

Solace



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BUSTER**

For thousands of years, people have believed devoutly in an omnipotent spirit who watched over them, cared for them, loved them, protected them. A homely priest sheltered from the world in the rural South African countryside comes face to face with the blatant reality that pervades the urban jungle when he journeys to Johannesburg in search of his son. Taken aback by the harsh truths of the ravaged and segregated city, he relies solely on his Christian faith to withstand the brutalities that the city hosts. In Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, in light of living as a black South African under Apartheid and grieving over how his son has gone astray, Stephen Kumalo's Christian faith helps him to overcome his hardships by bringing him solace in his darkest hours.

When Stephen Kumalo discovers his son's moral transgression and his apparent lack of conscience, he turns to Tixo (the Xosa word for " God") for solace in his time of trouble. In the wake of learning of his son's immorality, Kumalo sinks into the depths of despair; however, Msimangu's preaching to the blind in Ezenzeleni restores Kumalo's faith. The tone is one of hope; the Lord will " open the blind eyes" and " make darkness light before them" (Paton, 124). With the use of the contrasting words " darkness" and " light", the passage conveys the idea that the Lord can drive away encroaching evil with truth. From the phrase " hold thine hand" and " not forsake them" we can see that in times of trouble the Lord will not abandon his people and instead will guide them through their hardships, which Kumalo sorely needs. The mood is inspiring, because even in " darkness" the Lord does not forsake people; he will " hold thine hand" and " lead them in paths", showing us that the Lord will not leave anyone behind. Kumalo is " silent", awed by the "

voice of gold” from the man “ whose heart was golden, reading from a book of golden words”. This emphasis on the word “ gold” shows that Tixo is the sole source of pure truth and light for Kumalo in his “ darkness”. There are many pauses, reflecting Kumalo’s introspection and musings. At one point during the preaching he ask many rhetorical questions with no clear answer, revealing his grasping for truth. At last he comes to the conclusion that life is full of mystery, and all that matters is that he is “ not forsaken” by Tixo. The saints will “ lift up the heart in the days of our distress” and for that he is “ grateful”. Having reached this conclusion, he tells Msimangu that he is “ recovered” from the crippling “ darkness” and sees the “ light” again.

Not only does Kumalo see that the Christian faith provides consolation, but he also learns from Msimangu that the only way that South Africa can overcome Apartheid is through the Christian value of brotherly love between white and black men. The tone of Msimangu’s revelation is grave, because he is aware that the Apartheid in South Africa results in an imbalance of power between white and black men, which leaves room for discontentment. This discrimination from the unfair division of power prompts black men to desire to “ put right what is wrong” by taking “ revenge” (Paton, 71) on the white men. The mood here is somewhat hopeful despite the somber atmosphere. Msimangu presents one solution to the “ corruption” and “ power” thirst of the countrymen: “ love”. There is still “ one hope for our country”; the Christian love between “ white and black men”, when they desire “ only the good of their country”, will prompt them to “ come together to work” selflessly for their shared society. The resentment of the black men is discernable from the use of harsh negative words like “ revenge” and “

corruption". However, Msimangu's optimism is evident through words like "hope", "love", "good", and "come together", underscoring Christian values. The sentences are long, with pauses interspersed among them; this demonstrates thoughtfulness and depth, as well as the gravity of these notions. The weight of his words comes from the precarious plight of the South African society; Msimangu believes that only Christian "love" "between black and white men" is the only way that the segregation and racism will come to an end.

In the face of the unknown, Kumalo's fears get the better of him as his own world fades away; however, in a world where fear runs rampant, Kumalo combats the encroaching trepidation with his unwavering Christian faith. The tone is one of apprehension bordering on sheer terror; as "the journey" into the "unknown" (Paton, 44) begins, Kumalo's fears, which he had managed to hold at bay, infringe upon him and run amok. To fend off such dreadful thoughts, Kumalo seeks refuge in his "sacred book". Even though he is consumed with fear because his "own world is slipping away", he finds comfort in the Bible because "it was this world alone that [he] was certain". The mood is set as suspenseful; for when "the journey had begun", it was filled with possibilities of "the unknown". The repetition of the simple word "fear" does much to capture Kumalo's emotions. This emphasis on "fear" throws light upon how much influence Kumalo's Christian faith has on him; despite his overwhelming worries, they are all assuaged when he is immersed in the only world "that was certain". The words "fear", "killed", "sickness", "dying", and "destroyed" leave a negative impression on the reader; they convey an atmosphere of foreboding. The passage is composed

of sentences both long and short; by varying the lengths of the sentences, the author effectively conveys Kumalo's running trains of thought and the anxiety that accompanies each. By punctuating the long sentence with commas, the author takes Kumalo's fears and lines them up together; this shows how Kumalo gets carried away with his worries, and one leads to another. This vicious cycle of fear is cut short when Kumalo decides to read his Bible and takes refuge in the "world" that was "certain" because in a world that is rapidly changing, only his faith remains solid and stable. Kumalo is so emboldened by his faith that he is willing to trade the world he has always known for the "unknown" world of the "great city", so long as he can still find solace in Tixo.

Hence, the priest Stephen Kumalo is able to overcome his hardships through the solace he finds in his Christian faith. In the wake of discovering that his son became a murderer, Kumalo powers through the ordeal by maintaining faith in Tixo. From Msimangu, Kumalo learns that the Christian value of brotherly love can combat the injustices of Apartheid. When Kumalo leaves his comfort zone for a world of fears, he is able to fend off the apprehension by finding comfort in the Christian faith. Like countless before him, Kumalo has an unwavering belief in God; he knows that there will always be someone who will watch over him unfailingly.