STRONG CONSOLATION FOR THE LORD'S REFUGEES

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A SERMON
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"That by two immutable things,
in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation,
who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."
Hebrews 6:18

WHEN we read such a choice verse as this we are apt at once to conclude that it "belongeth to them that are of full age, even to those who by reason of use, have had their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

We set this aside as a choice morsel reserved for those who have worn well and borne the burden and heat of the day, who have attained to full assurance of faith, and therefore are able to lay hold upon rich covenant provisions. Let us at once correct this mistake, for the passage belongs to a very early form of Christian experience. It relates, indeed, to the lowest degree of Christian grace.

Let me read it again. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, *we* might have a strong consolation." To whom does the "*we*" refer? We "who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." The strong consolation mentioned in the text belongs to those who have fled to Christ for refuge, and surely this is at the very beginning of the divine life.

It belongs also to those who lay hold upon the hope of the Gospel, and this also is a very elementary part of Christian experience. If you have only newly fled to Christ for refuge, and if by a child-like faith you have freshly laid hold upon the hope that is set before you, then the riches of grace are yours, and God's oath and promise are intended to afford you strong consolation.

As far as this text is concerned, you need not examine yourselves to search for strong faith, or deep experience, or great growth in grace, or advanced holiness, for if you are but Christ's refugee, and a grasper of the Lord's promise, you may rejoice in the two immutable things and rest in peace.

I gather from God's beginning thus early to encourage His people, and from His laying down so much comfort for them at the outset, that He would have them happy all their lives. It is not the Lord's mind that the King's children should go mourning all their days. If you hang your harps upon the willows, it is not by divine precept that you do so, for His Word to the prophet is, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably unto Jerusalem."

He would have you clothed in raiment of rejoicing, yea, He desires that your joy may be full. If your heavenly Father would not have you sorrowful, will you not consent to His loving wish concerning you, and drink deeply into the comfort which He provides? The Lord knew of old that His people would want comforting, for He foresaw our infirmities and our afflictions from our birth. He knew what creatures of the dust we are, how frail and feeble, and therefore He has ordained abundant consolation, that His poor, weak, tried, and tempted people may be strengthened and cheered.

Carefully notice that the Lord has laid most stress upon the point which is most vital to the believer's comfort. He knew right well that we should often doubt His great grace, and think the covenant way of salvation to be too good to be true. And therefore that we might have no excuse for mistrust or suspicion, He has first pledged His Word, and then has condescendingly uttered a solemn oath, swearing by Himself that henceforth we might never raise a question about the foundations upon which the eternal settlements of love are laid.

To believers He has put salvation and all other covenant blessings beyond dispute, in order that all who are interested in them might have the firmest assurance concerning them. The worst possible trial to a believer is to have it suggested to him that the Gospel is not true, that pardon through the precious blood is a fiction, and that God is not reconciled through the atoning sacrifice.

If we are absolutely certain as to the truth of God's Gospel, and our own salvation thereby, then all other things are of small concern to us. And therefore has the Lord fixed on a sure basis of promise and oath this cornerstone of our comfort, and has set His promise in such a light that it becomes blasphemy to doubt it.

Our loving Father knew that we should often be assailed by the spirit of distrust, and this has led Him so abundantly to certify the truth of the things which He has promised. You know, beloved, guilt is very suspicious. When you have done wrong to a man, you cannot believe him. Nothing renders you so full of doubt towards another as your own consciousness of having acted unjustly towards him.

Now, when a sense of guilt comes over the soul, nature begins to say, "Can the Lord be a sin-pardoning Lord? Can He love me as He says He does? Such a base, ungrateful rebel as I—can I really have part in so great a salvation as that which God has provided and set forth?"

Knowing the suspicious nature of a guilty heart, God has made His oath and promise to be two sheet-anchors to the soul, that our faith may ride out every storm of doubt.

The greatness of the mercies themselves often staggers us. When we consider God's electing love, when we reckon the amazing cost of redemption, and when we see the high honor of adoption, union to Christ, and heirship with Him, we naturally exclaim, "Whence is this to me?" And alas, we are apt to go a step further and say, "Can it be true? Is it not all a pleasant dream? Has the Lord really made me one with Christ, and called me His beloved, and will He prepare for me also a place among the glorified?"

Now, lest the greatness of the blessing should stagger our confidence, the Lord has ensured every blessing to us by a covenant rendered valid by His own act and deed—a covenant signed, sealed, and delivered so as to be beyond all question.

