

Title: A Word of Comfort pt.2  
Text: 2 Corinthians 4.16-18  
Theme: Why we do not lose heart  
Occasion: Patrick's memorial service  
Prop Stmnt: Confidence in the work of Christ in us and through us drives a joyful perseverance through adversity.

Tonight, my charge is to bring comfort to those of you who are followers of Christ by reminding you of the promises of the gospel. I have another charge. And that is for those of you are not followers of Christ, I want to make you aware of the promises of the gospel and why the gospel (that is the good news of who Christ is and what He has done for us) is our great, eternal, all-sufficient and only hope.

The message tonight is actually part 2 of a 3-part series that I started last Sunday morning and will conclude tomorrow morning based on 2 Corinthians 4-5. Here is a summary from last Sunday morning, much of which comes from chapter 1: We are able to bless God even through adversity. We bless God, not in denial of our adversity but with eyes wide open, even as we are experiencing the cost of the adversity because God uses adversity as the occasion to pour out comfort upon us. In fact, he pours out so much comfort that he uses the comfort that we receive in adversity to comfort others.

Ok, let me break this down a little bit because I just so much in that statement that I am not sure I fully understand what I just wrote. Actually, here is where I can reference Patrick as an illustration that helps us see an example of this.

- We are able to bless God even through adversity.

The fact that we are able to bless God through adversity does not mean that people do it. Oh no! Praising God, even in the midst of adversity can only come when you are confident that God has a plan to use your adversity that is so great, that you are willing to play your part with joy. When you consider (important word) that the plan of God is more important, more precious, more to be desired, more beneficial, more glorious than your plan then you can play your part in God's plan with joy. That brings you great comfort. When you consider (important word) that the plan of God, even if that plan calls for you to experience extreme adversity, to be more glorious than your plan because God's plan will, through your adversity accomplish so much more than your plan will, then you can have joy. When you consider (important word) and, in fact are convinced (another important word) in the promise of God that he will through your adversity pour out upon you so much comfort that it will spill over and be poured out upon others, then you can consider all of the comfort that others receive to be more important than the adversity that you are experiencing.

- Because we consider the comfort of others to be more valuable than a life free from adversity.

Here is the choice that we have: We can set our hearts upon the comfort of others or we can set our hearts upon having an adversity-free life. When we set our hearts upon the comfort others, we are considering the comfort that others receive to be of more value than us having the life that we planned. In other words, we consider the advancement of the joy of others in Christ to be more valuable than our own lives. This is part of the calling of a follower of Christ, because this is what Christ did. He did this in the ultimate sense as the payment for our sins. He considered the joy that was set before him, to be more valuable than the agony of the cross. He treasured your joy more than he feared the cross. He considered your salvation to be more important and worth him being treated as if he had committed your sin. The only way for you not to die for your sins and be separated from God is for Christ to die for you. So, he endured the cross in order to secure our salvation, and thereby securing our joy.

Explain the gospel

He did that for us. As Christians (followers of Christ), we follow in his steps. We, like Christ, consider the joy that is set before us, which is the joy of seeing others comforted, seeing others grow in Christ, seeing others come to Christ as being so important, that we are willing to endure the agony of adversity in order to see the joy of others secured.

Here is how this played out for Patrick. He was diagnosed with ALS. This was not his plan. But now he had a choice to make. Would he consider his plans (which did not include ALS) to be the most important treasure in his life? If he did, then anything, including ALS, that threatened his treasure, that is his plan, would now be the occasion for rage, bitterness, disillusionment and depression. OR (big OR), he could consider the comforting of others, the benefiting of others (God's plan in adversity) to be more important than his plan. When the diagnosis was confirmed, if I remember correctly, he went to the gym, got on a stationary bike and rode. He had a lot of things to sort out. Standing over all of the details of planning for your family to live without you, was this issue. Who am I and how does that affect the way that I respond to this? Patrick was resolved not to waste this ALS. It was not an automatic, uninformed decision. It was a desire, rooted in his identity as a follower of Christ. While he was resolved to do this, he knew that he needed help. He could not do this by himself. God has never called us to live the Christian life by ourselves. So, he and Dena, with Tim's help, set up a blog so that 2200 of his closest friends could walk with him AND so that you would be able to be comforted and emboldened and encouraged by the comfort that he received. This comfort that you receive, as followers of Christ, is part of the grace that God gives you to keep you faithful and persevering, ensuring that you are going to make it home before dark. God has used Patrick as a means of grace in your life to help conform you more and more to the image of Christ, because through Patrick's life and death, you are learning to treasure Christ more than this world. (3.18)

