

Sunday June 26th sermon: "The God of All Comforts -- Joy that He has Chosen Us!"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS, by John Pittman Hey

1 Thessalonians 5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

One of the issues that causes grief to the saints who are in tribulation, is the apparent prosperity of the wicked. They seem to be triumphing, while the Lord's people are humbled and oppressed.

We think of the victims of Nazi oppression, and those of Stalin and Mao and Pol Pot, the victims of slavery in our own country - all these had to suffer while their oppressors benefited, and strutted in their victory over their poor victims.

How can God permit such injustices to flourish, we are tempted to wonder.

The Psalmist began to be envious of the wicked. What good did it do him to obey God, when evil men prosper, all the while acting corruptly, and speaking in favor of oppression?

Even thinking about it all is too painful for us.

We ask ourselves, does God even know? Surely the wicked scoff that God doesn't know the evil they are up to.

But there is a cure: when we enter into God's presence to worship Him, then we come to understand the true position of the wicked.

God has set them in slippery places! We all know how a person in slippery places doesn't realize what's about to happen to him, and then all of a sudden, he slips and falls and is cast down.

So it is with the wicked. Their position is very dangerous, but they only come to find out when God's judgment suddenly falls.

The cure for our despondency at the unfairness of the wicked prospering is to worship God and trust in His power to set all things right one day.

For in a moment, they are brought into terrors! It is as if God awakes from a dream, and suddenly sees them, and loathes them utterly.

But He Who watcheth over Israel slumbers not nor sleeps! Our God is always wide awake to save us!

Then we must rebuke ourselves for being so foolish and ignorant of God's ways and God's power!

We are like stupid beasts before our God.

But even in our own beastliness, God has mercy on us! God blesses us! God keeps us ever with Him! God holds us by our right hand! God guides us! God brings us one day into His Glory!

We are like the sheep, foolish and stupid and plain beasts. Yet our Good Shepherd leads us, and protects us, and dies to save us, and carries the weak lambs in His arms!

What condescension of our God towards us, that He should so love us and care for us and protect us, and we as stupid before Him!

We therefore must trust in our God! We must fix our desire upon Him. Even though our heart fail us, God is the strength of our heart.

Meanwhile, God destroys the wicked.

Finally, at the end, we discover the purpose of it all - why did God allow us to see, and wonder, and sorrow at the sight of the wicked prospering?

Because by doing so, we were driven to seek our God, and come to understand His mighty power over all things.

It is good for us to draw near to God. We trust in Him, and declare all His mighty works.

In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul gives us a recipe for the comfort of believers in times of tribulation and trouble.

First we are to understand the absolute promise of the judgment of the wicked one day soon.

We are to put on the armour of faith and love and hope of salvation, because God has appointed us to obtain salvation by Christ Jesus!

Appointed by God to salvation! And not only so, but salvation because Jesus died for us, to save us, that we should live together with Him.

Dead or alive, we live with Christ. We are baptized into His death and His resurrection, and because of this truth, we are to comfort ourselves together with the believers.

Paul then describes some of the means of comfort for the church - God has appointed ministers and pastors and teachers to exhort and teach and admonish believers. Because of their labors, they are to be greatly loved by the brethren, because God uses them to comfort the assembly.

By being so guided by the men God has placed over His people, there will be peace in the church. There can be no comfort amongst God's people when there are disputes and anger in the church.

We are to warn believers who stumble, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, and be patient toward all men. Of course we are never to return evil for evil to anybody, but follow after that which is good.

All these exhortations are for the comfort and rejoicing of believers.

We are to rejoice always!

We are to pray constantly, striving to cultivate a persistent state of prayer unto our Father God.

We are to be thankful for everything -- that is God's will in Christ concerning us. Sometimes it is hard to be thankful for the "bad things" that God brings into our lives, but our assurance is, that we ought to be thankful, because we know God is working all things together for our good. We need to trust in our God to do the right things for us, that need to be done, even if we cannot understand what their purpose is.

Paul warns us against quenching the Holy Spirit, or despising prophesying, or preaching.

The Holy Ghost indwells all believers, to knit our hearts together with God the Father and His Dear Son Jesus. It is God's miraculous method of changing our hearts, and conforming us to Christ's image. We are to yield ourselves to the Spirit, and not resist or disobey Him.

As for preachings, we are to consider and assure ourselves that they conform to God's Word, like the Bereans did of Paul's preaching.

Paul's point is that God is using the Holy Spirit and His preachers to bring to our minds the truth about God's love and power on our behalf, so that we might have comfort in times of adversity.

Thus he tells us, we are to "prove all things, and hold to that which is good." This means we are to measure that which is taught to us against God's Word, and those things that conform to it, are to be held on to by the saints.

Finally, we are to abstain from all appearances of evil. There should be nothing in our lives and conduct that an honest and sincere person could say is unclean or sinful.

Paul concludes with this promise: that God will be faithful to sanctify His people completely, and preserve our whole spirit and soul and body blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is indeed a great comfort for believers in times of distress! To think that God has promised that one day we will be presented perfect before Him in love!

God Who has called us to that glorious end, is faithful to do it!

Ultimately, of course, it is the Lord Himself Who is the comforter of the saints.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, we find that God has chosen us from the beginning unto salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.

Think of it! Chosen by God to salvation from the beginning!!

This great truth, of God's election of His beloved people, to be saved to the uttermost, and for eternity, is an exceeding great comfort for all who trust in Jesus.

Notice that Paul exclaims that we give thanks for this thundering truth, that God has chosen us unto salvation!

We are marked Holy unto the Lord by the Spirit indwelling us, and changed by His work and by the Word of God. Thereby we believe in the Gospel truth.

Faith and the Holy Spirit are the instruments by which our salvation is executed in us. All of this happens when we are called by the Gospel preached to us.

The end result is this: that we obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is preparing for us a great glory! In the end, it will be manifest unto us and upon us, that we have received the Glory of Christ.

Paul said in Romans 8, "for I reckon that the sufferings of this present life are nothing to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us!"

This is the great comfort that God has given to us, that we are chosen by Him unto salvation, and to receive that Glory that Christ is busy preparing for us to receive.

Because of all this, we are exhorted to stand fast, and lay hold of the traditions, that is, the truth communicated by the Gospel, and by the Apostles, unto us.

We are loved by God our Father! We are loved by His Son, our Lord Jesus! By His grace, we have been given an everlasting consolation and good hope!

God will comfort us! God will establish us in every good word and work!

So whenever we need comfort in our tribulations, we ought to remember these promises, and pray to the Lord Jesus to comfort our hearts, and continue to work in us to obey the truth.

Ultimately, all our comfort comes from the sacrifice of Jesus at the cross. We celebrate it each Lord's Day, when we gather around His Table and remember what He did for us at Calvary. His body was torn for us, and His blood shed for the remission of our sins.

In all this, we find our ultimate comfort in the face of trials and troubles.

We love to sing the words of that old hymn:

"He saw me plunged in deep distress,  
and flew to my relief;  
for me He bore the shameful cross,  
and carried all my grief.

"To Him I owe my life and breath,  
and all the joys I have;  
He makes me triumph over death,  
and saves me from the grave."