

THE SWEET HARP OF CONSOLATION

NO. 760

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*“Fear not, for I am with you.”
Isaiah 41:10.*

WE sometimes speak and think very lightly of doubts and fears, but such is not *God's* estimate of them. Our heavenly Father evidently considers them to be great evils, extremely mischievous to us and exceedingly dishonorable to Himself, for He very frequently forbids our fears, and as often affords us the most potent remedies for them. “Fear not” is a frequent utterance of the Divine mouth. “I am with you” is the fervent, soul-cheering argument to support it. Unless the Lord had judged our fears to be a great evil He would not so often have forbidden them, or have provided such a heavenly quietus for them.

I pray that my dear Brothers and Sisters who are cast down may have Divine Grace to struggle with their despondency and to overcome it. Martin Luther used to say that to comfort a desponding spirit is as difficult as to raise the dead. But then we have a God who both raises the dead from their graves and His people from their despair. “Though you lie down among the pots, yet shall you be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.”

May the oil of joy be exchanged for mourning by many sorrowing ones this morning! Sometimes my text is a trumpet of alarm, or a trombone of lamentation, but today it is a harp of sweetest sound. Saul was subject to fits of deep despondency, but when David, the skillful harper, laid his hand among the obedient strings, the evil spirit departed, overcome by the subduing power of melody. My text is such a harp, and if the Holy Spirit will but touch its strings, its sweet discourse shall charm away the demon of despair.

“I am with you”—it is a harp of ten strings containing the full chords of consolation. Its notes quiver to the height of ecstasy or descend to the hollow bass of the deepest grief. Let us see if this psaltery will yield us melody today. In the first place we shall note THE TIMES WHEN ITS SWEET STRAINS ARE MOST NEEDED. Occasions when comfort is needed are many. There are some, who, like the willow, will only flourish in a soil which is always wet with consolation. These are men and women of a sorrowful spirit. If their mothers did not bear them with sorrow, like Jabez, they commenced very early on their own account to accumulate a heritage of woe.

As John Bunyan would say, they need not be afraid of the Slough of Despond for they carry a slough within their own hearts and are never out of it or it is never out of them. They are plants which flourish best in shady places among the dampness of sorrow. They scarcely think themselves safe unless they are unhappy. They fear to be joyous—they tremble to be glad.

The high places of the earth do not suit them at all—they delight most to dwell in the Valley of Humiliation. And when they are journeying through that peaceful vale, like Mr. Fearing, they could lie down and kiss the flowers because the place is so suitable to their meek and lowly spirit. There is something sadly weak about this state of experience, though there is also much to admire. These are they whom the Master carries in His bosom and does gently lead. These are the shorn lambs of the flock for whom He tempers the wind—for whose sake He stays His rough wind in the day of His east wind.

Trembling fellow Pilgrims, we would play our harp before you, that, if possible, you may forget your fears awhile! And if you cannot altogether rise superior to your glooms, yet may you, for this hour, at least, take unto yourselves the wings of eagles and mount above the mists of doubt. Brothers and Sisters, more or less all Believers need consolation at all times because their life is a very peculiar one. The walk of faith is one protracted miracle. The life, the conflict, the support, and the triumph of faith are all far above the vision of the eye of sense.

The inner life is a world of mysteries. We see nothing beneath or before us, and yet we stand upon a rock and go from strength to strength. We march onwards unto what seems destruction and find safety blooming beneath our feet. During our whole Christian career the promises of God must be applied to the heart, or else such is the weakness of flesh and blood. We are ready to go back to the flesh pots of the Egypt of carnal sense and leave the delights which faith, alone, can yield us. May the Lord give to His people frequently to hear the transporting notes of the harp of the text, “Fear not, for I am with you.” “Though you cannot see your way, yet your way is safe, for I will go before you. I the Lord will be your rear guard. I am round about you like a wall of fire, and I will be the glory in the midst of your soul.”

Yet there are certain special occasions when the Comforter’s work is needed, and one of these certainly is when we are racked with much physical pain. Many bodily pains can be borne without affecting the mind, but there are certain others whose sharp fangs insinuate themselves into the marrow of our nature, boring their way most horribly through the brain and the spirit—for these much Divine Grace is needed.

