

COMFORT PROCLAIMED

NO. 221

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 BY THE REV. C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT EXETER HALL, STRAND.

“Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God.”
Isaiah 40:1.

WHAT a sweet title—“My people!” What a cheering revelation—“Your God!” How much of meaning is couched in those two words, “My people!” Here is speciality. The whole world is God’s. The Heaven, even the Heaven of heavens is the Lord’s and He reigns among the children of men. But He says of a certain number, “My people.” Of those whom He has chosen—whom He has purchased to Himself—He says what He says not of others. While nations and kindreds are passed by as being simply nations, He says of *them*, “My people.” In this word there is the idea of proprietorship to teach us that we are the property of God. In some special manner the “Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.” All the nations upon earth are His. He takes up the isles as a very little thing. The whole world is in His power. Yet are His people, His chosen favored people, more especially His possession, for He has done more for them than others. He has bought them with His blood! He has brought them near to Himself. He has set His great heart upon them. He has loved them with an everlasting love—a love which many waters cannot quench and which the revolutions of time shall never suffice in the least degree to diminish. “My people!” O my Hearers, can you by faith put yourselves in that number who believe that God says of them, “My people”? Can you look up to Heaven tonight and say, “My Lord and my God—mine by that sweet relationship which entitles me to call You Father! Mine by that hallowed fellowship which I delight to hold with You when You are pleased to manifest Yourself unto me as You do not unto the world”? Can you, Beloved, put your hand into your heart and find there the indentures of your salvation? Can you read your title writ in precious blood? Can you by humble faith lay hold of Jesus’ garments and say, “My Christ”? If you can, then God says of you, “My people.”

If God is your God and Christ your Christ, the Lord has a special, peculiar favor to you! You are the object of His choice and you shall be accepted, at last, in His beloved Son! How careful God is of His people—those of whom He says, “My people.” Mark, how anxious He is concerning them, not only for their life, but for their comfort. He does not say, “strengthen you, strengthen you My people.” He does not say to the angel, “protect My people.” He does not say to the heavens, “drop down manna to feed My people”—all that and more His tender regard secures to them—but on this occasion, to show us that He is not only mindful of our interests, but also of our superfluities, He says, “Comfort you, comfort you My people.” He would not only have us His living people; His preserved people, but He would have us be His happy people, too! He likes His people to be fed, but what is more, He likes to give them “wines on the lees well-refined,” to make glad their hearts. He will not only give them bread, but He will give them honey, too. He will not simply give them milk, but He will give them wine and milk and all the sweet things which their hearts can desire. “Comfort you, comfort you My people.” It is the Father’s yearning heart, careful even for the little things of His people. “Comfort you, comfort you”—that one with a tearful eye. “Comfort you, comfort you”—yonder child of Mine with an aching heart. “Comfort you”—that poor bemoaning one. “Comfort you, comfort you—My people,” says your God!

Now tonight we shall notice the *parties to whom the command is addressed*. Secondly, *the reason for it*. And thirdly, *the means for carrying it out*.

I. First then, TO WHOM IS THIS COMMAND ADDRESSED? You know, Beloved, the Holy Spirit is the great Comforter and He it is who alone can solace the saints if their hearts are really cheered. But He uses *instruments* to relieve His children in their distress and to lift up their hearts from desperation. To whom, then, is this command addressed? I believe it is addressed to *angels* and to *men*.

