

August 25th, 2019

# The Only Comfort of an Experimental Christian

Psalm 119:49-56

## What is an experimental Christian?<sup>1</sup>

As we have been going through this series on Psalm 119, we have been trying to unpack what an experimental Christian is. I know that term has been difficult for some of us to wrap our heads around. Some of you when you hear that word, you think about scientific experiments with beakers and goggles and white jackets. That's actually perfect imagery. You see there is an experiment: it's you and me. We are the ones being tested. Listen to how **2 Corinthians 13:5** puts it:

“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? — unless indeed you fail to meet the test!”

How does that verse strike you? Does it give you anxiety? Does it shake your assurance? That's not at all Paul's aim. He in fact does not want your conscience to remain in constant suspense. He does not want you to be in a state of perplexity. Now to be sure, he does want *false* Christians and unbelievers to have a great deal of anxiety from this verse. He does want to rob every ounce of security from those outside of Christ. But for the *true* Christian, he's aiming at giving you a full assurance. Listen again. “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. *Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that*

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<sup>1</sup> We live in a time where significant evangelical leaders are apostatizing before our eyes. Joshua Harris recently renounced the faith. Harris was not a liberal Christian. He was a conservative. He was a pastor of a mega-church. He was a best-selling Christian author. He was a conference speaker. This is why we must learn about experimental Christianity. Being a conservative, a pastor, an author, and a conference speaker does not make you a Christian. We are not to look at those things to in order to test out what a Christian is.

*Jesus Christ is in you?*” Don’t you see? Paul is telling us the glorious truth about being a Christian: Jesus Christ *in you*.<sup>2</sup> No greater thing could possibly ever be said of a human being: Jesus Christ is in you.

That’s one of the aims of experimental Christianity: to *either* to drive you to complete despair because you are outside of Christ or to give you a deeper more abiding persuasion that you belong to Him, body and soul.

### **Our only comfort in life and death**

This morning our passage performs this experiment by looking at how a Christian seeks after comfort. The Christian and the non-Christian seek after comfort in two very different ways. The non-Christian looks to earthly things for comfort. But the Christian has discovered that no true comfort can be found in anything in this world. This is one of the true marks of a Christian. It is one of the things that makes him utterly different from the unbeliever. When you ask an unbeliever ‘where do you find your comfort?’ What a multitude of different answers you might receive. They say, ‘I find comfort in my health or in my family; in my net worth; in my reputation; in my strength; in my retirement; in my kindness.’ No my friends, none of those things will ever do. Those comforts are paper thin. Those will disappear as quickly as lightning flashes across the sky. Those comforts will not hold you up in the Day of calamity.

The Christian alone, out of all the peoples on earth has found true comfort. You see “...the ultimate secret of every Christian...is that he has come at last to realize that the most precious thing in life is his soul.”<sup>3</sup> A soul that will never die. You will possess your soul longer than anything else—all the way into eternity. Therefore you need a comfort that is as abiding, as eternal, as your soul. That is where the Psalmist is taking us this morning. What is your only comfort in life and death? That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Colossians 1:27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

<sup>3</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Seeking the Face of God: Nine Reflections on the Psalms*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2005), pg. 54

## *The Big Idea...*

The Christian's only comfort in life and death is found in the Living Word of  
God alone

- ☆ Why Do We Need Comfort?
- ☆ Where Do We Find Comfort?
- ☆ How Do We Apply Comfort?

### I. Why Do We Need Comfort?

#### **The transcendent human need**

What does the universal *need* for comfort presuppose? It presupposes misery. It presupposes sorrow. It presupposes trouble. It presupposes the truth that all of us feel: that something is wrong, deeply wrong with this world. You don't need comfort if all is well. This need for comfort transcends all religions, all social-economic statuses, all ethnic groups. All people need comfort. The rich and powerful and influential are not exempt from this need. Psychiatrist Paul D. Meier once wrote:

I have had millionaire businessmen come to my office and tell me they have big houses, yachts, condominiums..., nice children, a beautiful mistress, an unsuspecting wife, secure corporate positions—*and* suicidal tendencies. They have everything this world has to offer except one thing—inner peace and joy [comfort]. They come to my office as a last resort, begging me to help them conquer the urge to kill themselves.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, (Carol Stream, IL,.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), pg. 14

Theodorus VanderGroe said “...truly, if we examine man from a spiritual perspective as to what he is in and of himself, we find him to be the most wretched, unhappy, and miserable of all God’s creatures.”<sup>5</sup> Think about that for a moment. The little sparrows that we see are never wretched and unhappy. They sing, they jump around, they are carefree, in most respects they are in harmony with the world around them. We recently were given a Golden Retriever puppy. That dog is so happy and carefree that sometimes it just makes me sick. Always wagging his tail, always carefree. He is not wretched or sorrowful or in need of comfort. Think of any creature, consider even of the angels themselves—out of all of God’s creatures, it’s man alone that is wretched, unhappy, and miserable. It’s man alone that needs comfort.

