

The Bulletin

Meeks Street Church of Christ

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June 19, 2022

“Comfort In Hardship”

By Joseph Lachausse

I believe there are two basic human needs that every individual has - forgiveness and comfort. I also believe that only God can completely meet both of those needs. We all sin (Romans 3:23), and so we all need God's grace. We all suffer, and so we all need the peace that only God can provide (Philippians 4:6-7).

Every Christian needs encouragement at various times throughout this life. We suffer due to family problems, health concerns, natural disasters, spiritual weakness, emotional trials, problems at work, and even difficulties in the church. This is nothing new, for there were problems in the church even during biblical times. In the church of Christ at Corinth alone, we read of division, immorality, lawsuits between brethren, incorrect worship practices, abuse of miraculous gifts, lack of love for one another, and misunderstandings concerning the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead in the last day. Corinth, like most every congregation of God's people, was filled with hurting people. This is why God inspired Paul to give them a lot of encouragement (2 Corinthians 1:3-5). They needed to grow stronger and remain stronger and more faithful, and encouragement would do that.

There are people around you who are hurting. We live in a broken, fallen world; thus, no life is free from hardship (Job 5:7). However, what we see in life is not determined by our own vantage point, but rather how we view life. Sometimes the hardships of life beat us down, and it is during those times that we need to be encouraged (2 Corinthians 1:5; John 16:33; 1 Peter 4:12-13).

Why rejoice when fiery trials come upon us, Peter? Because with those hardships come opportunities to receive God's comfort. Yes, I know that we think that we can do it all ourselves, that we have convinced ourselves that we are invincible, that we think we are self-reliant, that we think that if we obtain enough wealth and possessions we do not have to depend on God, that if we can educate ourselves enough we can determine our own morals, laws, and guidelines so we have no need of the Bible, that if we can be busy enough with programs, plans, and activities, we will have no need of the church, but God knows differently (John 15:5; 2 Corinthians 1:9). Hardships have a way of bringing us to our knees and reminding us of our great need for God's comfort (Hebrews 12:7-11). So instead of running away from God during the hard times, let's run TO Him (Hebrews 4:16; 1 Peter 5:7).

The Bible teaches us that we can find comfort in hardship. Finding comfort ... in hardship. How can that be possible?

For one, we can find comfort in hardship because hardship equips us to bring comfort to others. All of us who have gone through hard times know how comforting it is when someone else comes up to us and says, "I understand how you feel, because I've been through the very same situation you are going through right now." Christians, when a brother or sister in Christ comforts you in this way, what are they doing? God says that they are using the comfort which He Himself has given them in order to comfort you (2 Corinthians 1:4).

Until we have experienced pain, we really cannot sympathize with hurting people - not in the way we can after our own pain. One who has lost a child, a parent, a sibling, or a close friend can better understand people who are going through a similar situation. A person who is suffering with cancer can better understand when others deal with this dreadful disease.

When we go through tough times, we are enabled to identify with someone else who has a similar experience. Why do you think support groups are so popular? No one understands the agony of divorce like somebody who has

been divorced. No one understands the pain and humiliation of having a family member in prison like someone else who has a family member in prison. When people get together who have common experiences, they can encourage and comfort each other.

The Bible says that God is "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Corinthians 1:3). Mercies is sometimes translated compassion. Did you notice how Paul distinguishes between mercy/compassion and comfort in this verse? There's a difference between the two. Compassion has more to do with understanding, while comfort has more to do with putting that understanding into action to help others. No wonder "comfort" in the Greek literally means "to come alongside." That's what people who comfort do. They come alongside. The comforter listens, encourages, and assists (James 2:15-16). They will work to make the situation better. They will take the initiative to make the visit, pick up the phone, prepare the meal, or tap the sufferer on the shoulder and say, "I understand what you're going through; I've been there" (2 Corinthians 1:6-7).

So we can find comfort in hardship from others, the ones who have experienced the same or similar sufferings. So when we experience hardships, let us do our best to rejoice, knowing that now we are better equipped to be a more comforting blessing to more people.

Have you ever considered that your faith has a big spotlight placed on it every single time you as a Christian have to endure hardship in your life? It's true. There are many who are watching Christians to see if we are living consistent lives. They want to know if we really trust the God we claim to believe, so they want to know how we react when we are in trouble.

