

The Compassion of Christ to Weak Believers

by Samuel Davies

Jesus is compassionate and gentle towards weak believers, and will not break or crush them under His foot, but will instead support and strengthen them.

Scripture: Psalm 34:6, Psalm 42:11, Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 40:29, Matthew 12:20, John 6:37, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 4:15, Revelation 19:11

Topics: "Christ's Compassion", "Weak Faith"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the compassion of Christ to weak believers, emphasizing how Jesus possesses virtues that harmonize perfectly, showing both gentleness towards humble penitents and severity towards enemies. He assures that Jesus has the tenderest regard for the feeblest penitents, lifting them up and supporting them. Using the metaphors of a bruised reed and smoking flax, Davies illustrates the character of a weak believer as feeble, oppressed, and in need of strong consolation. He highlights the care and compassion of Jesus towards those who feel weak, burdened by sin, and struggling in their faith, assuring them of Christ's willingness to support, strengthen, and nourish even the smallest spark of true love towards Him.

Transcript

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By Samuel Davies, 1724-1761

"A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench." Matthew 12:20

The Lord Jesus possesses all those virtues in the highest perfection, which render him infinitely amiable, and qualify him for the administration of a just and gracious government over the world. The virtues of mortals, when carried to a high degree, very often run into those vices which have a kind of affinity to them. "Right, too rigid--hardens into wrong." Strict justice steels itself into excessive severity; and the 'man' is lost in the 'judge'. Goodness and mercy sometimes degenerate into softness and a sentimentalism, inconsistent with justice.

But in Jesus Christ these seemingly opposite virtues center and harmonize in the highest perfection, without running into extremes. Hence he is at once characterized as a Lamb, and as the Lion of the tribe of Judah: a lamb for gentleness towards humble penitents; and a lion to tear his enemies in pieces!

Christ is said to judge and make war, Rev. 19:11; and yet he is called The Prince of Peace; Isaiah 9:6. He will at length show himself dreadful to the workers of iniquity; and the terrors of the Lord are a very proper topic whence to persuade men. But now he is patient towards all men, and he is all love and tenderness towards the vilest penitent.

The meekness and gentleness of Christ is to be my pleasing topic; and I enter upon it with a particular view to those mourning, desponding souls among us, whose weakness renders them in great need of strong consolation. To such, in particular, I address the words of my text, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench."

The general meaning of my text seems to be contained in this observation: That the Lord Jesus has the tenderest and most compassionate regard to the feeblest penitents, however oppressed and desponding; and that he will approve and cherish the least spark of true love towards himself.

A 'bruised reed' seems naturally to represent a soul at once feeble in itself, and crushed with a burden; a soul both weak and oppressed. The reed is a slender, frail plant in itself, and therefore a very proper image to represent a soul that is feeble and weak.

A bruised reed is still more frail, hangs its head, and is unable to stand without some prop. And what can be a more lively emblem of a poor soul, not only weak in itself, but bowed down and broken under a load of sin and sorrow, that droops and sinks, and is unable to stand without divine support? Strength may bear up under a burden, or struggle with it, until it has thrown it off; but oppressed weakness, frailty under a burden--what can be more pitiable? and yet this is the case of many a poor penitent. He is weak in himself, and in the meantime crushed under a heavy weight of guilt and distress.

And what would become of such a frail oppressed creature, if, instead of raising him up and supporting him, Jesus should tread and crush him under the foot of his indignation? But though a reed, especially a bruised reed, is an insignificant thing, of little or no use, yet "a bruised reed he will not break," but he raises it up with a gentle hand, and enables it to stand, though weak in itself, and easily crushed to ruin.

Perhaps the imagery, when drawn at length, may be this: "The Lord Jesus is an Almighty Conqueror, marches in state through our world; and here and there a bruised reed lies in his way. But instead of disregarding it, or trampling it under foot--he takes care not to break it. He raises up the drooping straw, worthless as it is--and supports it with his gentle hand." Thus, poor brokenhearted penitents, thus he takes care of you, and supports you, worthless as you are. Though you seem to lie in the way of his justice, and it might tread you with its heavy foot--yet he not only does not crush you, but takes you up, and inspires you with strength to bear your burden and flourish again.

Or perhaps the imagery may be derived from the practice of the ancient shepherds, who were accustomed to amuse themselves with the music of a pipe of reed or straw; and when it was bruised they broke it, or threw it away as useless. But the bruised reed shall not be broken by this divine Shepherd of souls. The music of broken sighs and groans--is indeed all that the broken reed can afford him; the notes are but low, melancholy, and jarring. And yet he will not break the instrument, but he will repair and tune it, until it is fit to join in the concert of angels on high; and even now its humble strains are pleasing to his ears. Surely every broken heart among us must revive, while contemplating this tender and moving imagery.