Knowing that God used Patrick's adversity in your life and knowing that God uses adversity in and through your life enables us to say with Paul, (4.1). Because we (4.5) do not preach ourselves, nor can we save anyone. But Christ can. Therefore, we want to do everything that we can to point people to Christ. How do we point people to Christ? We seek to reflect him. But here is the tension. In order to reflect him, we have to get ourselves out of the way. That means that as we humble ourselves, he is exalted. In our weakness, his strength is seen. In our inabilities and insufficiencies, his ability and sufficiency is put on display. These bodies, "jars of clay" are not given to us to make much of ourselves, but in order to display the treasure (4.7) that is within. When death is at work in us (that is, we are becoming weaker and weaker, and Christ is being magnified more and more because instead of being discouraged, we are being encouraged), then life is at work in others who are encouraged by that. All of this builds to this summary statement in 4.15. This brings Paul back to where he started. (4.16-18) Here are three things to embrace:

### 1. Our Condition – "Though our outer self is wasting away"

These bodies are not forever. You are wise if you realize this and prepare for your death. Some of you prepare very hard for exams, for retirement, for presentations, for vacations, for family gatherings, for big ticket purchases, even for new technology purchases, but you do not prepare for your own death. This outer self, this body is wasting away. Patrick's diagnosis to death was barely more than a year. That was, in our estimation, really fast. But, so is life. A lifetime seems way too short to live. Let, the reality of your physical condition awaken you to the reality our soul's need to be ready. For the unbeliever, the reality of death is terrifying, which is why most live in the land of make-believe, hoping that death will never come and denying the obvious signs of it. However, for the follower of Christ, the condition of outward decay points to a greater reality.

### 2. Our Hope – Our inner self is being renewed day by day

The inner self is a reference to the believer's spirit/soul that has been made alive and is God's. It is like saying, "who I really am" on the inside. This is the person who will live forever in the presence of God and with the people of God. The outer self does not last, but the inner self does, so God is at work on the inner self and preparing us for an eternal weight of glory. (17) God uses affliction to prep us for glory. Affliction is real. Affliction is heavy. Patrick's disease process and dying brought with it not just physical grief, but personal grief because he knew the weight that he was for his family. But this heavy, at times overwhelming affliction is, in comparison to the weight of the eternal glory, light. Two comparisons are made in this statement. The affliction is not only light compared to the weight of glory, but the affliction is momentary compared to the eternity of the glory. This is only for a while. This will not last. Affliction will not win. Grief will not have the final word. Adversity is not the victor. Death does not win the day. But, the reality of that has to be embraced and believed in order to produce daily hope.

This renewal, this day by day renewal, this daily conforming into looking more and more like Christ only comes as we, in the midst of the adversity (18) stop looking at the things that are seen. Ok, hold the phone for just a second. Sometimes you want to say, "Paul, what on earth are you talking about?" How are we supposed to not look at things that are seen? If we don't look at the things that are seen, doesn't that mean that we can't see? Now, if that wasn't difficult enough, then we are told that we are supposed to look at the things that are unseen. How are we supposed to see things that can't be seen? Isn't that what unseen means? Obviously throughout this entire section, Paul has been speaking about your affections. Where do you place your affections? What do you see in your imagination of what your life is supposed to be like? How do you, when you close your eyes, or let your thoughts go, paint a picture of your life as you imagine "happiness" to be? What do you see? If what you see is only formed by the things that you can already see, then your dream is too small. But, when you see, when you look at, when you embrace that God is preparing for you a life of eternal glory, eternal joy, eternal acceptance, eternal security, eternal relationships, eternal wholeness, eternal satisfaction, eternal happiness, eternal knowing of God and being known by God and experience friendships that are as deep as they can go and never end, and you see that all of this is yours in Christ, and that it is a treasure that is eternally secure and can never be taken away, and can never go over the fiscal cliff and can never be lost, and that every single day that you live, or that every single day that you endure adversity and affliction that you are that much closer to that, well then...

### 3. Our Response – 16a – We do not lose heart.

A shorter life with Christ is infinitely greater than a longer life without Him.