

Scripture Reading:

Acts 23:9 “Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God." 10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks. 11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." 12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. 14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. 15 Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near."”

'Paul is Comforted by Jesus'

Our text is very short this morning... In fact it is a single verse where Jesus comforts Paul in the midst of all his trials and tribulations.

Having just escaped a Roman beating and a Jewish mob Paul is next going to be threatened by a conspiracy to murder him on his way to court. Jesus comes to him at night to remind him that he is right where he is supposed to be: “"Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."”

When I referenced this verse during communion last week, I mentioned how we can sometimes think, ah, but Jesus does not come to me at night like that when I am feeling overwhelmed!

- This can be an honest question, but we need to remember that Jesus DID meet us at the Table last week and will do so again this morning!

We also need to remember that Jesus meets us in His creation and in His Word as Psalm 19 tells us so plainly: “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. 2 Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge.”

And in verse 7 “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; 9 The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.”

What beautiful and comforting images the Psalmist uses for the Word of God:

His truth is to be desired more than fine gold [*tell the backyard story*]

His wisdom is sweeter than honey:

- Or as the Prophet said, taste and see that the Lord is good, which is why we believe it is right to have rich elements at His Table!

And finally we are reminded again that God’s Word is the safety fence around that backyard which is full of rich rewards for God’s children!

The Apostle Paul is in the midst of some very discouraging events and Jesus comes saying ‘be of good cheer.’ If we never feel overwhelmed or never think we have failed when it comes to Kingdom work, then we will not need or seek the comfort that Jesus offers...

- But if we do know these realities we will need His comfort!
- Where do we find that comfort today?
- In right worship; with a proper appreciation of creation and of course from God’s Word, the Bible!

While we might want the personal visit from Jesus or the other dramatic events the Apostles experienced, we know from Peter himself that WE are the ones who have the more sure Word!

In the same way, after Thomas insisted on putting his own fingers and hands into the wounds of Jesus, the Lord Himself said blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed!

This is who we are and we are to be as comforted as Paul was that night!

There are many places we could turn to in the Scriptures to see such comfort, but since our worship this morning has had many references to John’s Gospel, we will stay there. The Gospel of John was written to bring comfort and assurance of our salvation... *[mention its use in evangelism]*

After the account of Thomas John says, “truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”

- Just as Jesus came to speak to Paul that evening, He now speaks to all the ages through John, offering them life in His name.

In fact John begins his Gospel by presenting Jesus as “The Word.” “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

I think sometimes we use these powerful verses so much in our apologetics and systematics that we do not ponder the great comfort that they should bring to each of us.

What do we often do for a child who is afraid at night? Turn on the light.

- Jesus comes as the light of men!
- BOTH bring great comfort!

What is the most basic philosophical question that all men, young and old come around to ask:

- Where did we come from and why are we here?

I studied much of the work of Francis Schaeffer as a young Christian reading his many books and listening to hundreds of hours of lectures. Very heady stuff to most, but I always remember his saying that there are not very many BIG questions and there are also not many different answers to those questions! Such is certainly the case with the question of our origin or purpose: Some will argue that everything came from nothing, which I guess would mean that ultimately everything is nothing!

- Not a very comforting option.

Most of the Greeks coming all the way down to our modern evolutionists simply believe that the matter of the universe is eternal: It has always existed!

Still not very comforting!

Finally there are some who try to bring a little religion into the mix to make folks feel a bit better by saying that somewhere out there, there is a god who got everything started. Still not very comforting because we cannot communicate with him or her and what they started does not seem to be running very well.

Into all of this despair John proclaims, in the beginning was the Word and by Him everything was made and now He comes as the light of men! Only God is eternal and He has revealed Himself as the Triune God whose character validates all that we hold to be dear in this life: Love, service, commitment, sacrifice, beauty, wisdom, music, strength, creativity, and much, much more!

Yes, the material of this universe was in fact created out of nothing...

- But it was brought forth by the creative work of our all-powerful God for His enjoyment and glory!

Thus we know where we came from and why we are here: To bring glory to God and to enjoy Him forever!

- That should bring great comfort!

John goes on from this grand beginning to fully explain how Jesus has come as the light of the world, becoming flesh and dwelling with us! John's Gospel is centered around a few key events or stories...

In the first he reminds us that Jesus has come for His bride the Church, by taking us to the wedding at Cana for the first miracle of Jesus.

- As a glorious picture of the new covenant, Jesus not only turns regular old water into FINE wine, but does so in abundance!

