

When Love Hurts

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Well, it is Valentine's Day today, a fact that I've probably never acknowledged at any time in the course of my ministry, but it's okay to do it today because of what lies ahead. I suppose that many preachers will somehow or another be preaching on love today, and on my first Sunday back after being away on self-quarantine, I thought, "Well, you know what? I'll just join that parade." But I'm not here to speak to you about sentimental matters of roses or chocolate truffles, indeed, romantic love is not the focus of my thoughts or this message at all today, the concept of love is but not love in that romantic sense that the holiday has been defined by over the years.

While I was away, I had some added opportunity to consider the names of those, the faces of those that associate with our church. I keep different kinds of lists to help me keep my mind fresh on the people that are in our congregation, and something really stood out to me in a manner that is striking and made me want to set aside a day to speak to some issues and speak more importantly to some people, many of you, if not all of you to one degree or another. As we think about love, so many of you have suffered in the context of relationships with people that you love and that you thought loved you, and it's really hard. The details differ, of course, from life to life, but a common thread of heartache emerges. You've been misunderstood, you have been misconstrued, you have even been misrepresented by those that you love and you reach out and they do not want to reconcile. Parents or siblings push you away and make it plain that you're not within the realm of their sincere affections. Spouses have left you or want to leave you and make it plain that the wedding vows that you once shared with each other have no force of feeling anymore. Many of you have children that have rejected your upbringing, have refused the Christ that you have presented to them, do not hold dear in their hearts the word of God which is precious to you. For others, younger, a promising romance ends without warning and you're left holding the wispy nothingness of what you thought might become a life-long relationship. The title of today's message is "When Love Hurts." When love hurts.

Warren Wiersbe, the famous pastor of Moody Church in Chicago who's now with the Lord, once was pastor in Covington, Kentucky many many years ago. He said this, he said, "It is not the normal demands of life that break us, it is the painful surprises. We find ourselves fighting battles in a war that we never declared, and carrying burdens for

reasons we don't understand." Now I'm speaking again, with a heavy heart you say with David in Psalm 109:4, "In return for my love they act as my accusers." Or Psalm 120:7 comes to my mind as well where the Psalmist said, "I am for peace, but when I speak, They are for war."

Today is not a formal message. I'll just be upfront and candid with you about this today. This is no exegetical masterpiece that I'm about to share with you. This is not a homiletical act of brilliance by any stretch of the imagination. I'm doing something a little different this morning. I'm here as a pastor to help you and hopefully in the name of Christ and with the help of Christ, to offer comfort to you in the midst of those battles because I know that they are very very painful and it is very difficult to wake up day by day and have the press of that on your mind with the first time that your eyelids kind of flutter open and you say, "Oh, yeah, this is happening," and the night's slumber is replaced by the day's conflict.

So what we want to do today, here's the mindset with which I'm speaking and which I would invite you to receive what I have to say today. Let's suppose for just today, just for this one message that we're together in a private place, a comfortable remote lodge with fireplace going and as the snow falls outside, we're in a place where we can step back from life and enjoy a warm comfortable environment and have a meaningful conversation about life. That's the spirit in which I'm speaking with you today, talking about life with one another, and what I hope to do today is to comfort you by pointing you to Christ and to give you a sense of the majesty of Christ and how all of that conflict and rejection that you have known and that has hurt you finds its resolution and finds its comfort and finds its hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now look, again just being really candid with you, I'm not trying to fix anything today because I know I can't do that and it's foolish for a pastor to give you three simple points and this is how you can fix everything and we can go back to chocolate and roses again and everybody feels good. That's not real life and I'm not interested in preaching fantasies to people who need the truth to help them. So we can't fix anything today but I believe that we can do something that is much much better, and that's to give you some perspective from God's word and some comfort from the Lord Jesus Christ. So I'm going to break this up into three sections here this morning and we'll just see where it goes. I've been looking forward to being able to say these things to you because I know whether you would speak it openly or not, I know that far more of you than not need to hear this and need the comfort of God's word here today, and so I'm here as a pastor to try to help you. No more than that, and yet that's a lofty goal with the help of the Holy Spirit.