### **The reasons we need comfort**

So then what are the reasons why we need to be comforted? First let’s look at *why* mankind in general needs comfort and then why the Christian in particular needs comfort.

#### **1. Why does mankind in *general* need comfort?**

There are two main reasons. The **first** is the most controversial point: all mankind desperately need comfort because there is evil and suffering in the world. Now different theories of where this suffering comes from have always been offered. Karl Marx believed that economic inequality is the cause of all suffering. Suffering and oppression exist *because* the Bourgeoisie (the ruling class) have oppressed the Proletariat (the working class). What’s needed is state control so that all have equal shares.<sup>6</sup> Then suffering will go away.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that society and civilization is what causes suffering in this world. Suffering and oppression exist *because* of the

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<sup>5</sup> Theodorus VanderGroe, *The Christian’s Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 4

<sup>6</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2005), pg. 134-137

oppressive relationships that society forces upon us, namely marriage, family, church, and the workplace. What's needed is the state to dissolve all natural ties and to impose social contracts based purely on choice.<sup>7</sup> Then suffering will cease.

We could go on and on. Every worldview has a different theory as to why suffering exists and the solution to fix it. The problem is, is that these different theories have been all tried and they have all failed.<sup>8</sup>

The Scripture gives the one and only answer for what is wrong with the world: sin. The reason why mankind desperately needs comfort is because all are born under the wrath of God and in the misery of sin. **Romans 5:12** “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.”

It is because of *sin* that we have lost our fellowship with God (**Gen. 3:24**).

It is because of *sin* that we have provoked God to be our enemy (**Ps. 5:5**).

It is because of *sin* that all of creation has been cursed (**Rom. 8:20**).

It is because of *sin* that we were born children of the devil (**Jn. 8:44**)

It is because of *sin* that death exists (**Rom. 6:23**), that hell exists (**Mt. 25:41**), that all misery exists (**Rom. 3:16**).

The **second** reason why mankind needs comfort is because “...the soul has... needs, and desires that are infinite...and everything apart from God is finite and deficient.”<sup>9</sup> **Ecclesiastes 3:11** says that God “has put *eternity* into man’s heart.” What that means is that nothing but *eternity*—nothing but the eternal God can

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, pg. 137-142

<sup>8</sup> During the inter-testamentary time, when all the best philosophers lived—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle—no less than 288 theories existed for mankind’s misery and happiness. See Jonathan Edwards in *Thy Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, Ed. Peter A. Lillback and Richard B. Gaffin Jr., (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing 2013), pg.494

<sup>9</sup> Theodorus VanderGroe, *The Christian’s Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 5

satisfy. As Augustine famously prayed “Lord...you made us for yourself and our hearts find no [rest]<sup>10</sup> until they rest in you.”<sup>11</sup>

So that is why all mankind in *general* needs comfort. First, because man is born under the wrath of God, and second because we find within ourselves needs and desire that nothing in this world can satisfy.

## 2. Why does the Christian in *particular* need comfort?

Let’s take a brief survey of our passage.<sup>12</sup>

**First**, Christians need comfort because we have *afflictions* in this life. Look at v.50 “This is my comfort in my *affliction*, that your promise gives me life.” Now the Psalmist doesn’t tell us the specific nature of this affliction. Because the Christian will face a whole myriad of afflictions in his life—poverty, pain, distress, grief, sickness, loss, and death. **Psalm 34:19** says “Many are the afflictions of the righteous.” **Acts 14:22** “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” That’s the first reason Christians need comfort : because we suffer under affliction in this life.