To *angels*, first of all, I believe this command is addressed—“Comfort you, comfort you My people.” You often talk about the insinuations of the devil. I frequently hear you bemoaning yourselves because you have been attacked by Apol-

lyon and have had a hard struggle with Beelzebub. You have found it hard to resist his desperate thrusts which he made against you and you are always talking about him. Allow me to remind you that there is another side of that question, for if evil spirits assault us, doubtless good spirits guard us! And if Satan can cast us down, doubtless it is true God gives His angels charge over us, to keep us in all our ways and they shall bear us up in their hands lest at anytime we dash our feet against a stone. It is my firm belief that angels are often employed by God to throw into the hearts of His people comforting thoughts. There are many sweet thoughts which we have by the way, when we sit down and when we rise up, which we scarcely dare attribute immediately to the Holy Spirit, but which are still beautiful and calm, lovely and fair and consoling. And we attribute them to the ministry of angels. Angels came and ministered unto Jesus and I doubt not that they minister unto us! Few of us have enough belief in the existence of spirits. I like that saying of Milton's, "Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth both when we sleep and when we wake." And if our minds were opened, if our ears were attentive, we might hold fellowship with spirits that flit through the air every moment. Around the deathbed of saints angels hover. By the side of every struggling warrior for Christ the angels stand. In the day of battle we hear in the air the neighing of their steeds. Hark, how softly do they ride to help the elect of God while in the stern conflict for the right and for the Truth of God! When they would have been cast down, some angel whispers, "Courage Brother, courage. I would I could stand by your side, shoulder to shoulder and foot to foot, to fight the battle, but I must not. It is left for men. Courage then, Brother, because angels watch over you!"

It is a good wish of ours, when we say at eventide, "Peace be to you Beloved! Good angels guard you! May they spread their wings over you and stand around your bed!" But it is more than a wish, it is a reality! Do you not know it is written, "the angel of the Lord encamps round them who fear Him"? "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who are heirs of salvation?" This command, then, comes to angels—"Comfort you, comfort you My people." Full often the bright winged seraph flaps his wing to earth to comfort some desponding heart. Full often the cherub ceases for a moment his mighty song to go on errands of love—he descends as Gabriel did of old—to cheer the heart of many a struggling man and to stand by the side of those who are in conflict for God and for His Truth. You angels, you bright spirits, "Comfort you, comfort you My people."

But on earth, this is more especially addressed to the Lord's *ministers*. He calls His ministers, angels of the Churches, albeit they should be a great deal more like angels than they are. Ministers are bound to comfort God's people. I am sure, however, they cannot do it unless they preach the good old Doctrines of the Truth of God. Unless they preach Grace and gracious Doctrine, I cannot see how they are to console the minds of the Lord's family. Were I to adopt a lax theology which teaches that God's children may fall away; that although redeemed they may yet be lost; that they may be effectually called and yet slide back to perdition—I want to know how I could carry out this command? I would say, "Brothers and Sisters, God has told me to comfort you. That is what I have to preach. You must get what comfort you can out of it for I really cannot find much, myself." I have often marveled how the Arminian can comfort himself, wherewith he can light a fire to warm his own heart! What doctrine has he? He believes he is a child of God today and he is taught to believe he is a child of the devil tomorrow! He is now, he says, in the Covenant, but then that Covenant is such an uncertain thing that it may at any time be broken down and he may die beneath its ruins! He knows himself to be redeemed by the blood of Christ, yet he is taught that that will not be sufficient without the concurrence of some good thoughts, good actions, or certainly by some good grace or some faith of his own. He is led to believe that his standing depends upon his staying near to God instead of remembering that his keeping near to God must be by a sweet attraction that proceeds from God Himself! Where, then, comfort is to be procured I cannot tell. Happy I am I have no such Gospel as that to preach! Let me preach the old Gospel of Chrysostom; the old Gospel of Augustine; the old Gospel of Athanasius and above all, the old Gospel of Jesus Christ—the Originator of it! There I can find something to comfort the child of God! "Comfort you, comfort you My people." It is our duty to reprove, to exhort, to invite, but it is equally our duty to console.

