

# Comfort & Challenges

June 23, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Comfort and Challenges." Thank you to Rhonda, Glynnis, Jim, and Don for being part of the video. The scripture reading is 2 Corinthians 1, 3-5.

Happy birthday this week to Sellina, and happy anniversary to Glynnis and John, and to Dorothy and Len.

## Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning everyone. [Good morning.] And welcome.

We're having a Wednesday night Bible study at 7.30 and we're studying First John. It's an excellent study. And I might be biased, but Adam's an excellent teacher and it's a very good study. And if you can come and join us, do so. I'm not biased. He really is a good teacher. Anyway, it's a great study, so come and join us.

This is kind of a sad day for us because this is the last day that our auditorium will look like this because we won't have our students with us next Sunday and they won't be with us again until September. And that's kind of sad for us. We will miss them.

We miss them for all sorts of reasons. Jonathan starts asking me. I drive the kids from Hamilton. Jonathan starts asking me about Grimsby, whether we're there yet, because he needs to get here quickly so he can get his cookies. Well, the students play a role in providing those cookies and cleaning up after and we miss that. We miss you because you fill our pews. We miss you because several of you have helped us with our Sunday school program. We miss your singing. You're great singers.

I think if there's any Sunday that I remember really fondly this year, it was the Sunday that the chorus sang at the front. That was a very, very meaningful day. We miss you because you come around and you ask us for sponsors for Great Lakes, which is an indication that you support your school and you support causes that are bigger than you. And we miss you because of your presence in the community.

One day when I was walking up Bartlett Creek, there's a trail up beside Bartlett Creek and this had nothing to do with the workathon, but there were some students walking along ahead of me and they were busy picking up trash along Bartlett Creek and they do a lot in our community. So anyway, there we have it.

Tintern Bible day camp. They need volunteers. And if you have finished grade seven, you can help. And if you are a high school student, you can get community service hours and you can speak to Margaret or there's a link up there on the screen that you can register for that.

Prayer requests, Stacey looking for a job in an apartment, Cares family as they mourn for her passing, the students who are in exams this week. And we always continue to pray for Pam and

pray for her in her time of challenge and she's an amazing human being and we appreciate her. Okay, let's continue and pray.

God, thank you for the people who are part of our community. Thank you especially for our teenagers. And we pray that if they leave us that you'll protect them and protect them from Satan and protect them from evil and with your constant love. We pray that they will continue to walk in your light and especially for the ones who are graduating this year that they will continue to walk in your light once they're gone from us and that they'll grow in their faith and may they honour you in all that they do. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Song Leader

Thank you, Rhonda. Good morning, everyone. You stole my thunder a little bit. That's okay. I wanted to say thank you to our student volunteers. If you have volunteered here in any capacity in your time at Great Lakes, would you stand up for a minute please if you are comfortable doing so? We would like to applaud you for that. [applause]

So thank you for being part of us. You fill our seats and you fill our hearts. So we will miss you as you head home or head on to your next steps.

And I also wanted to, so you may notice, I'm pivoting a little bit here, you may notice that the seats are in different places this week. And I've had three people ask me, so I'm going to talk about it now. So what we wanted to do was make an opportunity for people who have different levels of mobility to sit at different places in the auditorium. We wanted to make sure that if someone is using a walker or has crutches or a wheelchair that we don't have to shove them to the back. That's not very welcoming. We don't want to be like that. So we've made some space on both sides part way up.

You don't have to sit there if you have a walker or a mobility device, but we want to make that space available. And similarly up at the front. And I would also like to thank Terry for giving up pretty much his entire Tuesday to, and listening to me blather and talk to myself while we worked on it together. I could not have done it without him. So thank you very much, Terry, for your time. [applause]

## Communion

Good morning. And at the risk of being terribly repetitive this morning, truly, I say to all of you from Great Lakes that we really, really, really will miss you. We really love having you here, every one of you.

In Genesis 1, verse 27, the Bible reads, "So God created mankind in his own image, and in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them."