**Secondly**, Christians need comfort because following the Lord will bring us trouble in this life. Look at v.51 “The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.” Why does the *insolent*—the proud man who rejects God and His Word—deride and abuse the Christian? Simply *because* the Christian follows God’s law. Persecution is aimed at one thing *mainly*: to get the Christian to stop being a Christian. But the Psalmist says “...but I do not turn

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<sup>10</sup> “peace”

<sup>11</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, Trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, (New York, NY.: Penguin Books, 1961), pg. 21

<sup>12</sup> Originally I had this as my first point: **First**, Christians need comfort because we are in a state of *waiting*. Look at v.49 “Remember your word to your servant in which you have made me hope.” The Psalmist is crying out in prayer,—*Remember* your word. He’s *not* reminding God of something He forgot. God never forgets anything. He’s saying ‘Lord *perform* Your Word, *act* on Your Word, *fulfill* Your Word.’ God has given us great and precious promises most of which have not yet been fully realized. We are waiting. We are waiting for the consummation of all things, for Jesus Christ to return, for death to be swallowed up, for sin to be no more, and for God to make His dwelling place among man. That’s the first reason Christians need comfort: because we are waiting for God to remember His word in which He has made us hope.

away from your law.” In other words, there is more trouble coming his way. According to the May 3 online edition of the BBC, Christians are the most persecuted people group in the world. That shouldn’t surprise us. God said back in **Genesis 3:15** that because sin entered the world, He would put enmity —hatred between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. That’s the second reason Christians need comfort: because following the Lord will bring us trouble in this life.

### **A wrong diagnosis = a wrong remedy**

So let’s test ourselves. How do you interpret the misery that you face in this life? What narrative have you embraced that explains your day-to-day sorrow? If you get the question of misery wrong, you will never look for comfort in the correct place. Growing up in my dad’s house, our neighbor had contracted a very serious sickness. She was in her fifties, and I remember seeing her during this time, and she looked like a corpse —pail skin hanging off her face with dark rings, like a raccoon, embedded around her eyes. The doctors thought they knew what was wrong so they started giving her medicine for this, and medicine for that. But none of it touched her ailment. Finally one of her granddaughters while visiting smelled some natural gas in the house. So she called Intermountain and sure enough she had a gas leak. She was being poisoned by something the doctors never thought of. The sickness was finally discovered. But do you know what happened? It took her months to recover from all the psycho-tropic drugs they prescribed her. They caused so much havoc to her other-wise sound mind, that it took her months to be able to walk in Fred Meyer without panic attacks. They mis-diagnosed her misery, and because of that they go the remedy wrong. If you don’t understand why you suffer misery and sorrow in this world, you will never find the comfort you are looking for. That’s our first point.

## II. Where Do We Find Comfort?

### Defining true comfort

Before we answer that question, we need to define what we mean by comfort. What does it mean to be comforted? There is a negative and positive aspect of comfort. **Negatively**, comfort means the absence of pain. To be comforted in this sense is to have the misery or pain or sorrow removed and eliminated. Think about when your child gets a sliver in their finger. When you take it out, you have comforted them because you have removed what was causing them pain. That's the negative aspect of comfort: *the removal of pain*.

**Positively**, comfort means a *revival of power*. To be comforted in this sense means that you have been given new strength, your spirit is animated and you discover fresh reserves of courage that you did not have before. It's so vital to distinguish between this negative and positive aspect of comfort. Because all of us are going to experience pain and anguish and suffering. And God has *not* promised to take that away in this age. In the next age God has promised to "wipe away every tear from our eyes"<sup>13</sup> but not in this age.

You can see the Psalmist being comforted in this positive sense in our passage. In v.50 he says "This is my comfort in my affliction *that* your promise gives me life." Notice he is not comforted because God *takes away* the affliction. No. He's comforted because God's promise *gives him life*. He experiences a revival of power, not a removal of pain. Dear saint, what kind of comfort are you looking for? I know this is difficult for some of you because you are in incredible pain and suffering. But if you are *only* looking for God to remove your pain you may miss out on the true comfort that He promises you.

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<sup>13</sup> Revelation 21:4

## The World of Comfort *in* the Word of Comfort

That brings us to our primary question: where do we find this comfort? The Psalmist makes it so clear: only in God's Word.<sup>14</sup> There is simply no other comfort. The Puritan Thomas Manton once said "...all other comforts are nothing to those comforts which we have from the word of God."<sup>15</sup>

### Counterfeit comforts vs. Canonical comforts

Why? Why is God's Word our *only* comfort?