The other emblem is equally significant and affecting. The 'smoking flax' shall he not quench. It seems to be an allusion to the wick of a candle or lamp, the flame of which is put out, but it still smokes, and retains

a little fire which may be again blown into a flame, or rekindled by the application of more fire. Many such dying snuffs or smoking wicks are to be found in the candlesticks of the churches, and in the lamps of the sanctuary. The flame of divine love is just expiring, it is sunk into the socket of a corrupt heart, and produces no clear, steady blaze, but only an unpleasant smoke, although it shows that a spark of the sacred fire yet remains. Or it produces a faint quivering flame that dies away, then catches and revives, and seems unwilling to be quenched entirely.

The devil and the world raise many storms of temptation to blow it out; and a corrupt heart, like a fountain, pours out water to quench it. But even this smoking flax, this dying snuff, Jesus will not quench, but he blows it up into a flame, and pours in the oil of his grace to recruit and nourish it. He walks among the golden candlesticks, and trims the lamps of his sanctuary. Where he finds empty vessels without oil, or without a spark of heavenly fire, like those of the foolish virgins--he breaks the vessels, or throws them out of his house. But where he finds the least spark of true grace, where he discovers but the glimpse of sincere love to him, where he sees the principle of true piety, which, though just expiring--yet renders the heart susceptible of divine love, as a candle just put out is easily rekindled; there he will strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die. He will blow up the smoking flax to a lively flame, and cause it to shine brighter and brighter to the perfect day. Where there is the least principle of true holiness--he will nourish it. He will furnish the expiring lamp with fresh supplies of the oil of grace, and of heavenly fire; and all the storms that beat upon it shall not be able to put it out, because sheltered by his hand.

I hope, my dear brethren, some of you begin already to feel the pleasing energy of this text. Are you not ready to say, "Blessed Jesus! is this your true character? Then you are just such a Savior as I need, and I most willingly give up myself to you!" You are sensible you are at best, but a bruised reed--a feeble, shattered, useless thing: an untunable, broken pipe of straw, that can make no proper music for the entertainment of your divine Shepherd. Your heart is at best but smoking flax, where the love of God often appears like an expiring flame that quivers and catches, and hovers over the lamp, just ready to go out. Such some of you probably feel yourselves to be. Well, and what do you think of Christ? "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax;" and therefore, may not even your guilty eyes look to this gentle Savior with encouraging hope? May you not say to him, with the sweet singer of Israel, in his last moment, "He is all my salvation, and all my desire!" 2 Sam. 23. 5.

In prosecuting this subject, I intend to illustrate the character of a weak believer, as represented in my text; and then to illustrate the care and compassion of Jesus Christ even for such a poor weakling.

I. I am to illustrate the character of a weak believer, as represented in my text, by "a bruised reed, and smoking flax."

The metaphor of a BRUISED REED, as I observed, seems most naturally to convey the idea of a state of weakness and oppression. And, therefore, in illustrating it, I am naturally led to describe the various weaknesses which a believer sometimes painfully feels, and to point out the heavy burdens which he sometimes groans under; I say sometimes, for at other times even the weak believer finds himself strong, strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man. The joy of the Lord is his strength: and he "can do all things through Christ--who gives me strength." Even the oppressed believer at times feels himself delivered from his burden, and he can lift up his drooping head, and walk upright. But, alas! the burden returns, and crushes him again. And under some burden or other many honest-hearted believers groan out the most part of their lives.

Let us now see what are those WEAKNESSES which a believer feels and laments:

He finds himself weak in knowledge; a simple child in the knowledge of God and divine things.

He is weak in love; the sacred flame does not rise with a perpetual fervor, and diffuse itself through all his devotions, but at times it languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff.

He is weak in faith; he cannot keep a strong hold of the Almighty, cannot suspend his all upon his promises with cheerful confidence, nor build a firm, immovable fabric of hope upon the rock Jesus Christ.

He is weak in hope; his hope is dashed with rising billows of fears and jealousies, and sometimes just overwhelmed.

He is weak in joy; he cannot extract the sweets of Christianity, nor taste the comforts of his religion.