So how should we consider these things and how should we think about our broken hearts and the difficulty of relationships, close relationships that bring us conflict? And you know, it's not always family, is it? Sometimes, you know, as I speak with people from other churches and in other areas, you know, I realize, speaking maybe a bit to a broader audience here with what I'm about to say, is that sometimes the difficulty and the heaviness comes in the context of spiritual relationships where pastors or spiritual leaders have let you down, or people you trusted in a spiritual context disqualify themselves from

ministry and people that we thought were Christian leaders were actually perverts. It's very very difficult.

What can we say about all of these things? Point 1 here today is this, it's that you should expect trials. You should expect trials in the Christian life. This comes with the territory. Living in a fallen world, having the Spirit of Christ within you in the midst of an environment that is animated by the spirit of the world, the spirit of Satan, of course there's going to be conflict. Ephesians 6 is real and we wrestle not with flesh and blood but we wrestle with principalities and we wrestle in an unseen realm, and that plays itself out through human agents that hurt us. And I think this simple reality, the expectation of adversity helps us. I think it brings a helpful focus at all times in life, and I just want to read you a small handful of verses just to set the stage. We're not going to spend much time here.

In Romans 5:3 it says, "we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance." The assumption is that there will be difficulty. It is assumed in Scripture that you as a Christian will have adversity that causes you pain, and so the fact that you are experiencing that does not mean that your present situation is somehow outside of the purposes of God, it doesn't mean necessarily that you have done something wrong to find yourself in that estranged position. Tribulation comes. It's to be expected.

In James 1:2 it says, "consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." When you encounter them, not if. This is not a matter of if, this is just a question of when.

In 1 Peter 1:6 it says, "in this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while if necessary you have been distressed by various trials." You're distressed by them. You don't know what to do. You look at the situation and it occurs to you, "This cannot be fixed. There's nothing I can do to fix this. I have reached out and tried multiple multiple times to help and improve this relationship, to apologize and to ask for forgiveness, to ask for any kind of kindness in return because my heart is full of peace and reconciliation. I want to be a peacemaker here." And yet you know that by weeks and months and years of reinforcement that that's just not going to happen today. You're distressed and the trials are there.

What did Christ himself say to us? What did our Lord say on the verge of his own crucifixion in John 16:33? He said, "In the world you have tribulation." Now look, beloved, I understand that in one sense being told to expect trials is not immediately comforting because, you know, I'd like to be out from under the trial rather than be affirmed that this is the nature of life in the world, but it does help to recognize that Scripture is a realistic book. Scripture is not the fantasy of romance novels or Hallmark movies where the conflict is quickly and easily resolved and everybody loves each other in the end and everybody gets kissy-face at the end of it. Scripture is realistic. It's wonderful and it's true that it is the inspired word of God, inerrant, without fault, without blame, perfect in all that it says, and it's wonderful to have that bedrock, that this is the word of God, but I never get tired of remembering and of reminding others that Scripture

is a realistic book about the nature of life. It does not set up for us a fantasy world that is not the experience of reality. Scripture instead comes to us, speaks to us about our own sin, about our own guilt before a holy God, points us to Christ as the means of reconciliation vertically with God, and then goes on to tell us that while God leaves us in this world, there will be times of trial and adversity that we face. I find that very helpful because what that means to me is that I can not only trust the Bible because it is God's word and he always speaks the truth to me, I can trust the Bible because it speaks to me in the way that life really is, and the way that life really is, that means I can come to this book as one theologian said, I come to a book that understands me. As I read the Psalms, I find that men 2,500-3,000 years ago, in some cases 3,500 years ago, men were walking through similar times and similar senses of estrangement and alienation and finding their comfort in their Lord.

So it's not the expectation of trials that is our comfort, it provides important context to help us understand. There's a point where in the midst of the sorrow you step back a little bit and you look at this expectation of trials and you say, "Okay, this is the life that the Lord has given to me and now I have something to help me have a perspective to move forward in it." And we recognize the reality of it. Maybe, just maybe, it helps us to stop feeling sorry for ourselves quite as much and equips us to embrace the opportunity and to look for the spiritual good that God would have for us in it because in all of those verses that I read, there's this sense of exaltation that is given, this sense of joy even in the midst of the distress because in the collective testimony of Scripture is this, is that God is using the trial and the adversity and the pain in your heart to accomplish a larger spiritual good in your life.