The minister should ask of God the Spirit that he may be filled with His influence as a comforter, that when he ascends his pulpit on the Sabbath morning his poor, hard-working people who have been toiling, fretting with care and anxiety all the week, may say, "Here comes our minister—he is sure to have his mouth filled with good things. As soon as he opens his lips he will utter some great and glorious promise from God's Word! He has little to say himself, but He will be sure to tell us some good old Truths of God with some fresh unction and we shall go away refreshed." Oh, you sons of

toil, some of you understand this! With weary feet you come to God's House and oh, how gladly do you sing there and how sweetly does your singing harmonize with your hearts! And when you have heard the Word, you go away and say, "Would God it were Sunday all the week! Oh, that I might sit and always hear the Words of God! Oh, that I might sit and always drink in such comforts—so would I be satisfied as with marrow and fatness!" But sometimes you come up and there is a flogging for you just when there needs to be consolation! Or you get some dry hard metaphysical subject that has not any nourishment for your souls in it and you go away half starved! You hear some fine discourse with rounded periods and people say, "Oh, such an oration! Never was English so beautifully spoken by Hall or Chalmers. How admirably it was delivered!" But alas, alas! What of the dishes—the porcelain, the knife, the plate, the vase of flowers—where is the *food*? There is none there! You have got the garnishing and you ought to be thankful and hold your ministers in esteem, even if they withhold from you your necessary bread? But the child of God won't like that. He says "I am weary of such things—away with these garnishing—give it to me in plain rough Saxon if you will, but give me the Gospel! Cut it up in any fashion you like, but give me something to feed upon." The language may be rough and the style homely, but the heir of Heaven says, "There was 'comfort you My people' in it. And that was what I wanted. Its style, humanly speaking, may not have exactly suited my taste, but it has fed my soul and that will suffice me."

But, my Friends, do not support your ministers as an excuse for the discharge of your own duties—many do so. They think when they have subscribed towards the support of the ministry, it is enough—imagining, as our Roman Catholic friends do, that the priest is to do everything and the people nothing! But that is very wrong. When God said, "Comfort you, comfort you My people," He spoke to all His people to comfort one another! And who is there here who knows the Lord and has tasted of His Grace who cannot comfort his Brothers and Sisters? There is my strong friend who is on the mount feasting on dying love. He is the subject of rhapsodies and high excitement. His soul is like the chariot of Amminadib. It is on fire with his Master's Presence—he is living near to God and drinking in fullness of joy! Oh, my Brother, go and tell others of your joy, for you know not what sorrow there is upon the earth! When you are happy, remember there is sure to be someone else sad. When your cup runs over, find an empty cup to catch the drops that overflow. When your soul is full of joy, go, if you can, and find a mourner and let him hear your song, or sit down by his side and tell him how glad you are—and maybe his poor heart may be warmed by your sweet cheering words. But are you weak? Are you sad, yourself? Then go to Him who is the Great Comforter and ask Him to relieve your distresses! And after that, go out yourself and comfort others! There are none so good to comfort others as those who once were comfortless! If I were an orphan and needed a helper, I would seek one who had been an orphan in his youth, that he might sympathize with me. Were I houseless and poor, I would not go to the man who has rolled in wealth from earliest youth, but I would seek out the man who, like myself, has trod with bare feet the cold pavement of the street at midnight! I would seek out the man who, penniless and poor, has begged his way from town to town and then, by God's Providence, has worked himself up—for I could believe that such an one would have a heart to sympathize with me! Go, you poor, tried one! Go, you weather-beaten soul, if you can, and call to your mate who is just out at sea with you and tell him to be of good cheer! You who are in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, sing, "Yes, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil." And maybe some Brother far behind you will hear the song and will take heart—

*"Lives of great men all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing, leave behind us,
Footprints on the sands of time.
Footprints that, perhaps, another,
Sailing over life's solemn main,
A forlorn and shipwrecked Brother,
Seeing, may take heart again."*

Go and when you have found any good, strive to perpetuate it by communicating it to others! When your foot is on the rock, show others how to put their feet there. When you are glad, tell others how you were made glad and the same cordial which cheered you may cheer them likewise! "Comfort you, comfort you My people."

