sinner than you think you are. “Oh, that cannot be!” you say. But I tell you that it is—you do not know what a sinner you are. Sin is a more horrible thing than imagination, itself, can conceive it to be. “But I deserve the hottest place in Hell,” says one. Yes, but suppose that it is so, and that all you say is true? Yet, in the name of God, I tell you that “all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men,” for, “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” What is your sin? Have you committed falsehood, theft, fornication, murder? Is there any crime which you have committed which I dare not mention—some secret sin which has polluted you and left you a black blot upon the face of God’s earth? Yet come along with you, whoever you may be! If you are the sweepings of Helldom, yet come along with you, for Jesus Christ is able to save to the uttermost—let me say that word again—“*He is able to save to the uttermost* them that come unto God by Him.”

Do not refuse to be comforted, for if you do, you will be a spiritual suicide! The man who will not eat and so dies of starvation is as much a suicide as he that puts the pistol to his head and blows out his brains. He that rejects Christ, damns himself as surely as he that gives himself, body and soul, to the devil. He that refuses what God has provided and will not have pardon through the precious blood, dashes himself upon the bosses of Jehovah’s buckler and fixes himself upon the point of the javelin of Divine Justice! Do not do it, I implore you! Be not among those who refuse to be comforted!

III. But now, lastly, for my time is nearly gone, YOU WILL HAVE TO REPENT OF REFUSING TO BE COMFORTED.

Possibly you will have to repent in a very terrible way. Suppose, now, that you should refuse to be comforted, and so should *willfully go into a yet darker and deeper dungeon of despair*? Suppose that your Christian friends should grow weary of you—I hope they will not—but suppose that godly man, or that godly woman who has so long followed you up, should, at last, despair of you and leave? Where would you be, then? And suppose that because you shut your eyes to the Light of God, God should take it away? What if you should have to move to a region where nobody will want to comfort you, where no minister will labor and travail for your soul’s salvation, where you shall sit under a dry and lifeless ministry, or perhaps under none at all—and you shall be left to go on down, down, down? God prevent it! But if ever that should be your sad lot, I hope there may still remain about you sufficient relics of life to make you say, “Oh, that I had been willing to be comforted when I might have been, and had accepted the testimony of Grace before I had passed beyond the reach of those blessed means of mercy!” But I do not mean to dwell upon that thought, for I have something much more cheerful to say.

I hope that many here present who have refused to be comforted, will yet regret it *when they shall be enjoying the fullness of comfort*. One of the things that I have sometimes said to myself, when I have been alone, has been this, “How foolish you are!” And if anybody had heard me, he would have known that I was upbraiding myself in the spirit of Christian and Hopeful when they were locked up in Giant Despair’s castle. You remember how Bunyan tells us that the pilgrims began to pray on Saturday, about midnight, and continued in prayer till almost the break of day, when Christian called out, “What a fool am I, thus to lie in a stinking dungeon, when I may as well walk at liberty! I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle.” So he pulled it out of his bosom, put it in the lock, opened the door of the dungeon, and they soon were out! When they came to the outer door leading to the castle yard, the key fitted that, and they went through. Then they came to the great iron gate—the lock went horribly hard, but Christian kept working away at it and, at last, the bolt shot back, the big gate was open—and they escaped.

But Giant Despair heard the noise and came down. And he was just about to fall upon his poor prisoners, when he was taken with a shaking fit—I have always been glad that the cruel old giant used to have epilepsy, so he could not catch the two pilgrims—and away they went! I am sure that when they got out, Christian kept saying to himself, “What a fool I have been! What a fool I have been! I have been lying in that dungeon all this while, when I might have been out ever so long ago.” If I ever hear you, who have had a similar experience, cry, “What a fool I have been,” I shall say, “That is quite right! You have hit the nail on the head this time,” for, whenever a man doubts the mercy of God, the best thing that I can say of him is that he is a fool! I could say a far worse thing than that, but when you refuse the sweet mercy, the tender love, the overflowing forgiveness, the generous kindness of the heart of Christ, you certainly act like a fool. And then, when you come to your right mind, I am sure that you will ask yourself, “How could I have refused so long to be comforted?”