When the head is throbbing and the heart is palpitating, and the whole system is disarranged, it is so natural to say with Jacob, “All these things are against me,” and to complain of Providence, and to think that we are the men above all others who have seen affliction. *Then* is the time for the promise to be applied with power. “Fear not, for I am with you.” “I will make all your bed in your sickness.” When bodily pain gives every sign of increasing, or we expect the surgeon with his dreaded knife, then to be sustained under sufferings at the thought of which the flesh shudders we need the upholding gentleness of God. “Fear not, for I am with you,” like the song of the nightingale, is most sweet when heard in the night season.

When the trouble comes in another shape, namely, in our relative sorrows borne personally by those dear to us. When we see them fading gradually by consumption, like lilies snapped at the stalk, or when suddenly they are swept away as the flowers fall beneath the mower’s scythe. When we have to visit the grave again and again, and each time leave a part of ourselves behind us. When our garments are the ensigns of our woe and we would gladly sit down in the dust and sprinkle ashes upon our heads because the desire of our eyes is taken from us—then we require the heavenly Comforter.

Then, indeed, the skillful harper is in great demand and sweet to the heart are notes like these, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God.” Again, when all the currents of Providence run counter to us. When, after taking arms against a sea of trouble we find ourselves unable to stem the boisterous torrent and are being swept down the stream, loss succeeding loss, riches taking to themselves wings and flying away till we see nothing before us but absolute need, and perhaps are brought actually to know what need is—then we require abundant Grace to sustain our spirits.

Ah, it is not so easy to come down with perfect resignation from wealth to penury, from abundance to scant. That is a philosophy to be learned only where Paul was taught it when he said, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.” Some of you would find it hard to be content if you were in yon widow’s position—with seven children and nothing to maintain them upon but the shameful pittance which is wrung out to her for her labors with her needle—at which she sits, stitch, stitch, stitch, far into the dead of the night, stitching her very soul away.

You might not find it quite so easy to bear poverty if you were shunned by the men who courted you in your prosperity and who now do not know you if they meet you in the street. There are bitternesses about the poor man’s lot which are not easily rinsed from his cup—*then* it is that the gracious soul needs the promise, “Fear not, for I am with you.” “Your Maker is your husband.” A Father of the fatherless, and a Judge of the widow is God in His holy habitation. If you are brought into this condition, may my Lord and Master say to you, “It is I, be not afraid.”

And, my Brethren, some of us know what it is to hear this voice of God in the midst of unusual responsibilities, heavy labors, and great enterprises. Have you been called, by God’s Providence, to undertake a work far beyond your own visible power, and have you plunged into it by faith? You have! Then you will not be a stranger to feelings like these—you will say to yourself—“Was I wise in doing this? Other people have attempted great things and failed—may not I fail ridiculously? When the crowds have gathered to see the mountain in labor, may there not be a ridiculous mouse as the only result? May I not, after all, be a mere fanatic, and may not my trust in God be a superstition? Oh, where shall I be if now I should fail?”

You may have been sifted in this sieve again and again, but it is delightful, indeed, when you can feel “God is with me. My responsibilities are overwhelming, but my God is Omnipotent. I could not carry the load, but He can, and by faith I will cast the burden upon the Most High.” Were you ever seeking to win souls, the most blessed of occupations, and have you had to return to your closet saying, “Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” Then you will begin to question whether you were ever called to an enterprise so high and lofty, and perhaps you will be tempted, like Jonah, to take ship and flee away to Tarshish, that you may escape from a service which brings you no honor.

At such a juncture, what can be more reassuring than the echo of these words, “Fear not, for I am with you”? I am with you even in your non-success, with you in your casting down, with you in those labors which remain unrequited. “Fear not, for I am with you.” And the issues must, in the end, all be well! Dear Friend, did you ever stand, as a servant of God, alone in the midst of opposition? Were you ever called to attack some deadly popular error, and, with rough bold hands, like an iconoclast, to dash down the graven images of the age?

Have you heard the clamor of many, some saying this thing, and some the other—some saying, “He is a good man,” but others saying, “No, but he deceives the people”? Did you ever see the rancor of the priests of Baal flashing from their faces and foaming from their mouths? Did you ever read their hard expressions, see their misrepresentations of your speech, and of your motives? And did you ever feel the delight of saying, “The best of all is, that God is with us! And, in the name of God, instead of folding up the standard, we will set up our banners. If this is vile, we purpose to be viler still and throw down the gauntlet once more in the name of the God of Truth against the error of the times”?