Scriptures paint the picture of a believing mother as one of teacher and comforter in Isaiah 66, 13, as a caretaker of her home in Proverbs 31, verse 27, and one who trusts in God's plan for her life, as the young Mary did in Luke 1, verse 38. In Luke 13, 34, Jesus said, "How many times have I wanted to put my arms around all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings?" In Isaiah 66, verses 12 and 13, speaking about Zion, who is a singular personification for God's

people, the writer says the following, "For this is what the Lord says, I will extend peace to her like a river and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream. You will nurse and be carried on her arm and dandled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you, and you will be comforted over Jerusalem." In Psalm 119, verses 86 and 87, "May your unfailing love be my comfort according to your promise to your servant. Let your compassion come to me, that I may live, for your law is my delight."

And then later in Psalm 119, Psalm 119, 81, 82 and 94, "My soul faints with longing for your salvation, and I have put my hope in your word. My eyes fail looking for your promise. I say, When will you comfort me? Save me, for I am yours. I have sought out your precepts." "Precepts" isn't a word we use very much anymore, so I looked it up in Oxford dictionary, of course it was online, and I love what it said. "A precept is a general rule intended to regulate behavior or thought." And I loved it that it's general, it's a general thing. It's that part of us that grows over time when we're looking to God's Word, when we're, you know, filling ourselves up with ideas about God, that helps to regulate behavior and thought. Make it more regular, make it less prone to, "Oh, let's go do this, this looks like fun." It's that, "Is this a good thing for us to do, or is this maybe not a good thing for me to do?" And I love this collection of scriptures because it points us towards the nurturing, comforting side of both God and Jesus.

But if you think about it, a person only needs comforting if they have some kind of distress. The Jews were no stranger to trouble in their thousands of years of existence as God's people, and they were still living under foreign rule at the time of Jesus. But it wasn't just those kinds of troubles that they had, it was individual troubles as well. The women caught in adultery. Ruth. The lepers. Job. David. Sarah. The Bible is filled with people who are in distress and in needs of God's love and mercy and His comfort.

Even down to His last breaths, we see the Son of God taking care of the troubles and the needs of His people. In John 19, verses 25 to 27, Jesus does this tender, tender thing. As He's on the cross, undeservedly, utterly undeservedly, betrayed, filled with trouble. The Bible says, "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing beside her, He said to His mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then He said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour, the disciple took her into his own home. He's always there, caring for us, comforting us, making sure we're okay. Let's pray.

As women and men, God, we were made in Your image. Help us to seek You for our comfort, God. Help us to be like Mary as we follow Your precepts to regulate our behavior and our thoughts. Help us to say, "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May Your Word to me be fulfilled." Help us to be like the psalmist and long for Your salvation, putting our hope in Your Word. Help us to trust Your promise and look to You for our comfort as we consider Jesus and the incredible gift of His life and death. And just as we believe in and trust His resurrection, help us to be the people who say, "Save me, for I am Yours." We ask Your blessing as we take our communion together. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Reading

### 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Good morning. Good morning. Our reading this morning is from 2 Corinthians 1, 3-5. Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of our compassion and the Lord God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort those in trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

## Sermon

### Comfort & Challenges

Morning, everyone. Thank you very much for being with us. I'm going to emphasize a word in the book of 2 Corinthians, because it's used so often also in 1 Corinthians, and that's the word comfort.

No matter how old we are, we need comfort. Some of us remember when our children were young as babies, sometimes they just couldn't settle. You try everything from holding them, loving them, and so forth. And then finally, finally, when you're just exasperated, then you hear this wonderful baby go [exhales]. Sleep comes. And that's comfort. In many ways in our life today, we need comfort, financial difficulties, relationship difficulties, all kinds of different difficulties, and we need encouragement. We need a relax.

I love the book of 2 Corinthians, because Paul wants us and emphasizes it over and over and over again, the word comfort. But he also says to be faithful, to be fruitful, to be encouraging in spite of the difficulties that we have. And we do have challenges and difficulties. We think of Pam, a wonderful, amazing woman. And if you're like me, you go to somehow give comfort to Pam. And when you leave, you know who's comforted. We are. She wants to know about everybody. She wants to know about your life. She wants to know about all these wonderful things that we share. Comfort is really important in all aspects of our life.

So I'm just going to go through the book of 2 Corinthians. And you can travel with me if you want. You don't have to, because I'm going to be moving along rather quickly. But in 2 Corinthians, Paul is writing this, talking about comfort. He says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion." God has compassion on us. Aren't we grateful for that?

The God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles. And so when we have troubles, and we have difficulties, and we don't know what to do, it's always to remind ourselves that God says, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I'm always with you. And whether you feel it or not, I am sending you God's my comfort. It's beautiful.