Fair or not, this is a reality, and our Lord recognizes that. It is for this reason that He inspired the apostles to write, "If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation ... so that many will give thanks on our behalf ..." (2 Corinthians 1:6, 11), and, "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). Faithful wives who have disobedient husbands - a serious burden for the wives, to be sure - are told to be subject to them ... why? So that "they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives" (1 Peter 3:1). Our conduct, how we act, especially in the face of suffering and hardship matters.

Here's a good question we should ask ourselves. What should a suffering Christian look like? For one, he should show gratitude to God. Look at Paul, who in the midst of talking about his and his fellow Christians' hardships in 2 Corinthians 2 didn't forget to be grateful to God (2 Corinthians 2:14). When he exhorted the Philippian Christians to bring everything to God in prayer in order to get unimaginable peace in the midst of hardship, what attitude did he go out of his way to tell them to have? An attitude of thanksgiving (Philippians 4:6-7).

When we complain about our trials, all we are doing is increasing our anxieties and worries. However, when we choose to instead thank God for His goodness even in the midst of suffering, we will have more peace. Is this hard to do? Sure. Are most of us not very good at doing this? Absolutely. Most of us count our problems rather than our blessings, and by doing so we forget that God, even during the hard times, still provides us with every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Have we forgotten that as Christians we have more spiritual blessings than we could ever enumerate (Ephesians 1:3)?

Life's difficulties remind us that we cannot make it through this life by ourselves. When we remember that and act accordingly, others will notice ... and that is one way we can open the door to bring the gospel to them. Not only that, but we should also be reminded that life is temporary, and we are strangers on this earth who have citizenship in Heaven rather than here (Philippians 3:20). The Greek word translated "citizenship" in this passage describes the homeland of an individual who has been taken into captivity in a foreign land. Such an individual would say, "Yes, I might be here as a slave against my will TEMPORARILY, but my citizenship is back in my homeland. I have my name written in a register back in my own country to prove it." This is how it is with Christians in a spiritual sense. We are here on this earth for a short visit, but our homeland is in Heaven. Our Father and our Savior are there, and our name is written there.

So we must remember that there is something better waiting for us (2 Corinthians 4:16-17). Jesus promised He would go and prepare a place of rest for us and that someday He would take us home to be with Him in this place of eternal rest (John 14:1-3). Where are our treasures - here or in Heaven (Matthew 6:19-21)? We can be thankful that they are in Heaven rather than here on earth. However, as long as we are here the God of comfort will bring rest and peace to our souls as we long for that eternal home. We can rejoice in this, even while we are suffering, and especially when we realize that our joy in the midst of trouble gets the attention of others and can open doors for them to come to learn and obey the truth so they can start on that road to Heaven themselves.

I will never forget something that a friend of mine once told me: "During life, we have ups and downs. But no matter what, we have an Advocate, Jesus Christ. We must cast our cares on Him. If we have a good day, we must thank Him. If we are having a bad day, we must talk to Him about it in prayer. If you bring your troubles to God, He will find a way for you." That's true. That's what God wants us to do. That's what God promises to do.

Always remember that.

News and Notes: Sick and recovering: Tim Harris Sr, Tim Harris Jr, Chad Harris, Daniel Holloway, Debbie Keplinger, Janis Johnson, Sam Johnson, J F Dancer, Robbie, Sheila, Sherry Doles, Nannette Chancellor, Sandi Poole, Nathan Cox, Wesley Trimble, Greyson Reynolds (Nellie's classmate), Sandra Oliver, and Janis Johnson (Savannah), and Robert Howard (Doug and Pat's son in law), and John Curtis Hearn.

Those Who Serve:

Sunday Morning 9:00 A.M. Service:

Opening Prayer: Tim Harris Sr.
Preaching: Adam Harris
Sermon #1: "Contentment"

Auditorium Bible Class: 9:35am:

Workbook: Fred Johnson
Ephesians (Chris Reeves)
Starting Page & Question: Page #16, Question #2

Sunday Morning 10:30 A.M. Service:

Announcements: Russell Briggs
Opening Prayer & Scripture Reading: Lee Busby
Proverbs 18:20-21
Jerry Kennemur
Song Leader: Russell Briggs
Lord's Supper: — —
Assisting: Adam Harris
Preaching: "Overlooked Sin: Sins Of The Tongue"
Sermon #2: Danny Sheffield
Closing Prayer:

Wednesday Evening: 7:00 P.M.

June 22nd:

Auditorium Bible Class: Russell Briggs
Workbook: Jeremiah & Lamentations
(John Humphries)
Starting Page & Question: Page #34, Question #1
Invitation: Paul Johnson
Song Leader: Adam Harris
Closing Prayer: Brian Meade

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