If you have ever passed through that ordeal, then have you needed the words, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God.” “Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?” “I will make you unto this people a fenced bronze wall: and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you.” “Fear not; for you shall not be ashamed.”

But, my dear Friends, we shall want this word of comfort most of all when we go down the shelving banks of the black river—when we hear the booming of its waves and feel the chill influence of its dark flood—and cannot see to the other side! When the mists of depression of spirit hide from us “Jerusalem the Golden,” and our eyes catch no glimpse of the “land that flows with milk and honey,” for the soul is occupied with present pain and wrapped in darkness which may be felt. In such a condition—

*“We linger shivering on the brink,
And fear to launch away.”*

We talk of death too lightly. It is solemn work to the best of men. It would be no child’s play to an Apostle to die. Yet if we can hear the whisper, “Fear not, for I am with you,” then the mists will sweep away from the river and that stream which was dark will become clear as crystal, and we shall see the “Rock of Ages” at the bottom of the flood. Then shall we descend with confidence and hear the splash of the death stream and think it music.

Yes, and it shall be music as it melts into the songs of the seraphs, who shall accompany us through its depths. It will be delightful when those mists have rolled away, to see the shining ones coming to meet us, to go with us up the celestial hills to the pearly gate, to accompany us to the Throne of God, where we shall rest forever. Happy they who shall hear their Lord say to them, “I am with you, be not afraid.”

After death, we read in this Word of great events that shall happen to us, but we feebly comprehend the revelation. After death solemnities shall follow which may well strike a man with awe as he thinks upon them. There is a judgment and a resurrection. There is a trumpet which shall summon the sons of men to hear from Heaven’s doomsday-book their future destiny. The world shall be on fire, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. There will be a pompous appearing of the great Judge at the dread assize. There will be the winding up of the dispensation, and the gathering together of all things in one that are in Christ. And there will be the casting down into Hell of the tares bound up in bundles to burn—and the fire that never shall be quenched will send up its smoke forever and ever.

What about that future? Why, Faith can look forward to it without a single tremor! She fears not, for she hears the voice of the everlasting God saying to her, “I am with you.” I will be with you when your dust shall rise—your first transporting vision shall be the King in His beauty. You shall be satisfied when you shall wake up in His likeness. “I will

be with you when the heavens are on a blaze, your Preserver, Comforter, your Heaven, your All in All.” Therefore, fear not, but look forward with unmoved delight to all the mystery and the glory of the age unborn.

Thus have I mentioned a few of the occasions in which this harp sounds most sweetly. All through life I may picture the saints as marching to its music, even as the children of Israel set forward to the notes of the silver trumpets. Israel came to the Red Sea—they might well be afraid, for the Egyptians were behind them—the crack of their whips might be heard. The rolling sea was before them, but Israel marched confidently through its depths because the word was given, “Fear not, Jehovah is with His people.”

See the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night—how safely do they follow its direction—even through the heart of the sea! They tread the sand on the other side. It is an arid waste—how shall they support themselves or their flocks? “Fear not, for I am with you!” Lo, the manna drops from Heaven, and the waters ripple from the Rock. But look! They come to Jordan! It is their last difficulty, and then they shall reach the land of their inheritance. Jordan divides—what ails you, O Jordan, that you were driven back? God was with His people—they feared not, but entered into their rest! This is the heritage of all the saints.

As I thought of the life of faith, I saw before my eyes, as in a vision, a lofty lighted staircase, and, led by an invisible hand, I mounted step by step. When I had ascended long and far, it turned and turned again and again. I could see no supports to this elevated staircase, no pillars of iron, no props of stone—it seemed to hang in air. As I climbed I looked up to see where the staircase went, but I saw no further than the step where I stood. But now and then the clouds of light above me parted and I thought I saw the Throne of the Eternal and the Heaven of His glory.

My next step seemed to be upon the air, and yet when I boldly put down my foot, I found it firm as adamant beneath me. I looked back on the steps which I had trod and was amazed, but I dared not tarry, for “forward” was the voice which urged me on, and I knew, for Faith had told me, that that winding stair would end at last—beyond the sun and moon and stars—in the excellent glory. As now and then I gazed down into the depths out of which the stair had lifted me, I shuddered at my fate should I slip from my standing, or should the next step plunge me into the abyss!