**First**, because this Word is a Divine Word. Look at all the pronouns that point to God's ownership of this Word: **v.49** *your* word; **v.50** *your* promise; **v.51** *your* law; **v.52** *your* rules; **v.53** *your* law; **v.54** *your* statutes; **v.55** *your* law; **v.56** *your* precepts. That how all of Psalm 119 describes the Word—as *God's* Word. Mere human words cannot comfort the soul when you face the real trials of this life. They are like spider webs trying to stop a falling boulder. In fact that's what the prophet Isaiah says about the man who tries to comfort himself in the face of calamity "...they weave the spider's web [but] their webs will not serve as clothing; men will not cover themselves with what they make" (**Isaiah 59:5-6**) But God's Word can comfort your soul, because it was God that made your soul. Who knows what your soul needs better than God? He is the one who knit you together in your mother's womb.<sup>16</sup> He can speak to the secret recesses of the heart, the place where no man can see. When God sovereignly administers His

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<sup>14</sup> Romans 15:4 "For whatever was written [that's the Word] in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton Vol. 7*, (Miami, FL.: Hardpress Publishing), pg. 28

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When Jeremiah the prophet was in despair, he cried out in agony "Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land. I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me" (Jeremiah 15:10) But then the Lord came to Him and spoke His Word to Him. God didn't fix his circumstances, yet Jeremiah found new courage and comfort from God's Word: "Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts" (Jeremiah 15:16). Jeremiah learned that the greatest comfort doesn't come through a change of circumstances but through God's living and active Word.

<sup>16</sup> Psalm 139:13

Word to the human heart He exercises His Divine authority. “Is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” (**Jeremiah 23:29**). That's the first reason God's Word can bring comfort, because it is not a human word, it is *God Almighty's Word*.

**Secondly**, God's Word is our only comfort because it is an *eternal* Word. Look at **v.52** “When I think of your rules from of *old*, I take comfort, O Lord.” Notice he says “your rules from of *old*.” He means *from everlasting*. God's Word is more ancient than this universe. **Psalms 33:11** “The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.” Jesus said “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (**Mark 13:31**). Oh how trendy human words are. The sophistication of yesterday is the foolishness of today. How could anyone find comfort in the words of human beings who live 70 years at best? That is like asking a 2-year old who you should marry, where you should invest your life-savings, or what is the meaning of life? Oh the foolishness of man to ignore this eternal Word. God is the Ancient of Days, and His Word is as eternal as His Being. That's the second reason God's Word can bring comfort, because it is an *everlasting* Word.

**Thirdly**, God's Word is our only comfort because it is an *experiential* Word. Look at **v.54** “Your statutes have been my *songs* in the house of my sojourning.” God's Word is the song of the Christian's heart. Why do people sing? Margaret Schaper the USC Professor of Voice once said in the Los Angeles Times “We sing because something inside of us needs to express something beyond words.”<sup>17</sup> Haven't you experienced this before? You come across a truth from God's Word and it hits you so suddenly and so surprisingly that you lose your ability to articulate it in mere words. You are stirred so deeply that the only possible response is song. And this is not just in times of joy, but also in times of despair and pain. When Marilyn Sullivan lay dying in her bed, several of us sang God's truths to her in her final hours. It brought her comfort because it expressed the deepest longings of her heart. Don't you remember what

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<sup>17</sup> Source: <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1992-04-02-vw-351-story.html> Accessed August 24, 2019

happened to Paul and Silas in Philippi? After they were stripped naked and beaten with rods and thrown into prison, what do they do? **Acts 16:25** says that “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” The prisoners couldn’t believe that these men still had songs to sing! That’s how deep God’s word goes into the human experience. It buries itself beyond the reach of beatings and banishment. That’s the third reason God’s Word can bring comfort: because it is an *experiential* Word.

### **Experimental Comfort**

So let’s examine our hearts. What kind of comfort are you seeking? Are seeking to have your pain removed? Or are you seeking to have your power revived? I’m not saying it’s wrong to pray for healing, or to call out to God to relieve pain and suffering. Of course we should do that. We have an explicit command: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (**James 5:14**). So yes we pray for pain to be removed. But dear saint, are you looking for this other type of comfort as well? Because there just will be pain in this life that will not be removed. In that day, you and I will need a different kind of comfort. One way to test whether or not you are seeking for this true comfort is simply to ask yourself: ‘Will the comfort I’m seeking after be enough on that Day when God requires my soul?’ If not, dear saint, you need a deeper comfort. That’s our **second point**. The only place where we can find comfort in life and death is in God’s Living Word.