Now, finally, *when you and I get to Heaven*, we shall regret that we ever refused to be comforted. “Oh,” says a poor sinner over there, “now you are drawing the long bow.” Which do you mean—for myself or for you? “Why, Sir, you said, ‘When you and I get to Heaven.’” Very well, which is the, “you,” and which is the, “I,” that you are quibbling about? Do you think that it is such a very great wonder that *I* should get to Heaven? If you do, I altogether agree with you, for it will be a wonder, indeed! “No,” you say, “I mean that it will be a wonder if *I* get there.” Yes, and I, too, think it will be so. You and I will be about equal wonders if we get there—and when we are there, by the rich mercy of God, by the infinite love of Christ—and we *shall* be, you know, as surely as we are here if we will but believe in Christ—you and I will meet together, one day, in Heaven. Why should we not? I will promise to meet you there! Come, we will make a bargain of it—I am going by Christ, the Way, and if you go by Christ, the Way, we shall get to the same place! And there will be the King in His beauty. I will guarantee you that you will not take much notice of me, or I of you, for the sight of the King will be so ravishing! Oh, what a Countenance! Oh, what a Glory! Oh, that matchless Lover of our souls! And I believe that, then, we shall, each of us, say, “However could I have refused to be comforted by Him when He had loved me with an everlasting love, when He had chosen me from before the foundation of the world, when He had bought me with His precious blood, when He had sought me by His Holy Spirit, when He had clothed me with His righteousness, when He had taken me into the family and made me His brother and a child of God, when He had gone to Heaven on purpose to prepare a place for me and sent His Spirit down to earth to prepare me for the place? Yet there was a time when I refused to be comforted by Him!” I think, if we could weep in Heaven, we would certainly weep glad tears of deep and solemn regret that ever we should have stood out against Him to whom we are married. Oh, on that wondrous wedding day, when He shall consummate His love and ours, He will *not* say, “You were difficult in the wooing. You refused Me many times.” But I do believe that I shall say to myself, “How could I have refused Him? How could I have treated Him so terribly?” And as I look at His dear hands, still scarred, I shall say to Him, “O my Savior, I cost You Your life, Your heart’s blood, and though I long refused You, yet You would have me! Oh, love unutterable! How I will love You throughout eternity!” But what regret we must feel that we ever rejected Him! Do not refuse to be comforted, dear Friend—come along with you and take at once the mercy that Jesus waits to give!

One little illustration, and I have done. I have noticed that when a dog is very hungry, he does not stand upon etiquette. There is a butcher’s shop and no invitation is given to him to enter—but he makes himself very free and in he goes! There is a very nice little bit of meat on the block and the butcher has not the courtesy to offer it to him, though there is no creature that would more welcome it. So what does my friend, the dog, do? Why, he just makes a grab at it, seizes the meat, and then away he goes down the street! Now, if he can only get time to eat it, I will defy the butcher to get it away from him if he has taken it right into himself! I want you, poor Sinner, to be like that dog! There is the mercy of God—you do not believe that you ought to have it. Come and lay hold of it, for let me tell you this—Christ never takes away from the jaws of faith what faith once dares to seize! Take it and you have it! Believe even if you seem to have no right to believe! Commit a heavenly felony upon Divine Mercy! If the devil tells you that it is felony, come and take the mercy all the same, for he can never steal it from you! If you once get it, you have it forever. Oh, take it, then!—

*“Artful doubts and reasoning be
Nailed with Jesus to the tree.”*

Come and trust Him and He is yours forever! The Lord help you to do it, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 77.

This “Psalm of Asaph” has a mournful tone in it. At times the writer is in the deeps, but we may be quite sure that he will end the Psalm cheerfully because he begins it with prayer. No matter what sorrow falls to your lot, if you can pray, you will rise out of it. When Jonah went to the bottoms of the mountains, in the belly of the fish, and took to praying, it was well with him. If you, dear troubled Soul, can but pray, you need not despair.

Verse 1. *I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me.* You see, he cried, and he cried again—and at his second call the door of mercy was opened to him. God sometimes makes petitioners wait that they may become more earnest and that they may really feel the value of the thing they are seeking. So Asaph says, “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice.” That is the way to get the blessing! You will often find, dear Friends, that it helps you to pray if you use your voice in prayer—there is no necessity to speak, you can pray without the use of the lips—but it often helps your thoughts if you are able to express them aloud.

2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted.* He could not sleep, so he took to prayer. Which is the greater mercy—prayer or sleep—I cannot say. In the Psalmist’s case, I suppose that prayer, just then, was better than sleep. His trouble so pressed upon him that it gave him no respite whatever—so all through the night he continued to cry unto the Lord.

3. *I remembered God, and was troubled.* God is the fountain of all comfort, yet there are times when even a godly man can find no comfort in God. Asaph, perhaps, remembered the dark side of God’s attributes. Justice seemed to stand over him with a drawn sword. Holiness frowned upon him. Power threatened to crush him. Truth stood up to condemn him. He could not find any comfort, even in his God.