Now why do we not enjoy this a little more? I believe one reason is because we are, most of us, rather too proud to tread in our Master's footsteps. We like not to say with Him, "I am not come to be ministered unto, but to minister." "Comfort you, comfort you My people" is a sublime admonition, but never intended for the meager sympathy of fash-

ion—for a lady who can ride in her carriage and send her card up when she calls to inquire for a friend who is sick. But were I to press home the duty and tell her that, “My people,” includes the poorest of God’s flock—the weakest and the mean—she would think me a rude and vulgar young man unacquainted with the etiquette of genteel society! Comfort the poor!—why should she? “The lower classes expect a great deal too much of the upper; I shall not demean myself by stooping to them.” This kind of feeling many professing Christians have—they talk with a fine lisp—they deem it enough to say, “Poor creature, I pity your case, I am sorry for you!” But the heir of Heaven reads, “Comfort you, comfort you My people.”

There is a poor man in the streets who has just come begging a crust at your door and you can see by what he says that there is something of God’s Grace in his heart—then comfort him. There is another up the creaking staircase in that back alley. You never went up there; you might be afraid to go. But if you hear of a child of God there, do not shrink back—God’s diamonds may be often found among heaps of rags and tatters—in the very outskirts of the city, the abodes of haggard poverty. So go after them! Whenever you hear of a child of God, go and find him out, for this command, “Comfort you, comfort you My people,” never ought to be put aside by our pride. Why, you sometimes go to your Churches and Chapels and sit in your pews without even a thought of speaking to your neighbors! Some men will go to a Chapel seven years and scarcely know the name of the next seat-holder. Is that right? Many will sit at the Lord’s Table, too, and not speak to each other! That is not the fashion of communion as I understand it—it is not the fashion of the Gospel, either. When I was but a youth, almost the smallest boy who ever joined a Church, I remember I thought that everybody believed what the minister said, so when I heard him say, Brother, I thought I must be his brother, for I was admitted into the Church. I once sat next to a gentleman in a pew and we received the bread and wine together. He called me, “Brother,” and as I thought he meant it, I afterwards acted upon it. I had no friend in the town of Cambridge, where I was. And one day when walking out, I saw this same gentleman and I said to myself, “Well now, he called me, Brother. I know he is a great deal better off than I am, but I don’t care about that. I will go and speak to him.” So I went and said, “How do you do, Brother.” “I have not the pleasure of knowing you,” was his reply. I said, “I sat next to you at the Lord’s Table last Sabbath, Sir, and you called me, ‘Brother,’ when you passed the cup to me and I was sure you meant it.” “There now,” he said, “it is worth while seeing someone who believes a little with sincerity in these times! Come in with me.” And we have been the nearest and dearest bosom friends ever since, just because he saw I took him at his word that he meant what he said.

But nowadays profession has become a pretense and a sham! People sit down at Church together as though they were Brothers and Sisters. The minister calls you Brothers and Sisters, but he won’t speak to you, or acknowledge you as such. His people are his Brethren, no doubt, but then it is in such a mysterious sense that you will have to read some German theologian in order to comprehend it! That person is “your very dear Brother,” or, “your very dear Sister.” But if you are in distress, go to them and see if they will assist you! I do not believe in such a religion as that! I would have those who profess to be Brothers and Sisters, believe that, “Comfort you, comfort you My people,” applies to every member of Christ’s Church and that they all ought to carry it out to the utmost of their abilities!

II. Secondly, WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR THIS COMMAND? Why does God say “Comfort you, comfort you My people!”