Over the edge of that where I stood I gazed with awe, for I saw nothing but a gaping void of black darkness and into this I must plunge my foot in the faith of finding another step beneath it. I should have been unable to advance, and would have sat down in utter despair had I not heard the Word from above of One in whom I trusted, saying, “Fear not, for I am with you.” I knew that my mysterious Guide could not err. I felt that infinite faithfulness would not bid me take a step if it were not safe, and therefore mounting upward, I stand at this hour happy and rejoicing, though my faith is all above my own comprehension, and my work above my own ability—

*“When we cannot see our way,
Let us trust, and still obey.
He who bids us forward go,
Cannot fail the way to show.
Though enwrap in gloomy night,
We perceive no ray of light.
Since the Lord Himself is here,
‘Tis not meet that we should fear.
Night with Him is never night,
Where He is there all is light!
When He calls us, why delay?
They are happy who obey.”*

II. Secondly, we come to you, harp in hand, and pray you TO DISTINCTLY HEAR ITS NOTES. The sweetness of all the notes melt into each other but now we shall touch each string severally and by itself, and if you have an educated ear—for all men have not the ear with which to hear the music of God—you will hear that which will solace your souls. “Fear not, for I am with you.” What does it mean?

1. In the first place, it means, “I am with you in deepest sympathy.” When you suffer, you suffer not a new pang—Christ knew that pain long ago. As Baxter puts it—“Christ leads me through no darker rooms than He went through before.” No, not only has Jesus once suffered, but in all our affliction He is still afflicted. When His servants were persecuted, the Lord Jesus cried out of Heaven to the persecutor, “Why do you persecute Me?” The touching of the feeblest

member is felt by the Head. Though He is crowned with light, yet He is not insensitive to the glowing of His feet, which John tells us are like fine brass glowing in the furnace.

Our Lord Jesus is moved with intense sympathy towards the members of His body, for His union with us is of a most intimate kind. It is no small comfort to know that Jesus is a fellow sufferer with us. That we have a High Priest who can be touched with the feelings of our infirmities. That we are not alone treading a thorny path where our feet have never trod, but we can plainly see the bloody footprints of the feet of the Man of Sorrows. Everywhere Christ is with us in the sympathy of His soul. Let that one note sound well. Perhaps I touched the string amiss, but touch it again, and see if angels' music can excel it.

2. But next, the Lord is with us in community of interests. That is to say, if the Believer should fail, God Himself would be dishonored. Luther rejoiced greatly whenever he felt that he had brought God into his quarrel. "Well," said he, "if it were I, Martin Luther, and the Pope of Rome who had to fight it out, I might well despair! But if it is the Pope against Martin Luther and Martin Luther's God, then woe be unto Antichrist! Well may the cold sweat stand on her brow, for when God is with us, who are they that are against us?"

Now God is in the quarrel of the man who attacks error. God is in the quarrel of the man who is trying to do good, to reclaim his fellow creatures from sin, and to establish the kingdom of Christ. Yes, and when you can quote a Divine promise, God is engaged in your affairs, because if He does not keep that promise, He is not true. In the matter of your own salvation, since it is in the purpose of God that you should be brought safely home, your ultimate salvation touches the honor of the Redeemer—

*"His honor is engaged to save
The meanest of His sheep.
All that His heavenly Father gave,
His hands securely keep."*

It is with us as it is with the timid traveler in the Alps who is attended by a faithful guide. He shivers as he passes under overhanging cliffs or glides down shelving precipices, or climbs the slippery steep of glaciers. But if his guide has linked himself with him he is reassured. The guide has said, "You are trembling, Sir, but the way is safe. I have passed it many a time with many a traveler as weak as you are. But to reassure you and make you feel how safe you are, look here!" And he straps a rope round the traveler, and round himself. "Now," he says, "both of us, or neither. We shall both get safely home or neither." As he bids his charge pass on with courage, he says to him, "Now, remember, if there is any danger, it is as great a danger to me as it is to you. We both go down together, or we are saved together." And the traveler plucks up spirit and finds his foot stands firm where it had slipped before.