So the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort, who comforts us in our troubles, so that we can comfort others in their difficulties. And then he says, if we are distressed, it's only because we're working so hard to bring comfort to you. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, you also share in the comfort.

We have challenge. We have sufferings in our life. But there is comfort that comes to us from God. And so in this book of 2 Corinthians, he's moving along rather quickly, and I am too, by reminding

us all of these promises of God. And if it seems a little bit out of sorts on occasion, it's because I'm just going through it rather quickly. He says, but as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not yes and no. It's always yes. But in him, it's always been yes. He has appointed us and set his seal of ownership both on us and you. And the Holy Spirit is in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. We don't have to worry about what will come. And even when death comes, when it does come, we don't have to worry. We'll open our eyes and look at the face of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit and our loved ones who have passed.

It's written on our hearts for everyone to show that we are living with God with confidence through Christ. And we are competent that what he says is true. So this book of 2 Corinthians is very optimistic. He also talks about a word that we don't use very often, and that's the word glory, the glory that the Israelites could not steadily look at the face of Moses because of his glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit even be more glorious? And if that ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? And there's an exclamation point there. How glorious this is. It's like watching your children on Christmas morning, and they open up the package and it's like, ah, this is so great.

It is great for us even today, no matter what challenges we have. It's the glory of God helping us in the ministry that can bring righteousness to all people who wish to have it. And I don't know about you, but I wish to have it. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. All those things that just consume us, no, no, there's freedom that he gives us. The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory-- listen now-- we are being transformed into God's image with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the-- what? Holy Spirit. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

It's precious, reading what God gives us, because he loves us. And so in verse 6 of chapter 4, it says, "For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge--" here it comes-- "God's glory of God's glory is displayed in the face of Christ," meaning Jesus knows that we have glory. I think he just wants us to realize it. And that this glory that we will receive, we are also receiving right now. It's guaranteed for us. But we have this treasure of jars of clay, our body, to show that the all surpassing power is from God, not from us. But someone says, but Don, you don't get the challenges that I have.

Maybe not. But here's what it said. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed. Perplexed in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus--" which is really amazing-- "may also be revealed in our body." And I think that something that's being said here is, no matter what's happening, good or bad, God is with us. He hasn't abandoned us. He'll never forsake us. And then he says in verse 13, "It is written, I believed, and so now I speak." And that's true. When we stand up, usually in front of the congregation, and say, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. In fact, in many people who are baptized, that's what is said beforehand. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?

I remember several years ago, baptizing someone, and I asked that silly question. She's here to be baptized, and I'm asking the question, do you believe in Jesus Christ? Do you want to be baptized into Jesus Christ? And there was laughter and joy and giddiness. And as I was going to baptize her,

she says, if I'm going under, you're going under too. And way we down under the water and came back up. She was so excited, she didn't know what to do. It was just the joy of this relationship with God Himself, the same God that says in Genesis 1, in the beginning. And it continues on even to this day.

I don't know if this is making much sense to you, but to me, I just can't get over the beauty and the glory of God that He just gives to us, no matter where we're at. So He says, even though we have trouble, though outwardly we're wasting away, yet inwardly we're being renewed day by day, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all, all of the challenges. Even the good things that happen. We can't grasp how beautiful this is. And then He says, for we know that if this body that we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God. Isn't that wonderful? We have a building with God. It's not built by human hands. And we're longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.

I can't tell you how often I've been besides someone's bed, knowing that they're going to pass. And the comment that has made numerous times over and over again, I'm ready to go. I'm just-- I want to go. I'm ready to go. I'm ready to see the face of God. I'm ready to see Jesus. I'm ready to see God's Holy Spirit. I'm ready to see angels. And for many, I'm ready to see my mom and dad again, or my brother or my sister.

All of these are promises that God gives us. Yes, we have difficulties. Yes, we have challenges. But God has given us a new suit, a heavenly dwelling, where we belong.

One day, all things will come together as one. So that's why we say, Paul says, we live by faith, not by sight. Sometimes we cannot figure things out. But we believe that we have faith in God. And His promise, I'll never leave you, I'll never forsake you. And because of that, He says, for Christ's love compels us. And we are convinced that one died, meaning Jesus. And because of that, we too live.