John tells us that the ruler of the feast did not know where it had come from, but the servants did and this should bring those of us who serve Jesus day by day a bit of comfort!

And just so we don't miss the point, John follows this picture of the New Covenant with Jesus cleansing the old temple and tells of His coming resurrection: The disciples do not fully understand at the time but John says, "Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said."

- They were comforted!

In chapter three we meet Nicodemus and learn that Jesus was willing to reach out to even Pharisees who were asking honest questions. Jesus gives him comfort with perhaps the most famous words of the New Testament, 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

- Jesus brings comfort to ALL the world!

Jesus then meets the woman at the well in Samaria: Jesus confronts her sin and her theology, but in the end brings her great comfort.

- It should remind us that we often do not hear Jesus because we really do not want to hear what He is saying!

This theme runs throughout the next few chapters as Jesus brings life to many BUT is resisted by the religious leaders who refuse to hear what He is saying!

Jesus reminds them: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life."

- In the end, many of them refused to come and be comforted by Jesus!

We see Jesus bringing material comfort with the feeding of the five thousand and then He warns them about learning the wrong lessons: 6:26 "Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. 27 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." 28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" 29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Next we see Jesus bringing comfort to a woman caught in the act of adultery when he confronts the hypocrisy of her accusers. Jesus tells her she is free to go and to sin no more!

Jesus goes on to declare, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

Jesus offers life, but the pride of many does not allow them to see and we have many more confrontations with these leaders. Even when Jesus heals the man born blind and raises Lazarus from the dead, they still refuse to believe.

- Jesus was sent to save His people from their sins and that is basis of the real comfort that He can bring.

As Jesus prepares for the final steps of this painful journey, John gives us an extended look at how Jesus shared what was on His heart during the final meal with the Disciples. Jesus brings comfort in so many ways, and I could not begin to cover it all in one message, but I would encourage you to read John chapters 13-17 often!

Jesus teaches them about real service by washing their feet. He speaks of mansions and the promise of the Spirit, the Comforter!

- He prepares them for their coming failures and persecutions.

He gives the wonderful picture of the vine and branches: We have no life outside of abiding in Jesus!

He gives the disciples the new commandment to love one another:

- We are to comfort each other!

And finally He reminds them that He will prevail in the end, even though the circumstances of the coming days may seem very dark indeed, just as they might have for the Apostle Paul in the Roman prison on the night that Jesus came to bring him comfort!

16:20 "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

- Great comfort for us all!

AT the end we have the great prayer that Jesus lifted up to the Father, before He was lifted up on the cross! His hour has come and He prays for those the Father has given Him.

17:13: "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

- *That is a promise of great comfort!*

14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 15 I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. *Please notice, Jesus is praying for our comfort in the here and now and NOT just in the world to come!*

16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

- *AND this great comfort is not intended for just the disciples who were with Him on this critical night...*

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, & that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

The next two chapters in John's Gospel tell the story of Christ's trials and crucifixion:

- The terrible price that had to be paid for our sins.

Then we come to the power AND comfort of the resurrection where John again gives us a glorious picture of the Son coming for His bride. Mary Magdalene meets the Savior near the garden tomb thinking He was a gardener. She falls down before her resurrected Lord as the aroma from the hundred pounds of spices in the tomb fill the air. All of these images should take us back to the Song of Solomon and we should be greatly comforted as God's people!

As we are commissioned today we will once again read about the glories of the Kingdom as Jesus rides forth with His Saints and remember how they were foretold in the Old Testament with the singing of Psalm 45.

- This is the great work that we have been given just as Saul of Tarsus was called to be Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles.
- Jesus came to Paul when he needed a word of encouragement and Jesus comes to us in our need as well.

There will be those times where we feel overwhelmed or discouraged. THEN we should lift up God's Word in our prayers thanking Him for being with us.

We also need God's encouragement when we face a different time of testing... Times where there is no particular trial or trouble but where you wonder if things are headed in the right direction at the right pace.

- We will see Paul face such a time over the next two plus years sitting in a Roman prison and I hope our study of this time will bring much encouragement as well.

And finally, we should remember that we also want to turn to God's Word for real comfort in our times of success and plenty so that we avoid the pitfalls of pride and presumption!

- Thus I guess you could argue that we are ALWAYS in need of the comfort that God offers!

Let it never be said of us that we have not because we ask not when it comes to God's comfort...

- AND may we always remember to give ALL the glory to God!

Communion Meditation: John 6:49 "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. 50 This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 51 I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." 52 The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" 53 Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent Me, & I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.'"