## III. How Do We Apply Comfort?

### **Applying the salve of Scripture**

So we know where to find our true comfort: in God’s Word. The question now is: how do we derive comfort from the written Word? How do we take

what we find and apply it like salve to our weary souls? Two ways to apply the Scripture so that we can experience comfort like the Psalmist.

### **The art of meditation**

First, we must meditate on the Scripture. Please look at **v.52** one more time. He says “When I think of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.” Notice the cause and effect: ‘When *I think*...then I am comforted.’ Webster’s 1828 defines thinking as having “...the mind occupied on some subject...to revolve ideas in the mind.” I’m afraid this is one of the greatest challenges in our modern culture. We are losing our ability to think. As a whole we value the practical over the contemplative.<sup>18</sup> Maryann Wolf recently wrote an article for The Guardian entitled: “Skim Reading Is the New Normal” with the subtitle “The effect on society is profound.” Wolf cited several studies that demonstrated that there is a growing “cognitive impatience” in our age. “College students actively avoid the classic literature of the 19th and 20th centuries because they no longer have the patience”<sup>19</sup> to think through the material. The church doesn’t look much different. But here’s the problem, if we approach our reading of the Scripture or our listening to sermons with this type of cognitive impatience, we will not draw comfort from them. The Psalmist says “*When I think* of your rules from of old, I take comfort, O Lord.” Practically speaking it means this: when you engage the Scripture it is not enough to seek after truth, you must seek after life. Ask: what life is there in this passage that God is seeking to impart to me? And then think, ponder, pause, ask questions. God didn’t give us the Scripture merely to transfer data to our minds, He gave us the Scripture to impart life and strength and courage to our hearts. But this requires meditation. Paul said it like this “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, *think about these things... and*

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<sup>18</sup> W.G.T. Shedd

<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/25/skim-reading-new-normal-maryanne-wolf> Accessed August 24, 2019

*the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8-9).* That’s the first way we derive comfort from the Scriptures, by meditating on it.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Incarnate Word**

Secondly, we derive comfort from God’s Word by looking to the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. The Heidelberg Catechism Q.1 is perhaps the greatest summary of comfort ever written outside of the Scripture. It asks:

#### **What is thy only comfort in life and in death?**

That I, with body and soul,  
     both in life and in death,  
     am not my own,  
 but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ,  
     who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins,  
     and delivered me from all the power of the devil;  
     and so preserves me,  
 that without the will of my heavenly Father,  
     not a hair can fall from my head;  
     yea, that all things must be subservient for my salvation,  
 and therefore by His Holy Spirit,  
     He also assures me of eternal life,  
     and makes me sincerely willing and ready  
     henceforth to live unto Him.

Dear congregation when the Psalmist says in v.50 “*your promise gives me life.*” This is the promise. Jesus Christ is the promise of all promises. Jesus Christ is

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<sup>20</sup> The truth is, is that everyone already does this. Everyone meditates. “Our minds are constantly dwelling on something.” J. Stephen Yuille, *The Path of Life: Blessedness in Seasons of Lament*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 67 The only question is, what are you meditating on? What the Psalmist is telling us is that, if you think on Scripture, if you meditate on it, if you let it occupy your mind, then you will find comfort you truly need.

the comfort of all comforts. So let's consider carefully what the *essence* of this comfort is.

### **The Ground: You belong to Jesus Christ**

Being a Christian means that you belong to Christ—body and soul, both in life and death. You have been made the complete property of the person of the Lord Jesus. He is Your Mediator and Your Redeemer. You are no longer the lost sheep wandering in the forsaken wilderness of this world. The Good Shepherd has snatched you up and has added you to His fold. Which means this, He is responsible for your well being. He has to give an accounting of you before the Father. The Father charged Him with your well being. Jesus said “this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day” (**John 6:39**). You do not just belong to Jesus in this life, but you belong to Him for all eternity. What comfort this is! Though you maybe traveling through the valley of the shadow of death right now, soon you will be in the promise land. Jesus is there now preparing a place for you. He's making all things ready for you, because you belong to Him.

### **The Purchase Price: the Precious Blood of Christ**

But how did He come to own you? He purchased you. The catechism says that “with His precious blood [he] has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil...” This means that Jesus took upon Himself all your guilt and all your sin, and was punished and cursed for you. **1 Peter 2:18** says “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold *but with the precious blood of Christ.*”

### **The Promise for this Life: Preservation**

What does that mean for this life? It means that “...without the will of [your] heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from [your] head; yea, that all things must be subservient for [your] salvation.” That means dear loved one that even

your afflictions *ultimately* will serve your eternal joy. All things must be subservient, meaning they *must serve* your salvation. Jesus controls the world and everything around you. and He is working all things together for your good.