3. *I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.* He was covered right up, like a ship that has gone down in deep water. “I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed. Selah.” Whenever you see this word, “Selah,” it means lift up the notes, retune the strings of the harp, get the mind and heart ready for something in a rather different strain.

4. *You hold my eyes waking: I am so troubled that I cannot speak.* You thought that the Psalmist was going to say, “I cannot sleep.” He has given up the attempt to do that, so now he tries to talk, but utterance fails him. Shallow brooks sound as they flow, but deep griefs are still, and a man may be so troubled in heart that he cannot speak—he can only explain his sorrow by groaning and tears.

5, 6. *I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night. I commune with my own heart: and my spirit makes diligent search.* He looked back into the records of ancient history to see if God had ever forsaken a praying man. He thought upon his own experience and he remembered how, when it was night with him before, God made him to sing like a nightingale in the darkness. So he asks himself, “Has God changed? Will He give me no songs, now? Will He leave me to perish?” Thus have the best of men, in their sore troubles, had to put to themselves solemn questions, but they have not always been able to answer them.

7-9. *Will the Lord cast me off forever? And will He be favorable no more? Is His mercy clean gone forever? Does His promise fail forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Selah.* If you are a child of God, yet never had to ask these questions, you ought to be very grateful. But if you have to ask them, be very thankful that Asaph asked them before you! And believe that as he had a comfortable answer to them, so shall you. It is always a comfort when you can see the footprints of another man in the mire and the slough, for if that man passed through unharmed, so may you, for his God shall also be your Helper. But only think of this inspired Psalmist, this sweet singer of Israel, being so troubled and broken in spirit that he says, “Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?”

10. *And I said, This is my infirmity.* “This is a trouble appointed to me, I must bear it.” Or, “This is because of the weakness of my faith. God has not changed—it is I who has changed. ‘This is my infirmity.’”

10. *But I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High.* “I will remember what God has done with that right hand of His. I will remember when I used to sit at His right hand—

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

*But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill.”*

It is a good thing to make a record of your experiences when they are sweet. You may need that record, one of these days. I do not believe in always keeping a diary, for one is apt to put down more than may be true, but there are times of special mercy when I would say, “Write that down for a memorial and keep it by you, for the day may come when that record will minister comfort to you.”

11, 12. *I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will meditate also on all Your work.* “I will not have any more of *my* works—I will meditate on Your work. I will get to You, my God, and think of what You have done; especially of Your works of Grace, how brightly they shine! I will meditate also on all your work.”

12, 13. *And talk of Your doings. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary.* Or, “is in holiness.” God’s way is sometimes in the sea, but it is always a holy way. God never deals with His people, or with any of His creatures unjustly or unrighteously. “I cannot trace God,” Luther once said, “but I can trust Him.” And from that saying of his we have coined the phrase, “To trust Him when you cannot trace Him.” When you are unable to see God’s footprints because He rides upon the storm, yet still say, “Your way, O God, is in holiness.”

13, 14. *Who is so great a God as our God? You are the God that does wonders: You have declared Your strength among the people.* See how the Psalmist comforts himself with what God had done—and he went right back to the Red Sea for his illustration! Somehow, God’s people in the olden times always liked to sing the Song of Moses. By a kind of instinct, they thought of the Red Sea, as if to remember the redemption that God worked out for His people when He destroyed Pharaoh and all his host. Let us go there, too, and think of the Red Sea of our Savior’s blood where all our sins were drowned!

15-17. *You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw You, O God, the waters saw You; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: Your arrows also went abroad.* I suppose that there was a storm at the time of the passage of the Red Sea, so that the deep-mouthed thunder spoke to the quaking heart of Pharaoh, while the flashing lightning set the heavens on flame and made Egypt’s chivalry tremble as the horse and his rider went down into the sea.

18, 19. *The voice of Your thunder was in the Heaven: the lightning lighted the world: the earth trembled and shook. Your way is in the sea.* Where you cannot see His footprints, “in the sea,” where there seems to be no way at all, there God makes a highway! Are you in such trouble, dear Friend, that you cannot see the possibility of escape? Remember this verse—“Your way is in the sea.”

19, 20. *And Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps are not known. You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.* There the Psalm stops, just when you thought there was more to be said. The Holy Spirit knows how to leave off—and He closes abruptly with a sublimity seldom equaled. God’s people need to know no more than this, that God is leading them! Asaph does not say that Moses and Aaron led them—“*You* led *Your* people.” Moses and Aaron were only the Lord’s servants and under-shepherds—“You led *Your* people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” May He always be our Leader! Amen.

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