You know, one of the things that is expectation of trials does for us and the reality of adversity does for us is this, it teaches us not to look for lasting perfect love in human relationships because men and women, boys and girls, children, brothers, sisters, parents, they let us down sooner or later, and even if they're perfect, death takes them away and we lose their presence. So we learn and it weans us from a complete attachment to this world and teaches us to look to the immutable unchanging God for our anchor for our final hope for what we rest ourselves most fully in. That's a very important point for us to learn and to understand, and the pain of trials teaches us like the little girl that put her hand on the stove and burned her hand and said, "Ouch!" She learned by the pain to be careful about where she rested her hand again in the future. That's right. That's a young amen back there. What a blessing to have children with us in the service sitting under the word of God.

So you should expect trials, that's section number 1. Section 2 here. You should expect family trials. You should expect family trials and I want to spend a little bit more time here, go to some verses that maybe aren't quite as familiar as the ones that I've already read. The Bible does not hide this reality from us either, this reality that oftentimes it will be our closest relationships, our immediate family that causes us pain, that causes us unending grief, it would seem. It's just the reality of it and the Bible does not hide that reality even if we try to avoid it and to explain it all away.

In Proverbs 17:1, you can turn to Proverbs 17 since I'm there and I'm going to spend a few minutes here. Proverbs 17 in your Bible. Proverbs 17:1 says this, and while I don't expect anyone to verbalize an amen with what I'm about to say, there will be some quiet amens in the heart of many with what we're about to see. Proverbs 17:1 says, "Better is a dry morsel and quietness with it Than a house full of feasting with strife." Prosperity is rather meaningless if you come home to conflict night after night after night. That's what the Scripture is pointing us to, is that outward prosperity and the sensual delights of life are nothing compared to a harmonious household. If you have the strife, all of the prosperity really is soured. It's like going to the fridge and looking for a carton of milk and you open it, "Oh!" and you realize it's all spoiled, it's all spoiled by the conflict of it all. And this conflict can come in marriage. Chapter 21:9 says, "It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman." And it's no violation of Scripture or hermeneutics to say the reverse of that is true, isn't it, ladies? To be in a house with a contentious man, an angry man, a man who punishes you with his silence is a very difficult way to live and Scripture recognizes this.

You're still in Proverbs 17, it's not only marriage, it comes from children as well, and I speak with as much gentleness as I can possibly do with the personality that the Lord has given to me here, knowing the reality of this for many of you is just an unending source of grief for you. Proverbs 17:21 says this, verse 21 of chapter 17, "He who sires a fool does so to his sorrow, And the father of a fool has no joy." God's word speaks to us realistically, doesn't it, and yet it speaks to us sympathetically. Do you see the sympathy in the human words of Solomon which come from the Spirit of God itself, recognizing and acknowledging before us that sometimes children are a source of great heartache?

The commentator Charles Bridges, I'm going to quote him a couple of times here, says this, he says, "The weeping parent not only finds no joy in the cherished object of his expectation, but instead a cankering grief embitters all his joys. It often brings him down with sorrow to the grave." You have this child, you have this son perhaps that you've raised and you've taught him and at times you walked closely together, and now there is this estrangement that has taken place. You would give your world simply to have that reconciled and yet the son, the daughter, rejects it, and as Bridges says, you're left with if not the external tears actually running down your cheek, you're left with the inner tears running down your heart at the sense of sorrow that predominates that cherished object of your former affections and your present affections.

Solomon expands on that thought a few verses later. Look at verse 25 and notice the intensity of the descriptive emotions that he's describing here in verse 25, "A foolish son is a grief to his father And bitterness to her who bore him." You know, financial loss, poor health is nothing compared to the kinds of things that we're talking about here this morning, that hostile spouse, the separated child, the memory of many pleas for listening, for understanding, for care and love and peace in return all being spurned away. That's hard. That is just hard. You can deal with bankruptcy if your family is with you, if your children are with you, but as we saw in verse 1, to have a house full of feasting with this kind of strife, it embitters everything else.