He is weak in zeal for God and the interests of his kingdom; he would wish himself always a flaming seraph, always glowing with zeal, always unwearied in serving his God, and promoting the designs of redeeming love in the world. But, alas! At times his zeal, with his love, languishes and dies away into a smoking snuff.

He is weak in repentance; he troubled with that plague of plagues, a hard heart.

He is weak in the conflict with indwelling sin, that is perpetually making insurrections within him.

He is weak in resisting temptations; which crowd upon him from without, and are often likely to overwhelm him.

He is weak in courage to encounter the king of terrors, and venture through the valley of the shadow of death.

He is weak in prayer, in importunity, in filial boldness, in approaching the mercy-seat.

He is weak in abilities to endeavor the conversion of sinners and save souls from death.

In short, he is weak in everything, in which he should be strong. He has indeed, like the church of Philadelphia, a little strength, Rev. 3:8, and at times he feels it. But oh! it seems to him much too little for the work he has to do.

These weaknesses or defects the believer feels--painfully and tenderly feels, and bitterly laments. A sense of them keeps him upon his guard against temptations: he is not venturesome in rushing into the combat. He would not parley with temptation, but would keep out of its way; nor would he run the risk of a defeat by an ostentatious experiment of his strength. This sense of weakness also keeps him dependent upon divine strength. He clings to that support given to Paul in an hour of hard conflict, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness;" and when a sense of his weakness has this happy effect upon him, then with Paul he has reason to say, "When I am weak--then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12. 9, 10.

I say the believer feels and laments these weaknesses; and this is the grand distinction in this case between him and the rest of the world. They are the weak too, much weaker than he; nay, they have, properly, no spiritual strength at all; but, alas! they do not feel their weakness, but the poor vain creatures

boast of their strength, and think they can do great things when they are disposed for them. Or if their repeated falls and defeats by temptation extort them to a confession of their weakness, they plead it rather as an excuse, than lament it as at once a crime and a calamity. But the poor believer tries no such artifice to extenuate his guilt. He is sensible that even his weakness itself has guilt in it, and therefore he laments his weakness with sincere sorrow, among his other sins.

Now, have I not delineated the very character of some of you; such weaklings, such frail reeds you feel yourselves to be? Well, hear this kind assurance, "Jesus will not break such a feeble reed--but he will support and strengthen it!"

But you perhaps not only feel you are weak--but you are oppressed with some heavy burden or other. You are not only a reed for weakness--but you are a bruised reed, trodden under foot, crushed under a load. Even this is no unusual or discouraging case, for:

The weak believer often feels himself crushed under some heavy burden. The frail reed is often bruised; bruised under a due sense of guilt. Guilt lies heavy at times upon his conscience, and he cannot throw it off. The frail reed is often bruised with a sense of remaining sin, which he finds still strong within him, and which at times prevails, and treads him under foot.

The frail reed is often bruised under a burden of deficiencies: the lack of tenderness of heart, the lack of ardent love to God and mankind, the lack of heavenly-mindedness and victory over the world; the lack of conduct and resolution to direct his behavior in a passage so intricate and difficult, and the lack of nearer fellowship with the Father and his Spirit. In short, a thousand pressing needs crush and bruise him!

He also feels his share of the calamities of life in common with other men. But these burdens I shall take no farther notice of, because they are not peculiar to him as a believer, nor do they lie heaviest upon his heart. He could easily bear up under the calamities of life if his spiritual deficiencies were supplied, and the burden of guilt and sin were removed. Under these last he groans and sinks. Indeed these burdens lie with all their full weight upon the world around him; but they are dead in trespasses and sins, and feel them not: they do not groan under them, nor labor for deliverance from them. They lie contented under them, with more stupidity than beasts of burden, until they sink under the intolerable load into the depth of misery!

But the poor believer is not so insensible, and his tender heart feels the burden and groans under it. "We who are in this tabernacle," says Paul, "do groan, being burdened." 2 Corinthians 5:4. The believer understands feelingly that pathetic exclamation, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" Romans 7:24. He cannot be easy until his conscience is appeased by a well-attested pardon through the blood of Christ. Also, the sins he feels working within him are a real burden and uneasiness to him, though they should never break out into action, and publicly dishonor his holy profession.

And is not this the very character of some poor oppressed creatures among you? I hope it is. You may look upon your case to be very discouraging--but Jesus looks upon it in a more favorable light; he looks upon you as proper objects of his compassionate care. Bruised as you are--he will bind up, and support you!