Moreover, the Lord knew that we should doubt His faithfulness, because we ourselves are so false. We remember many a broken promise, broken though made before the Lord, and persons who are untruthful themselves are very apt to think others so. Therefore, our God, knowing the deceitful nature of our hearts, foresaw that we should be an unbelieving race, and has set two swords at the heart of our suspicions and questions—slaying unbelief by His oath and promise.

Besides, our nature runs so cross to the whole system of divine grace that we need much assuring before we can believe it. We are always for working, deserving, and earning. Phariseeism is the religion of nature. We boast of our merit, and yet we are as meritless as Satan himself.

The idea of working and deserving appears to be ingrained in our nature, and as certain as the blood is red, so sure is the heart self-righteous. We cannot divest ourselves of the idea of salvation as payment for work done—that it is a gift, a free gift of grace—it is hard to make us believe. Even after conversion the old tendency betrays itself.

We steal away from Jesus to Moses as often as we get the opportunity, and then begin to doubt free grace. Therefore, the Lord has fettered, and bound us down to believing with golden chains of promise and oath. "It must be so," says He, "the grace that I have revealed is indeed true, for I have sworn by myself." Beloved, we ought earnestly to abhor that wicked legality of ours which so often does despite to the grace of God, casts suspicion upon His mercy, and brings our souls into bondage.

Another door for doubt is found in the fear of presuming. It is right that we should be fearful of being comforted in a wrong manner, for nothing is more deadly than false peace. The Lord approves of that holy jealousy which leads us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith. I am always sorrowful when hallowed fear departs from a man, so that he no longer dreads self-deception. But yet the fear of presuming may be perverted by the evil one, and then it becomes a snare to our feet.

Beloved, be sure of this, that it is no presumption to believe God. The presumption lies in doubting Him. Faith is sister to humility, and mistrust is neighbor to pride. But lest any of you, tremblers, should be afraid to take the promise of God as being verity and truth to you, behold JEHOVAH swears it, and now do you dare doubt it?

You dare not question the veracity of God who thus with "amens" and "verilys" pledges His own eternal power and Godhead that the covenant of His grace shall stand fast forever. Thus does God lay the stress of assurance where we are apt to put the force of our doubt, and by making His own promise sure, He affords to us consolation of the strongest order.

At this time, hoping that some of God's people may be comforted thereby, we shall describe the conditions of mind to which the text is addressed, and the blessing which it brings. The text speaks of three states—first, we have "*fled for refuge.*" Secondly, we have "*laid hold upon the hope set before us.*" And thirdly, we have "*a strong consolation.*"

I. First, WE HAVE "FLED FOR REFUGE."

Although the original Greek does not quite so plainly refer to a refuge as our authorized version would suggest, the figure here used is undoubtedly that of the city of refuge to which the man-slayer fled when he was in danger from the avenger of blood. I shall not attempt to draw the parallel at any length, pleasing as such a work would be, for you can easily trace it out for yourselves. I will only follow the figure so far as I need it for my present purpose.

The man-slayer, the moment he had in the heat of passion killed a man, became an apt representative of an awakened sinner who *discovers himself to be in an evil case.* There lies the body of the man he has murdered with a hasty blow. He knows not what to do. Can you conceive the rush of unhappy feeling which overwhelms his mind? May none of us ever know the pang of seriously injuring, much less of killing, any man by accident.

But to have done it in the heat of wrath, in sudden passion—how terrible! What must be the horror of the man's soul! He sees the clay-cold corpse upon the ground, and wishes he could die too! Blood is on his hand and on the soil, and his conscience hears a voice appealing to God for vengeance!

He looks around and trembles at the fall of a leaf. Everything is changed. The plot of land which his father left him, once so pleasant, is now a horrible Aceldama, a field of blood. He cannot endure to look upon the homestead which once he loved. He turns his eyes upward and the very skies seem to frown! He wonders that the earth beneath him does not open and swallow him up.

Blood smears are on everything. Even when he shuts his eyes, he sees the crimson blot. He knows not what to do—to go to his house, or to hide himself in yonder thicket, or to plunge into the river which flows hard by. He is in a terrible state of mind, the furies hover around him, and a thousand stings of serpents are fixed in him.

I do remember well when I was in a similar state of heart as to my sins, for I saw my Lord upon the tree, and felt that I was guilty of His death.