Again, Charles Bridges says this, commenting on verse 25. He says, "The mother's anguish is here added to the father's grief. When the baby was young, she embraced the delightful vision of training him in his coming maturity, and yet too often he proves in the end a foolish son and bitterness to her." Bridges goes on to say, "To see a foolish son hurried irrevocably into his eternal doom, oh, this to the godly parent is an awful conflict. Strong indeed must be that faith which bows reverentially to the divine sovereignty and maintains the serenity of peaceful submission."

There's a reason that the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is so well-known and is so powerful even to this day 2,000 years later after Jesus spoke it. It reverberates in the reality of the human condition. Parents understand this and identify with it, this godly father being rejected by both of his sons, one rebellious openly, one rebellious inwardly, and feeling the pain of his son saying, "I wish you were dead! Give me the inheritance that is mine." And standing at the end of the dusty driveway, so to speak, standing at the dusty path and watching that wrongly enriched son disappearing into the horizon to squander it all and to leave behind and to reject the love that was originally given to him, painful. Painful. And in that story that Jesus told, it's obvious that there is no fault with this father because the father was a representative, was a picture of the Father in heaven, and yet there is this rebellion that takes place.

Can't remember where, I read enough that it's hard for me to always trace things that stand out to me, but those of you that have experienced rebellious children and experienced the pain of that and still to this day feel the pain of that, let me remind you that in the perfection of heaven before the fall of man there was rebellion as Satan rebelled against God. God in all of his holy perfection, God having done nothing wrong, God in utter majesty and there's rebellion against God. I've come in my pastoral ministry not to assume anything about what the reality of a home life is. I know there are judgmental people that you can't share anything like this with because the immediate assumption is you must have done something wrong for your child to turn out like that. I don't traffic in that kind of legalistic approach. There's already enough pain and grief for a Christian parent to not have that added onto them by someone that they're looking to for comfort and sympathy.

Turn over to Matthew 10 as we consider this second section that you should expect, family trials. Matthew 10, Jesus is very direct and outspoken about it and, again, you just see the candor of Christ, you see the utter majesty of his truthfulness, and you see how he lays forth before us the cost of discipleship. In Matthew 10:34...let me just back up for a moment and just make a comment. It's really refreshing, astonishing to me the kind of demographic that we have in our church. Most of the people in our church, not all but a significant number of the people in our church are a lot younger than I am and that's encouraging to me, and I know that for some of these young people, some married with their own families, some single and, you know, maybe a little bit newer to the church, you know, as you get to the know their story, you realize the hostility that has come their way from people that they love or just that silent, cold-hearted, stone, granite-like rejection and the painfulness of that, and what a blessing it is for us collectively as a body to provide an environment of love and acceptance in Christ for people who are suffering

like that. We have a great great privilege and great opportunity to minister to people that are under the weight of this, that someplace there's an oasis that I can come and drink from and find friendship rather than rejection. But Christ, being mindful of many of those situations, Christ in Matthew 10 tells us that often the consequence of following him will be direct family conflict because of him himself, that Christ himself will produce division within the closest of relationships. He could not have been more clear or specific about this. He was completely explicit about it.

Look at Matthew 10:34 where he says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household." We should not be surprised by the reality that sometimes there is the most painful of conflict with people in our most intimate of relationships. And I've spoken to those who have had to, who would like to have been at our church but cannot be at a church because of the nature of conflict in the home and they're just not able to be where they want for the sake of trying to be at peace with a spouse or a parent, something like that. And just that conflict, it weighs on my heart.

But Jesus goes on and says and he says there's a lesson for us to learn from that kind of conflict. The lesson is his supremacy in it all and to take the opportunity to sanctify our affections and our sense of loyalties unto him and him alone. There's great spiritual opportunity for you that are in this kind of situation. It can purify your affections for Christ and bring about a profound sense of intimacy with him that gives you comfort and gives you courage that says, "No, Christ is with me and that's enough. Christ loves me even if they don't."

Look at what he says in verse 37, he says, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Dear Christian friend, my dear brother or sister in Christ, Christ himself may be the strain in your relationship. Your faith itself may be the source of division and loved ones turn away from you because they won't turn to him, and Christ says when that happens, assess the reality of the situation and place your deepest affection, your deepest loyalty in the Lord himself, in Christ himself.