### What makes one a Christian?

So if someone were to ask: “What is it that makes one a Christian? Is it not the simple fact that the Christian has *genuine comfort*?”<sup>21</sup> And what is this comfort? Here it is beloved: no matter what happens to you, whether you rot in prison, or are hanged, or shot, or you go bankrupt and become destitute, whether all turn against you and you are persecuted to the end of the earth, nothing will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus your Lord.

## Application

### 1. What kind of a Word has God given us?

He’s given us a Word in which when we plead God’s promises back to Him we can find comfort. Look at v.49. The Psalmist prays “*Remember your word to your servant in which you have made me hope.*” He’s *not* asking God to literally remember something that perhaps He forgot. God never forgets anything. He’s saying ‘Lord *perform Your Word, act on Your Word, fulfill Your Word.*’ This is the most vital practice of a Christian seeking comfort. Charles Spurgeon thought it to be so vital that he wrote a book on it. He called it the “Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith.” The modern edition is literally in the shape of a checkbook. Spurgeon’s premise was this: that all the promises of God are like checks that God has written to us. When we pray these promises back to God, it’s like we are taking the check to the bank to get it cashed. This is exactly what the Psalmist is saying in v.49 *Remember your word*—‘Lord you have promised this, now please fulfill your word to me, I hope in you alone.’

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<sup>21</sup> G.I. Williamson, *The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1993), pg. 8

So what does this look like? Well let's consider one check when we face sorrow and misery in this world.<sup>22</sup>

### **Check: Matthew 11:28**

Jesus said "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This is not just a salvation verse. It's also a promise for the Christian to find comfort. Please this promise with the Lord Jesus. "Jesus you invite me to come to you to find rest. And I am heavy laden. I am weary Lord. Please bear my burdens. Remind me that You already have. You carried all the crushing weight of my sin when You went to Calvary. You carried the stench of my death when You went to the grave. And You carried my victory from the tomb when You rose from the grave. Lord help me to quit resting in my own strength. Please give me strength just to make it through the next 24 hours. Help me to see my problems from the perspective of eternity. Please give me true rest as I come to you. This is what you promised.'

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#### <sup>22</sup> **Check #1: Addressed to those in severe affliction**

**Isaiah 40:31** "...they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." So you run to the bank and cash the check. "Lord you say that if I wait on You, You will renew my strength. Lord here I am, still my soul. Give me strength just to make it through the next 24 hours. Help me to see my problems from the perspective of eternity. You promised to give me strength to endure this. I believe you, help my unbelief."

#### **Check #2: Addressed to those with anxious hearts**

**1 Peter 5:6-7** "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, *because he cares for you*." So run to the bank with your anxious at heart and cash this check: 'Lord I have not been humble. I have been trying to control my own life. Now I am drowning in anxiety. So Lord please take all my worries, I cast them at your feet, I can't carry them anymore.' And then beloved let the last part of that verse penetrate to the deepest part of your soul: "cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you." Pray that. 'Lord you say you care for me. You care for me! Help my heart to believe that You thoughts towards me are precious and are more numerous than the sand.' I've had to pray that prayer countless times, especially as I'm lying in bed. My thoughts sometimes over take me and the only thing that calms my spirit is simply repeating that over and over again 'You care for me Lord, You care for me Lord.'

You see, when you do as Augustine said and “bring before God his own hand-writing”<sup>23</sup> will He not remember His own Word? That’s the kind of word that God has given us, one that we can plead back to Him.