"My conscience felt, and own'd the guilt,
And plunged me in despair;
I saw my sins His blood had spilt,
And help'd to nail Him there.

"Alas. I knew not what I did;
But now my tears are vain;
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord have slain."

I discovered that I had so sinned as to have involved myself in eternal destruction. What a horrible discovery it was! Everything had been pleasant enough before, but lo, I found myself a rebel against the Most High, and my very existence was dreadful beyond conception.

Whither should I flee, or how should I escape? An awful dread was over me, and I could not bear it. Hell had begun to burn within my spirit, and the undying worm had commenced its gnawings. It is the work of the Spirit of God to convince men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come—and it is well when the soul begins to fear—for then it begins to live.

The alarmed man-slayer would next, if he could calm himself at all, consider what he could do, and he would soon come to the conclusion that *he could neither defy, nor escape, nor endure the doom which threatened him.* The avenger of blood would be sure to be after him.

Could he resist him? Would it do to take up arms and defend himself? Could he hope to escape from the vengeance of the tribe by hiding in some secret den or cave of the earth? Or could he endure the wrath of the avenger? He knew that he could not, for the avenger of blood would seek blood for blood, and not be satisfied till he had taken his life.

Now, it is altogether in vain that men dream of defying the Lord. They would be utterly consumed as stubble in the flame. The Lord of hosts is terrible in arms, and we cannot stand out against Him. We may have thought ourselves strong, but when it comes to an actual facing the Lord before the bar of judgment, in our own conscience we find that we cannot stand before Him for an instant, and our loins are loosed with fear.

As to escaping from Him, how impossible we feel it to be! The top of Carmel has no caverns in which we could lie concealed, and in the deeps of the sea, the crooked serpent, commissioned by God, would find us out. The wings of the morning could not bear us swiftly enough to enable us to escape from the right hand of JEHOVAH, nor could the thick darkness cover us from His eye.

As to bearing the penalty of His wrath, that we know to be impossible, for should He once begin to deal with us in vengeance, we must be driven from His presence into the lowest hell. Thus in the days of our conviction no hope was discovered to natural reason, and our dread increased till fear took hold upon us, and pain as of a woman in travail, for we saw what we had done, but we knew not what we could do to escape from the consequences thereof.

Then there came to our ear what perhaps we had heard before, but had heard so indifferently as never to have really understood it—*we heard of a divinely provided way of escape*. The man-slayer had, perhaps, aforetime left unnoticed the provision of the six cities of refuge, because he had then no personal need of them.

But as soon as he became a homicide, those places became all important in his esteem, and his mind admired that merciful statute which had ordained a shelter from blood-revenge. When under a sense of sin, men value Christ Jesus. We ourselves heard of God's way of salvation, but we never studied it, set our hearts upon it, and labored to understand it fully, until we saw our guilt before us in all its blood-red hue.

How wonderful is the system of grace! Here it is—that as in Adam we die through Adam's sin, so if we be in Christ, we live through Christ's righteousness. The way of escape for the sinner lies not in himself, but in another. He must come under another headship, and then he is saved. Under the first natural headship, we became sinners, and under the second gracious headship, we become righteous.

How consoling it is to perceive that the second Adam, in whom we become righteous through believing, has the power to save us, because the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and He has made atonement to the full. Instead of dealing personally with every man in Christ, and asking from him the penalty due for sin, God in His mercy has taken the whole sin of those in Christ in the bulk, and asked payment for the whole mass at the hand of their great covenant head.

The Lord has gone, in fact, to the second Adam, to Christ Jesus, and presented to Him the dread account of all the sin of His redeemed, and said to Him, "Will You discharge all this?" and He has answered, "Ay," and has carried up to the cross all the gigantic load of sin, and made an end of it there.

He shouted the victory, saying, "It is finished," for the whole debt of His people was forever blotted out. Their sins were buried in His sepulchre, never to rise again. But He Himself has risen, having discharged Himself personally of all the liabilities which He took upon Himself on our behalf, and so we also are discharged, for He died for our offenses, but He rose again for our justification.

Now, when a man begins to perceive that his sin can be reckoned with by God otherwise than according to what he has personally been and done, when he learns that God regards believers as being in Christ, and therefore reckons with Christ for them, then his soul finds peace. Behold this, and admire.