And as you do that, let me remind you of something very very sweet and precious to remember. You know, sometimes, I mean, there's just no way to cover all of the different permutations of possibilities and realities that are here. You know, I know that some of you are here having lost your family and it was your fault, you know, it was your life of sin that sacrificed things. That's not true of everybody but that is sometimes the experience of all. But let me just say this as you find yourself in that estranged position when love hurts, let me just say this about our Lord and remind you of a couple of things about him. If ever there was a man who provided no legitimate basis for hostility against him, it was the Lord Jesus Christ because he committed no sin nor was there any deceit found in his mouth, and there was no legitimate cause in him for hostility, and yet in John

7 we read that even his brothers were not believing in him, his half-brothers. Judas Iscariot, one of the 12 with him intimately for three years during his earthly ministry, up and betrayed him for 30 pieces of silver. Sometimes familiarity brings contempt. Sometimes a prophet has no honor, Scripture says it a little bit differently, let me get this right. A prophet is not without honor except in his own hometown, and sometimes it's those closest relationships where the most bitter of hostility and rejection takes place. Well, look, that doesn't mean that you've done something wrong because Christ experienced that and he had done nothing wrong. These who rejected him, his half-brothers, Judas Iscariot, they were up close to him in all of his majesty and perfection and love and goodness, and at the time they would have nothing to do with him.

His own family rejected him. His own nation rejected him. John 1:11 speaks of this, "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him." And dear friends, what was our Lord's response to that? What was the inner nature of his own response to unrequited love? Well, look over at Luke 13. Luke 13 and with your bruised heart, look into the heart of Christ as he speaks to those that were rejecting him. He says in verse 34 of Luke 13, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" He said, "I wanted this and you refused."

Look over at Luke 19. Later on as he's coming closer and closer to the cross, we read this in verse 41. He says in Luke 19:41, "When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.'" He wept over the rejection. This was not a matter of cold calculating indifference to him. The sovereign plan of God did not insulate him from the pain of seeing his own people reject him. He wept over it, and we'll come back to that in a moment. Verse 42 he said, "If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes." And he goes on to tell them that enemies will come and burn down the city, level it to the ground. There will be serious consequences for this rejection.

For this morning the point is this: beloved, he shares your nature, he shares in humanity except without the sin which is a pretty major exception, but he shared in your humanity, he shared in life on earth and one aspect of the human condition that Christ entered into was this rejection from those that he loved, that he would have had but they would not have him. And so here on earth he was rejected, spurned, outcast. As we read earlier during our Scripture reading, murdered, as they spat on him and beat him and mocked him. Whatever we say about the difficulties and the sorrow and the sadness of our own human experience, we look to Christ and we see that he drank that cup to the full. He drank the very last drop of that.

And what does that mean? Well, it means this, when you go to Christ with a history of rejection or in the midst of present conflict and you go to him and you lay out your heart before him, maybe in between sobs getting a few words of prayer in, is that you can know this, this is what's so important is to understand that, is to know that Christ understands by experience how you feel. He's not a remote and distant deity, who as the

deists like to say just kind of wound up the earth like a clock and then set it off and went off someplace else to, you know, and abandon things to his own. He knows by experience how you feel.

Well, what now? What can we say to these things? We saw in the first section that we should expect trials in general. We saw in the second section that we should expect family trials in particular, at the very least not to be surprised by them. Well, what now? What is it that helps us? How do we move forward in light of these things that we've been seeing? Well, let me start here kind of in a little bridge, a transition here before I lay out the third section. Let me just comfort you with this in the midst of your difficult marriage, in the midst of the, you know, trying to navigate your way through estranged family members, let me just remind you of this and it's easy to lose sight of this very simple fact, but recognize this as we kind of transition from reality to hope, from the present to the future, remember this, is that the last chapter of this sad story in your life has not been written. God can still turn this around for good. God can still bring about change and bring about harmony. He's been doing this for millennia. He knows how to do it. If he carries now in the process and leaves you, seemingly leaves you on the outside knocking on the door trying to get in and it seems like he's slow to answer the door, understand that the story is not over. There's still more to be said. There's still other chapters to be written and maybe the future chapters will be more pleasant and more reconciled than the ones of the past. God can do that, he does that, after all, he is the one who said, right, that, you know, he causes all things to work together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose. There is a promise in the midst of this, my Christian friend, that you can go back to and lay hold of. As bad as this hurts, as much as I can't see any resolution, as hard as that person seems against me, God is still on the throne, God is still working out his purposes in my life, Christ did not die for me in vain, and take a deep breath and live for tomorrow if today is too painful to bear.