Now Jesus has bound Himself hard and fast to every soul that trusts Him, and if you do not find your way to Heaven, neither will Christ, for it is both of us, or neither—either you must win the crown of glory—or Christ must lose it, too. How sweet is this to think upon! Strike that string again! Strike it well in your retirement this afternoon and let the music of it ring in your ears, "Fear not, for I am with you."

3. Again, the next string of the harp, "Fear not, for I am with you," gives this sound. "I am with you in Providential aid." We believe in the Providence of God, but we do not believe half enough in it. Remember that Omnipotence has servants everywhere, set in their places at every point of the road. In the old days of the post horses, there were always relays of swift horses ready to carry onward the king's mails. It is wonderful how God has His relays of Providential agents! How, when He has done with one, there is always another just ready to take its place.

Sometimes you have found one friend fail you—he is just dead and buried. "Ah," you say, "what shall I do?" Well, well, God knows how to carry on the purposes of His Providence. He will raise up another. How strikingly punctual Providence is! You and I make appointments, and miss them by half-an-hour. But God never missed an appointment yet. God never is before His time, though we often wish He were—and He never is behind—no, not by one tick of the clock. When the children of Israel were to go down out of Egypt, all the Pharaohs in the pyramids, if they had risen to life again, could not have kept them in bondage another half-minute.

"Thus says the Lord, Let My people go!" It was time, and go they must. All the kings of the earth and all the princes thereof are in subjection to the kingdom of God's Providence, and He can move them just as He pleases. And as the showman pulls his string and moves his puppets, so can God move all that are on earth, *and* the angels in Heaven, according to His will and pleasure. And now, Trembler, why are you afraid? "Fear not, for I am with you." All the mysterious

arrangements of Providence work for our good. Touch that string again, dear Friends, you who are in trouble, and see if there my harp is not a rare instrument!

4. Next, God is with us in secret sustaining power. He well knows how, if He does not interpose openly to deliver us in trouble, to infuse strength into our sinking hearts. “There appeared an angel unto Him from Heaven, strengthening Him,” it is said of our Lord. And I do not doubt but what invisible spirits are often sent by God from Heaven to invigorate *our* spirits when they are ready to sink. Have you ever felt it? You sat down an hour ago and wept as if your heart would break, and then you bowed your knee in solemn prayer and spread the case before the Lord, and afterwards when you came down from the chamber you felt as if you could joyfully encounter the trouble!

You were humbled and bowed under it, as a child under a chastening rod, but you gave yourself up to it. You knew it was your Father that struck, and so you did not rebel any longer, but you went into the world determined to meet the difficulty which you thought would crush you, feeling that you were quite able to sustain it. I have read of those who bathe in those baths of Germany which are much impregnated with iron—that they have felt, after bathing, as if they were made of iron, and were able, in the heat of the sun to cast off the heat as though they were dressed in steel!

Happy, indeed, are they who bathe in the bath of such a promise as this, “I am with you!” Put your whole soul into that consoling element! Plunge into it and you will feel your strength suddenly renewed so that you can bear troubles which before would have overburdened you!

5. And, once more, there is a way by which the Lord can be with His people which is best of all, namely, by sensible manifestations of His Presence imparting joy and peace which surpasses all understanding. I shall not venture to explain the exhilaration, the rapture which is caused in a child of God by the consciousness that God is near him. In one sense He is always near us—but there is an opening of our eyes, and an unsealing of our ears—a putting away of the external senses and an opening of the inner *spiritual* sense by which the inner life of the Christian becomes wondrously conscious of the pervading Presence of the Most High.

Describe it, I cannot. It is not a thing for words. It is like what Heaven must be! It is a stray gleam of the sunlight of Paradise fallen upon this sinful world. You are as sure that God is with you as you are sure that you are in the body. Though the walls do not glow, and though the humble floor does not blaze with light, and though no rustle of angels’ wings is heard—yet you are like Moses when he put off his shoes from off his feet for the place where you stand has become holy ground to you.

Bowed down, I have felt it, until it seemed as if the spirit must be crushed. Yet, at the same time, lifted up till the exceeding weight of Glory became too great a joy, too overwhelming for flesh and blood! Ah, then, in such moments—

*“Should earth against my soul engage,
And hellish darts be hurled,
Then I can smile at Satan’s rage,
And face a frowning world.
Let cares like a wild deluge come,
And storms of sorrow fall,
May I but safely reach my home,
My God, my Heaven, my All!
There shall I bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across my peaceful breast.”*

I have tried thus, but in a poor way, to show in what senses God does appear to help His people. I beseech you, let each string yield you music, and pass not over these words hurriedly, for there is an abyss of solemn joy within them if you know but how to plunge into it.