I, believing, am dead to sin, for Jesus died. I, believing, have borne JEHOVAH'S wrath, for Jesus bore it on my behalf! Behold, He says unto the believer, "Thy warfare is accomplished and thy sin is pardoned, for thou hast received at the Lord's hands in the person of His Son double for all thy sins." The believer's debt was imputed to the Lord Jesus, and therefore it is no more on the believer. He is discharged, and may go his way in peace.

Dear hearers, such a plan as this may not please some of you who have never felt the horror of guilt, and have known no need of a Savior, but it charms us. You have always been so good and excellent that you feel no joy at the thought of another standing in your stead. But a man who is alarmed, distressed, amazed, and conscious of his guilt, when he hears of this strange, this wondrous plan of not imputing

unto us our trespasses, because God has laid all our iniquity upon Jesus, our surety and substitute, rejoices when he hears of it, and at once flies to it.

The text, however, not only implies that we need the refuge and have heard of it, but that *we have fled to it*. To flee away from self to the provided refuge is a main act of faith. The manslayer left his house, his wife, his children, his farm, and the oxen with which he was ploughing, he left everything to flee away to the city of refuge.

That is just what a man does when he resolves to be saved by grace—he leaves everything he calls his own, renounces all his rights and privileges which he thought he possessed by nature. Yea, he confesses to have lost his own natural right to live, and he flies for life to the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

The manslayer had no right to live except that he was in the city of refuge, no right to anything except that he was God's guest within those enclosing walls. And so do we relinquish heartily and thoroughly, once and forever, all claims and rights arising out of our supposed merits. We hasten away from self that Christ may be all in all to us. We have "fled for refuge."

Observe that fleeing for refuge implies that a man flees from his sins. He sees it and he repents of it, but he flees away to Christ, the sin bearer directly. His thoughts return gloomily to the sad memories of the past, but from all these he flies to Christ. He thinks of himself as under the law, and he soon finds that he cannot keep it, and therefore the law curses him for his failures. He will then have no consolation unless he flees away to Christ who kept the law on our behalf. In Christ is our refuge from the law and nowhere else.

When despair hovers over a man like a black cloud charged with lightning, he must run to Jesus. "How can you be justified?" asks the wounded conscience. The answer must be found in Jesus. When we fly to Christ, the fulfiller of the law, despair vanishes at once, for we see that we are righteous in the righteousness of Christ, and accepted in the Beloved.

Every now and then we foolishly go back to our own self-righteousness, but our wisdom is to flee from this as from the plague. We cannot live in that abomination. Creature righteousness is all a lie and a forgery—it ought to be regarded by us as dross and dung, for it is no better. Flee from it with all your might.

A Christian man is always fleeing from himself. It is the business of his life to escape alike from his sin and his righteousness—that he may never regard himself before the Lord as an individual, sole and separate from Christ, but only as one with Jesus, and therefore in Him, dear to the Father's heart—cleansed, justified, and accepted. May the Holy Ghost keep us to this.

You will perhaps ask me, "How came the apostle Paul to get where this text lands him? What line of thought led him to speak about the strong consolations which furnish the Lord's fugitives with such confidence?"

He had been speaking of three matters which represent the confidence to which we flee. He spoke just before (Heb 6:13-16), of the covenant which the Lord made with Abraham in which He had sworn with an oath that He would bless him and his seed. Now it is understood that the seed of Abraham is, first, the Lord Jesus, and secondly, all believers—for the covenant was by promise, as in another place the apostle proves, and was made with a seed, not after the flesh, but after the spirit, so that Abraham was the father of the faithful, or of all who have faith.

Now a covenant firmly established by oath with the father is sure to the heirs, and accordingly Paul says, "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath." He then who is a believer is certified by the oath of God that in blessing He will bless him. This is sure to all believers and sure to me and to you if we are believers. As believers we flee away from ourselves and the covenant of works to the sure covenant of unchanging grace, and our consolation is strong, because God is true.

The apostle had also been speaking of the inheritance of rest which was typified by Canaan. An oath was sworn by God that the unbelievers in the wilderness should not enter into His rest, and this was tantamount to an oath that believers should enter into His rest, seeing that some must enter therein. Now, we, because we are believers, and upon that ground alone, do enter into rest.

Believing in Him who justifies the ungodly, we by faith enjoy peace with God, nor need we fear but what we shall enter into rest eternal, for the oath of God will bring us in.