The last chapter hasn't been written. That brings us to our third section here this morning and it is one of the blessings of staying in ministry in the same place over a number of years, is seeing the blessing of people who were in the middle of that conflict, maybe a marriage that was on the brink of disaster and seeing how God turned it even if it was an unbelieving spouse, you know, there's a measure of reconciliation. We've seen that. We've watched that happen among people in our own church and, you know, you look at that and say, "Well, maybe God would that for me too." But thirdly, above all else you should enter into the comfort of Christ. You should enter into the comfort of Christ. In other words, while these trials come and you expect them and even in the most intimate of relationships, you know, there's a response of hostility to you, understand this, is that even then you can and should enter into the comfort of Christ.

Go back to Matthew 10. I didn't read the final verse of that chapter. I did it deliberately to bring us back to here at this point in the message. In Matthew 10:39...before I read the verse, let me just say this. Following Christ may cost you relationships, and following Christ may not fix the relationships that you would like, but it is not without reward. There is a surpassing blessing that is far better than any earthly relationship could ever be. Verse 39, Christ said, "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his

life for My sake will find it." That in the midst of the conflict that Christ brings to us and that discipleship costs us relationships along the course of life, there is this promise of Christ saying that there is a blessing from heaven, there is a blessing from his hand, there is intimacy with him that is found nowhere else, and while we may not get the lesser treasure on earth that we desire, there is a greater treasure in Christ that is worth the exchange, and we learn to value Christ supremely in our affections when we lose things in an earthly way, we find instead something even better in him. It's better. You know, you'd like to have both and sometimes the Lord gives us both, but the true disciple of Christ says, "Do you know what? If the cost of having You is my earthly relationships, Lord, I will still follow You. You are that precious. Lord, You are the One who loved me and gave Yourself up for my soul. These people that I have affection for here on earth, the best I can say about them, whatever else they did, they didn't do that. They didn't make me. They didn't fashion my days. They didn't shed their blood for my soul. It's not them that is keeping me. It's not them that will transition me from death into eternal life by nail-scarred hands." And you start to see by contrast the supremacy of Christ in a way that satisfies your heart like nothing else could do, and when he says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," that means something. That means something. That means that the one that I love most and depend the most on and trust the most is never going to fail me. Earthly people may and will, he won't, and in that recognition of the glory of Christ, you find your life, you find your reason for living.

And with that perspective, let me just give you a couple of kind of closing thoughts about the comfort of Christ, remembering that we're talking as though we're in a comfortable wilderness lodge someplace talking about life and what Christ means to us. First of all, let me remind you as I've already said, I told you I'd come back to this point, is that Christ sympathizes with you. Christ sympathizes with you in the midst of that broken relationship and I think it's just so important for us to remember this and to dwell on it and focus on it for just a moment because I know the tendency is for even, you know, tender-hearted Christians to say, "Maybe I'm being punished for something. Maybe the Lord's against me, you know? What did I do wrong here? And maybe, you know, all of this is just a punishment for things that I have done." And then added to the earthly hostility is a wrong-minded sense of hostility from God as well directed against you, and that really does become unbearable. Well, understand that if you are in Christ, if you have been born from above, born again by the Spirit of God and Christ is in you and he has saved you by grace through faith alone, then the whole nature of your interaction, the whole nature of your position before God has utterly changed and God is now, as I like to say and I've said it many many many times and I'll probably say it many many more times, God is favorably disposed toward you. Christ came and gave his life on the cross, bore the wrath of God on your behalf because he loves you, because he cares for you, because he is full of mercy and kindness toward you. If you are in Christ, the last thing that you have to worry about is thinking that he's hostile to you based on something that you did in the past. He came to forgive you of your past.