But I proceed to take a view of the character of a weak Christian, as represented in the other metaphor in my text, namely, SMOKING FLAX. The idea most naturally conveyed by this metaphor is, that of true and sincere grace--but languishing and just expiring, like a candle just blown out, which still smokes and

retains a feeble spark of fire. It signifies a susceptibility of enlarged grace, or a readiness to catch that sacred fire, as a candle just put out is easily re-kindled. This metaphor therefore leads me to describe the reality of religion in a low degree, or to delineate the true Christian in his most languishing hours. And in so doing I shall mention those dispositions and exercises which the weakest Christian feels, even in these melancholy seasons; for even in these he widely differs still from the most polished hypocrite in his highest improvements.

On this subject let me solicit your most serious attention; for, if you have the least spark of real religion within you, you are now likely to discover it, as I am not going to rise to the high attainments of Christians of the first rank--but to stoop to the character of the lowest. Now the peculiar dispositions and exercises of heart which such in some measure feel, you may discover from the following short history of their case:

The weak Christian in such languishing hours does indeed sometimes fall into such a state of carelessness and insensibility, that he has very few and but superficial exercises of mind about divine things. But generally he feels an uneasiness, an emptiness, an anxiety within, under which he droops and pines away, and all the world cannot heal the disease! He has chosen the blessed God as his supreme happiness; and, when he cannot derive happiness from that source, all the sweets of created enjoyments become insipid to him, and cannot fill up the great void which the absence of the Supreme Good leaves in his craving soul. Sometimes his anxiety is indistinct and confused, and he hardly knows what ails him; but at other times he feels it is for God, the living God, that his soul pants. The evaporations of this smoking flax naturally ascend towards heaven. He knows that he never can be happy until he can enjoy the communications of divine love. Let him turn which way he will--he can find no solid ease, no rest, until he comes to this center again.

Even at such times, he cannot be thoroughly reconciled to his sins. He may be parleying with some of them in an unguarded hour, and seem to be negotiating a peace; but the truce is soon ended, and they are at variance again. The enmity of a renewed heart soon rises against this old enemy. And there is this circumstance remarkable in the believer's hatred and opposition to SIN--that they do not proceed principally, much less entirely, from a fear of punishment--but from a generous sense to its intrinsic vileness and ingratitude, and its contrariety to the holy nature of God. This is the ground of his hatred to sin, and sorrow for it; and this shows that there is at least a spark of true grace in his heart, and that he does not act altogether from the base, selfish and mercenary principles of mere human nature.

At such times he is very jealous of the sincerity of his religion, afraid that all his past experiences were delusive, and afraid that, if he should die in his present state, he would be forever miserable. A very anxious state is this!

The insensible world can lie secure, while this grand concern lies in the most dreadful suspense. But the tenderhearted believer is not capable of such fool-hardiness: he shudders at the thought of everlasting separation from that God and Savior whom he loves. He loves him, and therefore the fear of separation from him, fills him with all the anxiety of bereaved love. This to him, is the most painful ingredient of the punishment of hell. Hell would be a sevenfold hell to a lover of God, because it is a state of banishment from him whom he loves! He could forever languish and pine away under the consuming distresses of widowed love, which those who love him cannot feel. And has God kindled the sacred flame in his heart--only in order to render him capable of the more exquisite pain? Will he exclude from his presence--the poor creature that clings to him, and languishes for him? No! the flax that does but smoke with his love--was never intended to be fuel for hell; but God will blow it up into a flame, and nourish it until

it mingles with the seraphic ardors in the region of perfect love!

The weak believer seems sometimes driven by the tempest of lusts and temptation from off the rock of Jesus Christ. But he makes towards it on the stormy billows, and labors to lay hold upon it, and recover his station there; for he is sensible there is no other foundation of safety; but that without Christ he must perish forever.

It is the habitual disposition of the believer's soul--to depend upon Jesus Christ alone. He retains a kind of inclination or tendency towards him--like the compass needle turns towards the north pole; and, if his heart is turned from its course, it trembles and quivers until it gains its favorite point again, and fixes there. Sometimes, indeed, a consciousness of guilt renders him shy of his God and Savior; and after such base ingratitude he is ashamed to go to him: but at length necessity as well as inclination constrains him, and he is obliged to cry out, "Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life!" John 6:68. "In you alone I find rest to my soul; and therefore to you I must fly, though I am ashamed and confounded to appear in your presence!"

In short, the weakest Christian upon earth sensibly feels that his comfort rises and falls--as he lives nearer to or farther from his God. The love of God has such a habitual predominance even in his heart, that nothing in the world, nor even all the world together, can fill up God's place. No, when God is gone--heaven and earth together cannot replenish the mighty void.