Furthermore, the apostle referred to the eternal priesthood of Christ as set forth in the type of Melchisedec, and there again we have a matter in which promise and oath unite. In a after chapter, Paul opens up what he had already mentioned, "For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, the LORD sware and will not repent, thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."

By the oath of God, the Son is consecrated for evermore, and having offered one sacrifice for sins forever, He sits at the right hand of God, able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him. Well then, I, a poor convinced sinner, without any other hope, do flee away from myself to the eternal priesthood of Christ, and to the sacrifice that He has offered once for all. And I know, because God has sworn it, that His sacrifice avails for me and for all believers.

In thus fleeing for refuge to our great Lord and Priest, we find a strong consolation in the oath and promise of God.

The one solemn question is—beloved hearers, have you fled for refuge? Are you the Lord's refugees today? Are you fugitives daily from self and sin? Are you in Christ as in a city of refuge, and is He the sole ground of your security? If so, the strongest consolations are your portion.

II. But secondly, WE HAVE COME TO "LAY HOLD."

Here we have a change of figure, unless we recall the case of Joab, who fled for refuge to the temple, and laid hold upon the horns of the altar. We will not insist upon that rare incident, for probably it did not occur to the apostle's mind.

Beloved, we feel that we need a refuge, and we find that God has been pleased to set one forth. He says, "Whosoever believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." He bids us cease from all hopes of merit, and simply come and believe Him, and trust in the great work which His well-beloved Son has finished for us.

He bids us accept the great plan of Christ's headship on our behalf, and His sacrificial suffering in our room and stead. Justification by faith in Jesus is set before us. What are we to do according to the text? We have to "*lay hold*" upon it. We are not commanded to prepare ourselves for it, or to get what the Romish writers call, "the grace of congruity," by which we should be fit for it, but it is to be laid hold upon by us just as we are.

Everybody here knows what it is to lay hold upon a support or a treasure. Sinner, that is just what you have to do with Christ! You have to lay hold upon Him by faith. You are drowning—there is a rope thrown to you. What have you to do? "Lay hold." You are not to look at your hands to see whether they are clean enough. No, lay hold, dirty hands or clean hands.

"But my hand is weak." Lay hold, brother, as best you can, weak hand or not, for while you are laying hold of Christ, God is laying hold of you, you may rest assured of that. If you have the faintest grip of Christ, Christ has a firm grip of you such as never shall be relaxed. Your business at this moment is to lay hold and keep hold.

God has given us this blessed hope, that those who are in Christ are for Christ's sake forgiven all their iniquities, are accepted and are secure of everlasting life, and of this we have only to lay hold. What does it mean? What is to be done in order to lay hold?

Well, first, we must *believe the Gospel to be true*. Do you, all of you, believe it to be true that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them? Yes, I know you believe that God has sent His Son to be a propitiation for sin. So far, so good. The next thing is to *apprehend for yourselves this truth.* Christ justifies believers. He is worthy of trust—trust Him—and He has justified you.

"I do not feel it," says one. You do not need to feel it. It is a matter of believing. Believe in Jesus, and because you are a believer, be assured that you are saved. "But I thought I should feel," says another. Yes, you shall feel enough by and by, but now there is a question between you and God. Is the Lord a liar or not? "He that believeth not has made God a liar," and on the other hand, "He that believeth on him has set to his seal that God is true." Which of the two is it to be?

God with a solemn oath declares that believers are blessed, being the seed of Abraham, blessed according to His covenant. With an oath He declares that believers shall enter into His rest. With an oath He declares that His Son, the everlasting Melchisedec, is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. What then? Do you believe Him or not?

"Oh," says one, "I believe God's Word, but I doubt its application to myself." You do not believe it unless you believe it for yourself, for there are no exceptions made in the case. If you believe, you are blessed. If you believe, you shall have rest. If you believe, the great Melchisedec lives for you, and pleads for you, and you are saved.

If you believe—there is the point—if you honor God by accepting His Word as true, and by relying upon Christ for yourself—then is it well with you. If you say, "Yes, the rope is a strong one, and I believe it will support a sinking man," why not lay hold upon it? There is the vital point of faith—practically to believe God by resting one's own eternal destiny upon the truth which we say we believe. "Lay hold on the hope."