The first reason is because *God loves to see His people look happy*. The Roman Catholic supposes that God is pleased with a man if he whips himself, walks barefooted for many miles and torments his body. I am certain if I were to see anyone do that I would say, “Poor soul, give him a pair of shoes. Take that whip from him—I cannot bear to see him so.” And as I believe that God is infinitely more benevolent than I am, I cannot suppose that He would take pleasure in seeing blood run down a man’s back, or blisters rising on his feet! If a man would please God, he had better make himself as happy as he can. When I am by the seaside and the tide is coming in, I see what appears to be a little fringe, looking almost like a mist, and I ask a fisherman what it is. He tells me there is no mist there—what I see are all little shrimps dancing in ecstasy, throwing themselves in convulsions and contortions of delight! I think within myself, “Does God make those creatures happy and did He make me to be miserable? Can it ever be a religious thing to be unhappy?” No—true religion is in harmony with the whole world! It is in harmony with the sun and moon and stars—and the sun shines and the stars twinkle! It is in harmony with all the world and the world has flowers in it and leaping hills and caroling birds. It has joys in it. So I believe religion was meant to have joys in it and I hold it to be an irreligious thing to go moping

miserably through God's Creation. You cannot help it sometimes, just as sins will overtake you, but happiness is a very virtue. "Go your way, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepts your works," which means not so much eating and drinking, as the living with a joyous countenance and walking before God, believing in His love and rejoicing in His Grace!

Again—"Comfort you, comfort you My people" because *uncomfortable Christians often dishonor religion*. Look at my Friend who has come here tonight with such a sorrowful countenance. Yesterday he had a new servant in his house and when she went down into the kitchen she said to her fellow servant, "Is not our master a pious man?" "Yes, surely." "I thought so because he looks so miserable." Now that is a disgrace to religion! Whenever a Christian sinks under affliction; when he does not seek Divine Grace from God to battle manfully with his sea of troubles; when he does not ask his Father to give him a great weight of consolation whereby he shall be able to endure in the evil day, we may say he does dishonor to the high and mighty and noble principles of Christianity which are fitted to bear a man up in times of the very deepest affliction! It is the boast of the Gospel that it lifts men above trouble. It is one of the glories of our Christianity that it makes us say, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vine, the labor of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat, yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." But when the Christian gets sad and miserable, run to him, Brothers and Sisters, wipe those tears from his eyes; tell him to cheer up, or at least if he is sad, not to let the world see it! If he fasts, let him anoint his head and wash his face, that he appear not unto men to fast. Let his garments be always white and let his head lack no oil. Let him be happy—for so he gives credit to religion.

Again—"Comfort you, comfort you My people"—because *a Christian in an uncomfortable state cannot work much for God*. Break a poor man's heart and let him come on this platform with a grieved and agonizing spirit and oh, what a lack of power there will be in him! He needs all his time for his own sighs and groans and will have none to spend upon God's people! We have seen broken-hearted ministers who have sadly lamented that when in trouble they have found themselves unable to declare God's Truth as they would wish. It is when the mind is happy that it can be laborious. Nothing hurts the man while he can keep all right with Heaven and feel it so! While he can say that God is his own God, he can work night and day and scarcely feel fatigued. But take away his comforts and his joys and then one day's labor distracts his nerves and shatters his mind! Then comfort God's people because bruised reeds give little music and the smoking flax makes little fire. "Comfort you, comfort you" the saints, for they will work ten times better when their minds have once been made comfortable!

Again—"Comfort you" God's people because *you profess to love them*. You call that poor aged cripple, loitering home tonight, leaning on her crutch, your Sister. Do you know that she will go to bed tonight without supper? Only once has she tasted food today and that was dry bread. Did you know that? And is she your Sister? Let your heart speak—would you allow your *sister* to eat dry bread once a day and have nothing else? No—out of love to her as your relation, you would go and comfort her! There is another poor Brother who will pass you on the road home, not poor in bodily things, but poor in soul, distressed in spirits. Don't do as that person has just done—he has quickened his pace—because he says that old man makes him miserable and it makes him melancholy to talk with him. No—just go to him and say, "Brother, I hear you are in the Valley of Baca. Well, it is written, they who pass through the Valley of Baca make it a well, the rain also fills the pools." Join yourself to him, for it is written, "Comfort you, comfort you My people." "No, Sir," you say, "I intend to go tonight with one or two very good people and we shall enjoy ourselves together and be very glad tonight." Yes, but if they are glad, you cannot comfort them, so go and seek out some broken-hearted one if you can—some poor, sad, mourning one and say, "The Lord has appeared to you of old, saying, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love.' God's mercies have not failed and therefore, we are not consumed." Go and cheer him. What? Are there no families near you where the head has lately been removed by death? Have you no bereaved friends? Have you no poor in your streets, no distressed, no desponding ones? If you have not, then yonder Scripture might be torn out of the Bible for it would be useless! But because I am sure you have such, I bid you, in God Almighty's name, to go and seek out the needy, the distressed and the poor and send them portions of meat. "Comfort you, comfort you My people."