## 2. What kind of a world do we live in?

We live in a world in which no true comfort can be found. If you are comfortless this morning, it’s because you have not yet understood your true misery. Dear friend, the reason you are miserable in this life is because of your sin. And that is something that you can’t fix. You can never erase what you have done. You can never break even with God no matter how much good you resolve to. You’re guilty. You stand condemned. And this is humanly incurable. Your only hope is to flee to Jesus Christ. He has made a promise for your everlasting comfort if you will just believe Him for it. Jesus said “...whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”<sup>24</sup>

## 3. What kind of a church should we want?

We should want a church that overflows with comfort for each other. The NT is emphatically concerned with the way that we comfort one another.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, *so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction*, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

**2 Corinthians 13:11** “Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, *comfort one another...*”

**Galatians 6:2** “*Bear one another's burdens*, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Bridges’, *Psalm 119: An Exposition*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2002), pg. 123

<sup>24</sup> John 6:37

We have a duty before God to “support one another, tenderly and affectionately —bearing one another’s burdens.”<sup>25</sup>

I’ve mentioned several times that many in this church are suffering greatly. There are brothers and sisters in our midst whose day to day lives are filled with misery. Do you know who these people are? Do you ever take time to look through our membership directory and ask: Who might be lonely? Who is sick? Who is suffering? Is not this the care that you have for your own physical body? The Puritan John Owen notes here ‘If we could maintain a spiritual union with each other similar to how our physical body is in union with all it’s parts, this duty to bear one another’s burdens would be easy. No one ever hated his own flesh.’<sup>26</sup>

**1 Corinthians 12:25-26** “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. *If one member suffers, all suffer together.*”

The other day I injured my back moving a desk in my house. And immediately all the other members of my body suffered together with my back. That’s the precisely imagery that of the body of Christ. You see dear saints, if I have no desire to care and comfort one others in the body, if my heart is not moved to compassion for the church of God, I’m not a Christian. **1 John 3:14** “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.”

So how can you help love and support these dear saints? First, find out who they are. Ask questions. Find out how is suffering among us. And then pray

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<sup>25</sup> John Owen. *Duties of Christian Fellowship: A Manual for Church Members*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), pg. 60

<sup>26</sup> Paraphrased, *ibid*, pg. 61

for them, ask how you can support them, check in on them by a phone call, visit them. Jesus said “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (**Matthew 25:46**). We should all desire a church that overflows with compassion and comfort for another just as Jesus continues to overflow with compassion and comfort for us.

#### **4. What kind of Savior do we need?<sup>27</sup>**

We need a Savior who can comfort us when the bottom falls out. Horatio Spafford, a Presbyterian churchman in the late 1800’s, decided to take Anna his wife and their four daughters on a family vacation in Europe. They lived in Chicago and were friends and supporters of the evangelist D.L. Moody. While in Europe he had his heart set on helping the Moody during his crusades in London. But when the time came to leave, Horatio was detained with some business. So he sent his Anna and their four daughters ahead of him, confident that he would catch up with them in a few short days. Partway through their journey across the Atlantic a British iron sailing ship rammed their vessel. Anna and her daughter made it to the deck but they couldn’t use the life boats because they were stuck to the ship by fresh paint. Author Steven Demme tells us what happens next:

Nine-year-old Maggie was terrified and commanded a pastor friend near them, “Pray!” Then the bow broke away from the ship, and Maggie suddenly became calm. “Mother, God will look after us,” she said. Eleven-year-old Annie continued, “The sea is His, and He created it.” The ship sank in 12 minutes. Of the 273 passengers aboard, fewer than one in five survived.

When Anna awoke from unconsciousness in a rescue rowboat a few hours later, she learned that all her girls had drowned. Yet she sensed a divine voice speaking: “you have been spared for a purpose. There is a mission for you to accomplish.” It took nine days to reach land, and while making their way there, she told the pastor Maggie had commanded to pray, “God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. One day I shall

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<sup>27</sup> With the exception of the first question, the last three are from Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross, Preaching the Word Series*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2014), pg. 17-23

understand why.” When she landed at Cardiff, Wales, she sent her husband a simple telegraph message: “Saved alone.”

Spafford immediately sailed for England to join his grief-stricken wife. When they were passing over the spot where [their ship] sank, the captain pointed it out to the passengers. Spafford stared into the ocean, thinking of his lovely daughters. Then he went to his cabin and began to write: “When peace, like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul.”

A few days later, Stafford wrote to his sister, “We passed over the spot where she went down, in the mid-ocean, the water three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are in safety, folded, the dear lambs, and there, before very long, shall we be too.”<sup>28</sup>

That’s how the hymn “It Is Well” was conceived. When Horatio lost everything that he most treasured in this life, he found the Savior that He most needed. This is our only comfort in life and in death, that we belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. And one day very soon, when everything is ready, He will come and take us to Himself. He will wipe away every tear, and we will always be with the Lord.

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<sup>28</sup> Steven P. Demme, *Hymns For Family Worship*, (USA,: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 10