While a man lays hold upon a thing he goes no further, but *continues to cling to it*. We have fled for refuge, but we flee no further than the hope which we now lay hold upon, namely, eternal life in Christ Jesus. We never wish to get beyond God's promise in Christ Jesus to believers, the promise of salvation to faith. We are satisfied with that, and there we rest.

"Laying hold" in the forcible language of the Greek, would imply firm retention of that which we have seized. I remember well when first I laid hold on the hope that God had set before me. I was terribly afraid to grasp it, for I thought it was too good to be true. But I saw that there was no other chance for me, and therefore I was driven right out of myself to be bold, and venture all.

I knew that I must flee somewhere, and it seemed to be that or nothing. I was forced to believe in the wondrous plan of salvation by another and in another, even in salvation by Jesus Christ. I made a dash at it, believed it, and joy and peace filled my spirit. That is twenty-seven years ago now, and I am laying hold upon it still.

Brethren and sisters, I have not gone an inch beyond the old hope. Jesus Christ was all in all to me then, and He is the same now, only I am more resolved than ever to lean my soul on Him and upon Him alone. I do profess to you this day I dare not place a shadow of reliance on any sermons I have preached, or any alms I have given, or any prayers I have offered, or any communions with Christ I have enjoyed, or on anything that I have done, or said, or thought.

But I rely wholly on what Jesus did, and is doing, as my covenant Head and Surety. I know He bore my sin in His own body on the tree. I know He buried my sin where it never shall have a resurrection, and I know He stands as my representative at the eternal throne, and I also know that I shall soon be where He is, because I am one with Him, since I have believed in Him.

Now, my friend, if you believe in Him too, if it be but five minutes ago that you received faith, you are just as safe in the hand of Jesus as those of us who have been in Him for years. If by an act of trust, you do but accept what God has set forth, fleeing to it, and laying hold upon it, the "strong consolation" of which the text speaks belongs to you. I pray God of His mighty mercy to lead many to believe in Him now.

Did you notice that the apostle speaks of *laying hold upon a hope*? This does not mean that we are to lay hold by imagination upon something which we hope to obtain in the dim future, for the next verse goes on to say, "which hope we have." We have our hope now. It is not a shadowy idea that possibly when we come to die we may be saved. We know that we at this moment, are safe in our refuge, and we lay hold on our confidence as a present joy.

Yet that which we lay hold upon is full of hope—there is more in it than we can now see or enjoy. What is the hope? The hope of final perseverance, the hope of ultimate perfection, the hope of eternal glory, the hope of being with our Lord where He is that we may behold His glory forever—a hope purifying, elevating, and full of glory. A hope which cheers and delights us as often as we think of it.

This we have laid hold of by a simple act of faith, believing God to be true. This laying hold upon the hope which God sets before us is a very simple matter, and yet there are some who do not understand it, for they ask us again and again, "What is faith?" Well, it is laying hold, but if you want to

know more about it, lay hold at once, and see what it is by practice. Lay hold at once, sinner, it is all you have to do and the Spirit of God enables you to do it.

As I said before, black-handed sinner, do not stop to wash your hands, but lay hold. That which you lay hold on will wash you and cleanse you. And you, poor, feeble, trembling, paralyzed soul, Jesus bids you stretch out your hand, and as you lay hold you shall find peace and consolation.

III. For this is our last point, WE ENJOY "STRONG CONSOLATION."

I have not time to speak upon this as I should like, and therefore will just throw out a few hints. Many of our fellow men have no consolation. When trouble comes, woe is unto them. There are many others who have a weak consolation. They depend upon the "*absolvo te*" of a priest. That must be a very poor thing, I should think, for anybody to get consolation out of—to know that you have been to mass, have confessed, and have been assured of forgiveness by a poor, mortal man who is no better than yourself, except that he has had his head shaved.

What ground for consolation poor beings can see in this, I cannot tell—it must be a very poor support when sin and Satan assail the soul. Many have a very insufficient consolation, for as soon as trial or trouble arise they faint, and when they have the prospect of death before them, their consolation vanishes like the dew in the sun.

But *we have a strong consolation*. We call that liquor strong of which a very few drops will flavor all into which it falls. How wonderfully the consolation of Christ has affected our entire lives! There is such potency in it that it sweetens everything about us. It is so strong that it masters all our fears, and slays all our skepticisms.