The weakest Christian upon earth, longs to be delivered from sin--from all sin, without exception: and the body of death hanging about him is the burden of his life.

The poor languishing Christian has his hope--all the little hope that he has--built upon Jesus Christ. This smoking flax sends up some exhalations of love towards heaven. The poor creature that often fears he is altogether a slave to sin--honestly, though feebly, labors to be holy, to be holy as an angel, yes, to be holy as God is holy. He has a heart that feels the attractive charms of holiness, and he is so captivated by it, that sin can never recover its former place of dominion in his heart. No! the tyrant is forever dethroned, and the believer would rather die than yield himself a devoted slave to sin's usurped tyranny again.

Thus I have delineated to you, in the plainest manner I could, the CHARACTER of a weak Christian. Some of you, I am afraid, cannot lay claim even to this low character. If so, you may be sure you are not true Christians, even of the lowest rank. You may be sure you have not the least spark of true religion in your hearts--but are utterly destitute of it.

But some of you, I hope, can say, "Well, after all my doubts and fears, if this is the character of a true, though weak Christian, then I may humbly hope that I am one. I am indeed confirmed in it, that I am less than the least of all other saints upon the face of the earth--but yet I see that I am a saint; for thus has my heart been exercised, even in my dark and languishing hours. This secret uneasiness and pining anxiety, this thirst for God--for the living God, this tendency of soul towards Jesus Christ, this implacable enmity to sin, this panting and struggling after holiness: these things have I often felt!"

And have you indeed? Then away with your doubts and jealousies; away with your fears and despondencies! There is at least an immortal spark kindled in your hearts, which the united power of men and devils, of sin and temptation, shall never be able to quench! No, it shall yet rise into a flame, and burn with seraphic ardors forever!

For your farther encouragement, I proceed,

II. To illustrate the CARE and COMPASSION of Jesus Christ for such poor weaklings as you.

This may appear a needless task to some: for who is there that does not believe it? But to such would I say, it is no easy thing to establish a trembling soul in the full belief of this truth. It is easy for one that does not see his danger, and does not feel his extreme need of salvation, and the difficulty of the work--to believe that Christ is willing and able to save him. But oh! to a poor soul, deeply sensible of its condition, this is no easy matter. Besides, the heart may need be more deeply affected with this truth, though the understanding should need no farther arguments of the speculative kind for its conviction; and to impress this truth is my present design.

For this purpose I need but read and paraphrase to you a few of the many kind declarations and assurances which Jesus has given us in his word, and relate the happy experiences of some of his saints there recorded, who found him true and faithful to his word.

The Lord Jesus Christ seems to have a peculiar tenderness for the poor, the mourners, the broken-hearted; and these are peculiarly the objects of his mediatorial office. "The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, because the LORD has appointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to announce that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel, he will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of despair. For the LORD has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for his own glory." Isaiah 61:1-3.

Thus says the LORD, in strains of majesty that become him, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Could you ever build me a temple as good as that? Could you build a dwelling place for me? My hands have made both heaven and earth, and they are mine. I, the LORD, have spoken!" Had he spoken uniformly in this majestic language to us guilty worms, the declaration might have overwhelmed us with awe--but could not have inspired us with hope. But he advances himself thus high--on purpose to let us see how low he can stoop. Hear the encouraging sequel of this his majestic speech: "I will bless those who have humble and contrite hearts, who tremble at my word!" Isaiah 66:1-2.

He loves to dwell upon this subject, and therefore you hear it again in the same prophecy: "Thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy,"--what does he say? "I dwell in the high and holy place." Isaiah 57:15, This is said of his character; this is a dwelling in some measure worthy the inhabitant. But oh! will he stoop to dwell in a lower mansion, or pitch his tent among mortals? Yes, he dwells not only in his high and holy place--but also, "with those whose spirits are contrite and humble. I refresh the humble and give new courage to those with repentant hearts!"

He charges Peter to feed his lambs--as well as his sheep; that is, to take the tenderest care even of the weakest in his flock. John 21:15. And he severely rebukes the shepherds of Israel, "Because," says he, "You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the broken bones. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with force and cruelty." Ezekiel 34:4.