And the book of Hebrews couldn't be any more clear and emphatic about this. Hebrews 4:15 and if you are in the midst of unjustified hostility from those that are close to you, well, enter into the comfort of Christ and remember that he sympathizes with you. Verse

15, "we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore," here's the consequence of that, "let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And here you are in the midst of this hostility and the brokenness of it and it's definitely a time of need, Christian friend, and you're in need of grace and mercy and wisdom, and what Scripture says to you is come near to Christ. Draw near to him. Come to his word and read it. Bow on your knees and pray to him in response to his word and recognize that in that there is sympathy, supernatural sympathy that will be mediated to your heart by the Holy Spirit. In other words, Christ is near you when love has not been returned to you.

Secondly, Christ has covered you. You should enter into the comfort of Christ by remembering the fact that he sympathizes with you and, secondly, that he has covered you. Now Christian friend, I realize that none of us are here blameless, without sin. We've all fallen short of the glory of God and sometimes the way that we have fallen short has impacted the relationships and maybe there is some consequence of what you have done that has contributed to it. Not assuming that but that is the reality of life. Well, understand that even that, even where you've fallen short does not hinder you from the comfort of Christ. It does not restrict you. The comfort of Christ isn't given to those who deserve it. The whole assumption of Scripture is we don't deserve it. Despite our undeserving, that comfort is available for the asking.

Listen, let me remind you of something very basic, Christianity 101. If you are a Christian here today, Jesus Christ did not save you because you had lived well up until that point. Christ saved you precisely because you had not lived well, because you were a law-breaker and a rebel against him. He came to seek and to save the lost, the guilty. And so if he came in the midst of your guilt, if while you were an enemy, the logic of Scripture is, if while you were an enemy he loved you and gave himself up for you, how much more now being reconciled to him is his love and mercy freely available to you? This is inescapable. This is wonderful. Right now I am experiencing the greatest privilege that could ever be given to any man is to announce such great mercies to my fellow men on behalf of a wonderful Savior. This is the best news of all.

Christ came to seek and to save the lost and so, beloved, your hope, your comfort in Christ – listen, this is really really important, this is really important – your comfort is not that you have been righteous or that you can justify yourself over against the hostility that is being directed against you. Don't go there because that's a waste of time. That's not where real comfort is. That just leads you to pride and bitterness if you're trying to justify yourself. That's not our comfort at all. Your comfort is not that you have been righteous, your comfort is – watch this – your comfort is that Christ is righteous. It's not that you are good, it's that he is good. You see, your heavenly Father accepts you without blame for the sake of his Son. He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. It's because you are in Christ that God accepts you and receives you. Yes, maybe you've sinned and sinned greatly and you lost everything on account of that, well, my friend, Christ has covered that. Christ has paid the price for it so that there is no barrier, there is no hindrance to you going immediately

into the presence of God, calling out to him and knowing that you are well-received on behalf and in the name of Christ.

These are wonderful truths. Don't justify yourself, look to the one who justified you and dwell on this: if God is for you, if Christ is for you, then who's against you? Weigh it out. Christ knows your past and he's covered you with his shed blood and his righteousness. Christ knows the present and knows the pressure and the distressing nature of the circumstances. He knows all of that and what? He's with you right in the midst of it. "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." And Christ knows the future and after you've suffered a little while longer, he'll bring you home to heaven in Christ. He said, "If I go to prepare a place for you, I'll come again and receive you to Myself that you may be with Me forever," John 14. So he's covered the past, he's with us in the present, he is preparing this and has ordained this wonderful future for those that are in him. That's comfort. That's wonderful. That is an unchanging place, an unchanging anchor where your heart can go to rest.

So the wonderful grace of Jesus is this, is that he receives brokenhearted sinners just like you, and that you can go to him by faith and find a refuge. He knows when love hurts. He knows how love has hurt you. He knows how hatred has hurt you as well, and he offers the supreme thing in the universe to you as a free gift for your consolation, he offers himself. You can have Christ in your sorrow. Scripture says, looking to Christ it says, "Turn to Me and be saved all the ends of the earth, for I am God and there is no other." My friend, the broken heart that you came into this room with can lead you even more deeply into the splendors of Christ. The nail-scarred hands from Calvary reach out to you in grace. Go to him, my friends. Go to him and lay hold of those hands by faith.

Let's pray.

Father, on behalf of everyone who sorrows here this morning, I simply ask You to do what You've promised to do, that You would work it all together for good to those who love You and are called according to Your great purpose. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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