Jesus died, was buried, and rose again, and we shall too. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ Jesus, that person is a new creation. The old is gone. The new is here. It is a reconciliation with God. And then Paul kind of stops from the glory part, and then comes back in and talks about hardships, even with people who are extremely faithful.

Hardships. The Apostle Paul talks about this. Here's what he says in chapter 6. We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited, rather as servants of God, we commend ourselves in every way in great endurance, we'll put up with that, in troubles, we'll put up with that. Hardships and distresses, we'll put up with that. Luckily, I don't think any of us have had to deal with this. In beatings, in prisonments, in riots, in hard work, sleepless nights, and hunger, in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness in the Holy Spirit, and in sincere love, in truthful speech, and in the power of God, with the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and left, through the glory, regarded as unknown, dying, and yet we live, beaten, and yet not killed. Oh, boy. And distress, and everything else, we'll put up with it. We will put up with it. So we open up our hearts because of the glory of God.

And so to this church, he says, everything that I've just said, they hear this, and they stop, and they say, yeah, I think we need to live up to this. I think we need to live up to God's glory. There is rejoicing over someone who repents. It's not necessary that someone has to come before the

church and confess, but we confess to God. You know that there are days at the end of the day when it's difficult to sleep because we messed up. But it's also encouraging to know God was with us when we messed up. And he'll encourage us. He'll bring about situations. He'll bring about people. He'll bring all kinds of things to help us to get back on track. It's not always easy, but it's beautiful in God's eyes.

So because of the service that Paul has, he says to these people that God should be praised for the obedience that accompanies our confession of Jesus Christ, always reminding ourselves of this. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and make every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Then he says this. I love the scripture. We take captive every thought and make it obedient to Jesus Christ.

WWJD, what would Jesus do? We know a lot of what Jesus would do because of the scripture. And we have our challenges. What would Jesus do with that? And when we have wrestling, what would Jesus do with all of that? And we remember him. He offers us divine intercession. He offers us beautiful things to remember that we can live this way. Now, Paul also says there are false prophets. There are deceitful workers masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, because Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light, but he's not. Not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Yes, there are people trying to do bad things, but there are many, many people trying to do good things, even with their challenges.

So chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about his thorn, his pain in the side. Paul says this. He talks about a vision. And he says this. "I must go on boasting. Although there's nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from God himself." And then he says, "I know a man in Christ." And I think he's talking about himself. "I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago--" listen to this-- "was caught up into the third heaven." That's where God is. Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I don't know. God knows. And I know that this man-- I think it's himself-- whether, in part, apart from the body, I don't know that God knows, was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things. Things that no one is permitted to tell.

And this is when we say, oh, come on. What do you mean not, I want to know? Tell me. And I think this is when Jesus smiles and goes, you'll get it someday. I'll show you someday. I'll tell you someday. Caught up in the Lord. He said, I should never boast, but I'm going to boast about that. It's got nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with the Lord. God knows. I was caught up in paradise. I heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. But I'll talk about my weakness. If I can't talk about that, I'll talk about my weakness and how God helps me, soothes me, encourages me. We talk about love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. All of those things are available for us every day. You just have to remember.

And so Paul talks about this. And then he concludes with these words. And I'll conclude as well. He says this, and I think it's important to do. Examine yourselves to see whether you were in the faith. Am I? Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Have you ever thought of that? He is in us. Unless, of course, you don't know. He says, if you fail the test, don't fail that test. Do you not

know that Christ Jesus is in you unless, of course, you fail the test? The test is you don't believe. We believe he is in us, living in us.

So after writing all of these things-- and I don't know how long it took for Paul to write this-- he finishes up with final greetings. And it's beautiful. He says this to us. Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. I probably didn't read that correctly, because at the end of that word, rejoice, there is an exclamation point. Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice. Graduation is going to be happening pretty soon. Take off that cap, throw it in the air, rejoice. I'm finished with this. Now I'm moving on to something else. Brothers and sisters, rejoice. Strive for full restoration. Get back to that faith. Encourage one another. Be of one mind. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. And if God says that my love and peace will be with you, then God's love and peace is with us. If he says it, it is. Then he says, greet one another with the holy kiss, one cheek on the other cheek. All of God's people, send their greetings. How does he finish? May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, may the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all forever and ever. Amen.

## Closing

As a final benediction this morning, I'm going to read in a minute from Psalm 121.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip. He who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you. The Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm. He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore. Amen.

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