III. In the last place. God never gives His children a duty to do without giving them THE MEANS TO DO IT. He never bids them make bricks without straw and when He tells us to comfort God's people, we may be certain there are many means whereby they may be comforted. Let me just hint at those things in the everlasting Gospel which have a ten-

dency to comfort the saints. What? Child of God! Are you at a loss for a topic to comfort the aching heart? Go tell, then, of the ancient things of former days! Whisper in the mourner's ear electing Grace and redeeming mercy and dying love! When you find a troubled one, tell him of the Covenant, in all things ordered well, signed, sealed and ratified. Tell him what the Lord has done in former days; how He cut Rahab and wounded the dragon. Tell him the wondrous story of God's dealings with His people. Tell him that God who divided the Red Sea can make a highway for His people through the deep waters of affliction. That He who appeared in the burning bush which was not consumed will support Him in the furnace of tribulation! Tell him of the marvelous things which God has worked for His chosen people—surely there is enough there to comfort him! Tell him that God watches the furnace as the goldsmith the refining pot—

*“Your days of trial, then,
Are all ordained by Heaven.
If He appoints the number ‘ten,’
You never shall have eleven.”*

If that does not suffice, tell him of His present mercies; tell him that He has much left though much is gone. Tell him there is “now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” Tell him that now he is accepted in the Beloved. Tell him that he is now adopted and that his standing is safe. Tell him that Jesus is above, wearing the breastplate, pleading his cause. Tell him that though earth's pillars shake, God is a refuge for us. Tell the mourner that the everlasting God fails not, neither is weary. Let present facts suffice you to cheer him!

But if this is not enough, tell him of the future—whisper to him that there is Heaven with pearly gates and golden streets. Tell him that—

*“A few more rolling suns at most
Will land him on fair Canaan's coast,”*

and, therefore, he may well bear his sorrows. Tell him that Christ is coming and that His sign is in the heavens. His advent is near. He will soon appear to judge the earth with equity and His people in righteousness. And if that suffices not, tell him all about that God who lived and died. Take him to Calvary! Picture to him the bleeding hands and side and feet. Tell him of the crown of thorns. Tell him of the mighty Monarch of woe and blood who wore the scarlet of mockery which was yet the purple of the empire of grief. Tell him that He, Himself, bore our sins in His own body on the tree. And if I have not said enough, go to your Bible, read its pages, bend your knees and ask for guidance and then tell him some great and precious promise that so you may accomplish your mission and comfort one of God's people!

I have but a few words to say to some who I grieve to think *need no comfort*. They need something else before they can be comforted. Some of my hearers are not God's people. They have never believed in Christ, nor fled to Him for refuge. Now I will tell you briefly and plainly the way of salvation. Sinner, know that you are in God's sight, guilty; that God is just and that He will punish you for your sins! Listen, then. There is only one way by which you can escape and it is this—Christ must be your Substitute. Either you must die, or Christ must die for you! Your only refuge is faith in Jesus Christ who did really and actually shed His blood for you. And if you are able to believe that Christ died for you, I know it will cause you to hate sin, to seek Christ and to love and serve Him world without end!

May God bless us all, forgive us our sins and accept our souls for Jesus' sake! Amen.

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