III. Thirdly, having thus bid you distinctly hear the notes of my harp, I must now request you to MEDITATE MUCH UPON THE SWEETNESS OF THOSE NOTES. How shall I bring out their delights? Taste and see, my Brothers and Sisters, that the Lord is good! It is the shortest mode and the surest of knowing the sweetness of God’s goodness. Let me, however, put a few things before you. The comfort of my text excels all other comfort under Heaven.

Here is a person who has lost all his goods and is very poor. He is met tomorrow morning by a generous friend who says to him, “Fear not, you shall go share and share with me. You know that I am a person of considerable property. Fear not, I know your losses, but I am with you.” Now, I feel sure that any person so accosted would go home and say to himself, “Well, now, I have no need of any trouble. I am rich, since one half of what my friend has is more than I had before.”

Yes, but may not the same losses which fell upon you fall upon your friend? May not the same reverses in commerce which have made you poor, make *him* poor? And in that case you are as ill off as ever! Besides, your friend may change his mind. He may find you much too expensive a client, and he may, one of these days, shut his door against you.

But now, *God* says to you, “I am with you.” Now the Lord has much more than your friend. He is much more faithful. He will never grow weary of you. He cannot change His mind. Surely it is better for you to feel that *God* is with you than to rely upon an arm of flesh. Is it not so? Believer, you will never prefer man to God, will you? Will you prefer to rest in a poor, changeable man’s promise, rather than to rest upon the immutable Covenant of God? You would not dare to say that, though I dare say you have acted as if you would!

I am afraid such is our unbelief, that sometimes we should really prefer the poor arm of flesh to the almighty arm of God—what a disgrace to us! But in our sober senses, sitting here this morning, we must confess that God’s, “I am with you” is better than the kindest assurance of the best of friends. I will suppose that one of you may be engaged in Christian service and you have been working very hard. Would not you feel very happy if God were to raise up a dozen young spirits who would rally round you and help you?

“Oh!” you say, “yes! I could go, then, to my grave saying, Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace since there are so many others enlisted in the good cause.” Well, but is it so? Might they not also grow as weary as yourself? And what are they compared with the world’s needs? And may they not soon be taken away, or prove unfaithful? If God says, “I am with you,” is not *that* better than 20,000 of the brightest spirits? Yes, and thousands and thousands of the most industrious missionaries? For what would they all be without God? So that the only comfort they can bring you they have to borrow first of all from Him. Let us, then, take the naked promise of God, for it is *enough*, and more than enough, though all earth’s springs were dry.

But, Beloved, to make you sensible of the value of this promise, let me remind you that there is all the comfort here that Heaven itself could afford. When that young man’s eyes were opened by the Prophet and he saw the mountain full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about Elisha, he said to himself, “Now Elisha is safe enough, they cannot touch him while those chariots of fire protect him.” Yes, but what are angels but *ministering* spirits—what are they without God? They are dead, inactive, unless God shall give them their energy and fiery life.

So, my Brethren, if it were written, “The angels shall always be with you,” that would not be one half so blessed as this, “Fear not, for I am with you.” We have the angels, but we have the angels’ Master! We have the chariots of God, which are 20,000, but, better than that, we have God Himself to be our Protector. “I am with you.” O child of God, all the seraphim and cherubim could not yield you such a fullness of joy as this!

Note again that when the text says, “I am with you,” it gives you something, which is sufficient for all emergencies. In the succeeding verses of the chapter before us, we find one engaged in a service, and for his comfort it was written, “I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness.” Presently we find that same person engaged in warfare, and then the promise changed—“I will make you a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: you shall thresh the mountains and beat them small, and shall make the hills as chaff.”

Then we find that individual becomes a traveler, traveling without water in a barren land, and again the promise is altered—“I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys.” Then the traveler became a farmer, but the soil was fruitless, and he could grow nothing. Then came the word, “I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree.”

