

For Dominion Presbyterian

A Divine Voice of Consolation  
in the Night.

Isaiah, chap. 41, v. 10.

BY REV. B. B. WILLIAMS.

It was a dark night in the history of Israel just now, for they were exiles in Babylon and as such their position was trying in the extreme. They felt themselves to be strangers in a strange land. Some of them remembered the temple where they and their fathers had once worshipped, they remembered also the songs of Zion in which they had taken part, and the remembrance made them unutterably sad. (Notice the touching picture of their grief in Psalm 137, 1-6.) The love of the father-land was strong and deep in them all, and they all longed with a passionate longing to be there, but there seemed no prospect of return and so the night grew darker and darker.

To these exiles, apparently without a ray of light or hope, there came a Divine voice bearing a most gracious message—"Fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God." This may justly be called "a Divine voice of consolation in the night."

Great interest attaches to this message as sent to a benighted and spirit broken people some three thousand years ago, for it reveals to us God's nearness to and tender concern for them. As a mere matter of history its value can scarcely be overstated, but the point of special interest to us is that this message is being constantly repeated, that it comes fresh and warm from the throne to those, who, like Israel of old, are in the midst of night dark and starless. Thousands are at this moment in the depths of night. It may be that of secular embarrassment, sorely straitened circumstances, or that of exile from home with all its sacred associations. The night may be one of mental perplexity caused by the pressure of the many dark problems of life, or it may be that of deep religious depression, giving rise to strange questionings, painful doubtings, terrible heart shakings, an untellable gloom. The night may be one of sickness in the home—a precious life in the balance; what the issue will be is most uncertain; if there be any hope it is strangely mingled with trembling and forebodings. The storm is simply terrible; at length perhaps the angel of death comes and the grave closes upon all that is mortal of the beloved one. Oh, the darkness and dreariness of that night!

The Father in Heaven, who faithful vigil keeps, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike, sees it all, and He speaks not less truly than in the days of old.

We know what takes place when there is a child of very tender years in the home. The child sometimes awakes suddenly in the night and cries out in great fear. There is one who is sure to hear, for love ever makes the ear quick to hear; it is the mother. She speaks and the very sound of her voice quiets and comforts the troubled child. This is a simple picture of God, who is both father and mother, and who, hearing the benighted cry, speaks pointedly and specially, saying, "fear not."

When He speaks is His voice heard?

To hear a sound is one thing, to recognize in that sound a voice is quite another thing. Hearing a voice speak, is it known whose voice it is? That depends upon the spirit that is in us; if it is the true child spirit it will instinctively and readily know the voice as that of the Father.

The message is structured not in the line of remonstrance or chiding, for He who sends it knows our frame and remembers that we are helpless and He speaks accordingly. It is well that we should read it carefully and ponder each word. It contains the doctrine of the Real Presence, not as taught in some of the churches, but in a far truer and nobler sense. "I am with thee," nearer than thou art to thyself. We miss, however, the full meaning if we suppose that it is mere nearness that is taught, valuable as that thought is. "I am with thee," identifying myself with thee, entering into, sharing thy experience.

To encourage and strengthen faith in the "Real Presence" and all that is involved therein, these wondrously gracious words are added, "For I am thy God." Therein lies a pledge that He will be close at hand and will enter into, and share, as no other can, our difficulties and troubles. It is as if a man were to say to his son, "such help as you may need either in word or deed, I will, up to the measure of my power, give you. Your perplexities shall be mine, your sorrows shall be mine—into all these I will enter, for I am your father, and as your father your interests are mine."

The fact of nearness and true Fatherly interest guaranteed by close and special relationship is followed by a promise that is well fitted to carry with it a powerful and healthful inspiration. The promise is three-fold—"strength," "a renewal of strength," "a constant renewal of strength."

The night, whatever its nature, gives rise to fear, for we are all but children of a larger growth, hence we are naturally afraid in the night. Fear is always weakening, indeed there is no force so weakening and paralyzing. What we need, therefore, is to be strengthened. We never become strong simply by resolving to be so. We must be made strong and God alone can do this. How and in what way He does this is not of so much moment as to believe and remember that He has promised to strengthen and will make that promise good. The method may vary much but the fact remains.

Now it is not the Divine method to supply strength once and forever, leaving us to ourselves to live on upon the portion given us at a certain time; nay, God's will is that we should live a life of continued dependence upon Him; that as the manna of old fell day by day and only in sufficient measure for the day, the strength is to be given and only enough for the time being. We are not permitted to ask for yearly, nor monthly, nor weekly bread, but daily bread. In like manner, it is to be in the matter of strength. "I will help," that is, I will renew the strength; for there is a constant expenditure going on, and there must be a fresh supply, or a break-down is inevitable.

Would that we were more willing to be

helped by God in every part of our life! would that we were ready to welcome Him as an active partner!

Sometimes, alas! too often, we imagine ourselves to be strong enough without God's help, save in a very small measure. In this state of mind there is no room in us for the entry and working of the strength of God. 'Tis when we feel ourselves to be poor, weak, helpless orphans, that we are in the most favorable position to be helped by our Father in heaven. "When my father and mother forsake thee, then the Lord will take me up."

Helped by God, our work would be better done, trials would be more successfully borne, our life in all its parts would be of a higher and nobler form.

Lest the thought should lay hold of us that the supply of strength may fail us in our sorest need, at some solemn crisis, there is an assurance given in the message that there shall be a renewal of strength. "I will uphold thee with the right hand of My righteousness," with My faithful right hand.

Human promises may be broken, human help may fail when most urgently needed, but God's promise cannot be broken, His help cannot fail unless His heart loses its love, and His right hand its power.

It would be well to look closely into the "Book," concerning the right hand of God. With His right hand He upholds.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for this "message of consolation in the night." Let the words ring in our ears, let them live in our memories and work in our spirits; then despite the horror of a great darkness that may come upon us, then amid the longest and dreariest night that may overtake us, we can move onward with a bold step, feeling brave and calm as to the Sacred Shrine we go—singing as we move:

"Though the night be dark and dreary,  
Darkness cannot hide from Thee;  
Thou art He, who never weary,  
Watchest where Thy people be."

It was for the sake of a Christ to be crucified that God could deal mercifully with Israel; it is for the sake of a Christ who has been crucified that He can think thoughts of peace concerning us.—Rev. W. Thorp.

Sometimes when the gold goes into the fire you can scarcely see the gold. It is mixed with various elements, all dress nearly, but when the smelting process is over, you see the pure gold. So it is with many Christian characters.—Rev. W. L. Pickard, D.D.

Counting up our mercies and our everyday reasons for gratitude, and looking at the hundred little things and large things, gentle words, loving smiles, flowers sent to cheer us, children to greet us, old friends to advise, and middle-aged friends to uphold us, good books to read, dear songs to sing, meetings in gladness, even partings in hope for the better life, we do not know where to end the list. The only thing to do is to live always in an atmosphere sweet and vital with thanksgiving.—Margaret E. Sangster.