But what an amiable reverse is the character of the great Shepherd and Sustainer of souls! "Behold," says Isaiah, "The Sovereign LORD is coming in all his glorious power. He will rule with awesome strength. See,

he brings his reward with him as he comes!" How justly may we tremble at this proclamation of the approaching God! for who can stand when he appears? But how agreeably are our fears quenched in what follows! If he comes to take vengeance on his enemies--he also comes to show mercy to the lowest of his people. "He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young!" Isaiah 40:10, 11. That is, he shall exercise the tenderest and most compassionate care towards the lowest and weakest of his flock.

"The LORD looked down," says the Psalmist, "from his heavenly sanctuary. He looked to the earth from heaven;" not to view the grandeur and pride of courts and kings, nor the heroic exploits of conquerors--but "to hear the groans of the prisoners, to release those condemned to die!" He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. This was written for the generation to come. Psalm 102:19-20. It was written for your encouragement, my brethren. Over three thousand years ago, this encouraging passage was entered into the sacred records for the support of poor desponding souls today--to the ends of the earth.

Oh, what an early provident care does God show for his people! There are none of the seven churches of Asia so highly commended by Christ as that of Philadelphia; and yet in commending her, all he can say is, "I know all the things you do, and I have opened a door for you that no one can shut. You have little strength, yet you obeyed my word and did not deny me!" Rev. 3:8.

Oh, how acceptable is a little strength to Jesus Christ, and how ready is he to improve it! "He gives power to those who are tired and worn out", says Isaiah, "He gives strength to the weary and strengthens the powerless!" Isaiah 40:29.

Hear farther what words of grace and truth flowed from the lips of Jesus. "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you will find rest for your souls!" Matthew 11:28-29.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away!" John 6:37.

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink!" John 7:37.

"The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life!" Revelation 22:17

Oh, what strong consolation is here! What exceeding great and precious promises are these! I might easily add to the catalogue--but these may suffice.

Let us now see how his people in every age have ever found these promises made good.

Here David may be consulted, and he will tell you, pointing to himself, "This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles!" Psalm 34:6.

Paul, in the midst of affliction, calls God "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles!" 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4. "God," says he, "who comforts those that are cast down--has comforted us." 2 Corinthians 7:6. What a sweetly emphatic declaration is this! "God, the comforter of the humble--has comforted us!" (This is the literal translation of the text.) He is not only the Lord Almighty, the King of kings, the Creator of the world--but among his more magnificent characters he

assumes this title, the Comforter of "the humble."

Such Paul found him in an hour of temptation, when he had this supporting answer to his repeated prayer for deliverance, "My grace is sufficient for you--for my power is made perfect in weakness!" 2 Corinthians 12:9. Since this was the case, since his weakness was more than supplied by the strength of Christ, and was a foil to set it off, Paul seems quite regardless what infirmities he labored under. "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong!" He could take no pleasure in feeling himself weak: but the mortification was made up by the pleasure he found in leaning upon this almighty support. His wounds were painful to him: but, oh! the pleasure he found in feeling the divine physician dressing his wounds, in some measure swallowed up the pain!

It was probably his experience, as well as inspiration, that dictated to the apostle that amiable character of Christ, that he is "A merciful and faithful high priest. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Hebrews 2:17, 18. And, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15.

But why need I multiply arguments? Go to his cross--and there learn his love and compassion, from his groans and wounds, and blood, and death! Would he hang there in such agony for sinners--if he were not willing to save them, and nourish every good principle in them? There you may have much the same evidence of his compassion, as Thomas had of his resurrection: you may look into his hands, and see the print of the nails; and into his side, and see the scar of the spear; which loudly proclaims his readiness to pity and help you!

And now, poor, trembling, doubting souls--you should raise up your drooping head, and take courage! May you not venture your souls into such compassionate and faithful hands? Why should the bruised reed shrink from him, when he comes not to tread it down--but raise it up!

As I am really solicitous that impenitent hearts among us should be pierced with the medicinal anguish, and sorrow of conviction, and repentance. I am truly solicitous that every honest soul, in which there is the least spark of true piety, should enjoy the pleasure of it. It is indeed to be lamented that those who have a title to so much happiness, should enjoy so little of it! It is very incongruous that they should go bowing their head in their way towards heaven--as if they were hastening to the place of execution! and that they should serve so good a Master--with such heavy hearts! Oh lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees! "Comfort, comfort my people! says your God." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Trust in your all-sufficient Redeemer; trust in him--though he should slay you!

And do not indulge causeless doubts and fears concerning your sincerity. When they arise in your minds, examine them, and search whether there is any sufficient reason for them; and if you discover there is not, then reject them and set them at defiance, and entertain your hopes in spite of them, and say with the Psalmist, "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!" Psalm 42:11

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