

Be of Good Cheer

Malcolm H. Watts

DR. Jowett, the well-known preacher, was in Birmingham one miserable morning when the dirty snow was melting in the streets and a thick November fog was possessing the whole city. He met an acquaintance who that day was suffering quite badly from depression. "I feel", the man said, "so very depressed; my feelings are gloomy; I feel as though my Lord were far away." Dr. Jowett listened sympathetically and then he said, "Do you think the Welsh water is running into our town today? Has the supply from the Welsh hills been stopped? The day is gloomy enough, the fog is about, and the atmosphere is certainly chilly, but the water from the Welsh hills is flowing into the city quite as abundantly as it will do on the sunniest day in June! The fog in Birmingham will not check the gracious supply from the hills!" He meant, of course, that the supply of comfort and grace through God's Word is unaffected by the changes around and within. That river flows even on the darkest of days.

There is a stream whose gentle flow
Makes glad the city of our God
Life, love and joy, still gliding through,
And watering our divine abode.

This sacred stream, Thy Holy Word,
Thus all our raging fear controls;
Sweet peace Thy promises afford,
And gives new strength to fainting souls.

Sometimes things do look fairly bleak and dismal but we ought never to forget the consolation and encouragement which are in God's Word. What does the Scripture say? "Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad." (Prov 12:25). That verse deserves more than a passing thought. "A good word", as one commentator so rightly observes, "is wider than the

good news which would remove the cause of the anxiety but is not always possible; a good word gives courage to face it."

When here upon earth, the Lord Jesus spoke many a good word to those who were bowed down with care and in the very depths of sorrow. I notice, however, that on three occasions He used a very special and very gracious exhortation. He said: "Be of good cheer". (Matt 9:2; Mk 6:50; Jn 16:33). There is something for us here, whatever our condition may be.

A good word to those disturbed by SIN

Make no mistake about it; sin is like a sore and cruel "sting" piercing the spirit and causing terrible hurt and sorrow (1 Cor 15:56). The sense of guilt can be agony. Cain, suffering it, cried out: "My iniquity is greater than I can bear" (Gen 4:13 marginal reading). Judas, when he realized the fatal effects of his transgression, experienced such trouble of spirit as terminated in despair. "I have sinned", he said, and then he "hanged himself" (Matt 27:4, 5). Men, when they begin to feel their sins, know the pangs and terrors of a wounded conscience. In one of his sermons, Thomas Manton accurately described this wretched state- "We think a man in a fever is in a miserable condition, who hath little rest day or night: but alas! feverish flames are nothing to the scorplings of conscience, and the fearful apprehensions of divine wrath: they that are under these are miserable indeed, because the pains of hell do compass them round about, and wherever they go, they carry their own hell along with them".

There was a poor man brought to the Lord Jesus. Though stricken with palsy, his sins caused him most pain. As the Saviour looked on him, He saw all the guilt and anguish of his heart, and mercy moved

Him to speak words of comfort and peace. As we hear them once again, let us remember that the pardon of our sins is the greatest comfort of all. The Lord said to him: “Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matt 9:2).

A good word to those disturbed by FEAR

I do not refer here to that fear which God has implanted within us to guard us from the various dangers and miseries of this life, but I have in mind that unreasonable fear of things which often rises to an excessive degree and makes life unbearable. This is the fear which Isaac Watts called “the tyrant-passion”.

It may be that you are oppressed and tormented by such a fear. The precise nature of it I do not know. It could be the fear of a person. It could be the fear of some circumstance. A great many people have the fear of the unknown. The fear of death is perhaps most common. The list seems endless. There are so many fears which can possess our hearts. David could speak of “all my fears” (Psalm 34:4).

Comfort and relief can only come when Jesus draws near and proclaims Himself to our souls. This was what the disciples learned when that storm came to Gennesaret and their little boat was threatened by every blast of wind and every raging wave. The most terrible thing that night was seeing the form of something, or someone, coming towards them. “They supposed it had been a spirit, and cried

out: for they all saw him, and were troubled.” But it was then, when their fears had risen to such a pitch, that the Lord made Himself known to them, and His voice-the voice they knew and loved so very much (Jn 10:3,4; Song 2:8) - banished the fear from their hearts. “Immediately He talked with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid.” (Mk 6:50).

Even so today: to know His presence is enough. “I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me.” (Psalm 23:4).

A good word to those disturbed by TROUBLE

None of us can claim an immunity from that. “Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7) - “so many are they, so thick and so fast does one follow another.” (Matthew Henry).

To those in trouble, the Lord Jesus says: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world.” (Jn 16:33). He claims a power infinitely superior to anything and everything in this world and He promises to His people His all-powerful help. With Christ as our Saviour and Supporter, we are able to cope with the greatest of life’s problems and triumph over them all. “We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Are you cast down for some reason? I would bring you a word from the Lord - “Be of good cheer!”