Though there are many teachers busily engaged in suggesting unbelief, yet our strong consolation flings a thousand doubts aside, as Samson slew a thousand Philistines. It conquers all our trouble too, for it makes us feel that, being called according to the eternal purpose, all things work together for our good. Yea, this consolation is so strong that it vanquishes death itself, and makes us descend into the chill precincts of the sepulchre without a shiver, joyfully triumphant because Christ has promised us life, God has sworn it, and the promise and the oath must be true.

What I want you to note is that *the consolation of the Christian lies wholly in His God*, because the ground of it is that God has sworn, and that God has promised. Never look, therefore, to yourselves for any consolation—it would be a vain search. Flee from yourselves, and lay hold upon the hope set before you.

Oh Christian, you lose consolation when you look away from your God. Fasten the eye of faith on Him, and never let it glance elsewhere. His promise, His oath, Himself—a true and faithful God—this consideration alone can sustain you.

Remember, too, that your consolation must come *from what God has spoken*, and not from His providence. Mind that you do not look to the Lord's providential dealings for your springs of joy, for He may chasten you with the rod of men, and beat you with many stripes, but His promise smiles when His Providence frowns.

See how the apostle dwells upon the promise and the oath as the two immutable things, and not upon temporal blessings. Outward providences change, but the oath never changes—hold you on to that. Your comfort must not even depend upon sensible realizations of God's favor, nor on sweet communions and delights.

No, but upon—He has said it and He has sworn it—those are the two strong pillars upon which your comfort must rest. Not upon what you think He says to your heart, nor upon what you may believe you have felt to be applied to your own soul, but upon the bare Word, promise, and oath of God without feeling or evidence to back it. God has said it and sworn it—there is your strong consolation.

Remember, however, that *the power of the strong consolation* derived from the oath of God *must in your personal enjoyment depend very much upon your faith*. What is the consolation of a promise if you do not believe it, and what is the comfort of an oath if you doubt it? It is not the end of all strife to those who believe not.

O brother, I charge you by the veracity of God, labor after an increased faith. If you never doubt God till you have cause to do so, you will never doubt again. It is impossible for Him to lie in anything, and

above all in the great things that your soul rests upon. Therefore, do not treat Him as if He could lie, nor dare to suspect His faithfulness, but hold on to the immutable veracity of God.

Remember that this consolation which is intended to come to you by faith, if you do not get it, will prove that you are insulting God. It may appear to be a small and an easy thing to believe God, but it is a horrible and a detestable thing to disbelieve Him.

Picture some generous friend in this assembly coming before us and saying, "I promise such and such a thing." He would be grieved at heart if someone should rise and say, "I am willing enough to believe it, but I cannot." I can hardly think of anything which would be more insulting to an honest man than to have doubt cast upon him by one who pretends to be anxious to believe him.

But suppose in great gentleness of spirit the person so mistrusted were to say, "To put an end to all questions, engross a deed and I will set my hand and seal to it, and I will at the same time take a solemn oath, calling God to witness that what I promise is true." Now if any person should say, "I still do not believe it," can you conceive the pain of heart, yea, and the indignation which would naturally take possession of our friend's mind!

Now God cannot swear by anything greater than Himself, for there is no greater, and so He has sworn by Himself. By His own existence, by His holiness from which He can never part, by the majesty of His deity, He has solemnly sworn that the believing seed shall be blessed, and blessed they must be. There shall be forgiveness and eternal life to every one that believes in His Son Jesus Christ.

This is no fiction. God cannot deceive us on such a point as this, nor indeed, upon any other. This is no dream, no charming myth as some would seem to fancy. It is reality, divine reality. Now then, souls, will you cast yourselves upon this divine reality? May the devil be kept back from you that you may cease blaspheming God by doubting Him!

May the eternal Spirit now convince you how natural, how proper, how necessary it is that you should at once believe the promise and the oath of God, and trust yourselves with Jesus Christ, whom He sets forth to be a Prince and a Savior to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sins this day!

I wish I knew how to plead with you, but the time has gone. There was a time with me when to have heard this message would have made my heart leap within me, for I wanted Christ, and when I heard that I must lay hold upon Him, and flee to Him, and so be saved, I was delighted to do so.

Those of you who are as sinful as I was, and as conscious of it, will I trust at this very moment look unto Him, and be saved—and if you do, by the promise and the oath of God, you are eternally secure. May God the Holy Ghost lead you to Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
HEBREWS 3:7-19; 4:6-9; 5:1-11; 6:13-20

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—381, 611, 548

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.