So, my Brethren, no matter where we may be cast, God is with us! The Manx people have for their motto three legs, so that whichever way you throw them they are sure to stand. But as for the Christian, it is impossible for them to be thrown down by misfortune, or even by the infernal powers. We shall stand, for God upholds us. Carried to the highest heavens to judgment, God is with us! Cast down to the depths of sufferings, still He is with us! Slumbering in the tomb, as our dust soon must, still God is with us!

It is not possible for the Christian to be in any condition in which these words shall not be to him universal medicine for all disease! Universal armor against every weapon! Universal supply of every necessity. Now divide the words, and view them separately. “I AM.” Do you know what this means—“I am”? God is self-existent, eternal, independent, sitting on no precarious throne, nor borrowing leave to be. “I am.” It is no other than “JEHOVAH,” “JAH,” “I AM,” who has become the Friend of His people. Note the tense of it—not, “I *was*,” not, “I *shall be*,” but, “I am.”

We have, yesterday, today, and forever, the same great “I AM.” “I am”—what? “I am with you,” poor, feeble thing as you are. As “I AM” was in the bush, and made it glow with golden fire, transforming it from a despicable bush to become a throne for Deity, so shall it be with you. “I am with you, poor bush that might readily be burned. I will fill you with Myself and make you radiant with glory, for I have set My love upon you from of old.”

My spirit bows beneath the majesty of the text! I commend it to your earnest consideration. Bear it with you to your chambers of meditation this afternoon, and God open it up to you, that you may be filled with delight!

IV. In the last place, I would have all my hearers remember that though I have spoken of my text as a harp yielding rarest music, yet IT NEEDS THAT THE EAR BE TUNED BEFORE ITS MUSIC CAN BE APPRECIATED. It is not every man that understands the delights of harmony, even in ordinary music. The clown stands by and thinks that a brass band in the street, with all its horrors, would be almost as good. He does not understand how sound accords with sound. He knows nothing of “linked sweetness long drawn out.”

So, Beloved, there are tens of thousands of men who know nothing at all of what it is to have God with them. Yes, this would be their dread—they would be glad to escape from God if they could. Is it so with you, my Hearers? Are you afraid of God? Would you shun His Presence? Is it because you are His enemy, and conscience makes a coward of you? If you were His child your spirit would long for His embrace. And as the hart thirsts for the water brooks, so would you thirst after your God.

Now, in order to appreciate the sweetness of the text, you must have *faith*, and the more faith you have, the more sweet it will become. You must believe in a real God. I am afraid that to most men God is a myth, a spiritual something which they have not discerned. But faith realizes God, is sure of His existence, puts eyes into the soul to see God with, and gives hands to the soul to lay hold upon the invisible God. You must realize God, and you must be firmly persuaded of His veracity, that He cannot lie, that it is impossible for Him to deviate a hair’s breadth from perfect truth, and that He cannot also fail in power. “Has He said, and shall He not do it?” “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” “Is His arm shortened that it cannot save?”

Such questions as these must meet with a quick answer in our spirit. We must feel that there is with us a mighty Worker, a real working, active, potent, faithful, truthful Agent, who, having promised to help us, *will* help us, and never leave us nor forsake us till He has accomplished all His eternal purpose and brought us to Himself in Heaven. Ah, my Brothers and Sisters, if you have come to this, and can always stay there—I only wish I could! I can believe in God, and do believe in Him, glory be to His name!

I have seen His arm uplifted and His faithfulness and Truth displayed as few have seen, but yet that awful unbelief! That dark vapor which is the death of comfort, worse than cholera! This pest, this infidelity for which no excuse can be made! This most damnable of sins, this which has no foundation, for which I will not whisper even a thought of apology! This still creeps over us and unmans us! How it throws us into the mire! How it breaks our bones, and like a mighty Juggernaut, rolls over our very nature to crush it into nothing!

O God, save us from it! Help us to trust You! It is all we want! It is human omnipotence. Help us to rest upon You! It is all we want! It is Heaven to our souls. Help us to be sure that You are, and that You are the rewarder of them that diligently seek You, and that Your promise must stand fast and firm! This were to make us sons of God, indeed, and of a truth, and to give us the enjoyment of Heaven while lingering in the valleys of earth! May God bless us with this faith!

Some of you have no faith at all. O may the eternal Spirit beget faith in you now, or else your portion must be wretchedness, your end must be confusion, your eternity must be misery! God save us through faith in Jesus!

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