
HARD-PRESSED, BUT NOT CRUSHED. PERPLEXED, BUT NOT IN DESPAIRSermon for the 2nd Sunday after Pentecost, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:8

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 4:8: **In every way we are hard-pressed, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We all know the story of Job. Sitting in misery he *opened his mouth and cursed the day when he was born*, (Job 3:1). In the bitterness of his soul, Job cried out: “A human being who is born of a woman lives for a few days and is full of trouble,” (Job 14:1). Moses expressed a similar thought when he said: “*The days of our lives have seventy years in them or, if we are strong, they are eighty years. Their pride is only toil and trouble. For life quickly passes and we fly away,*” (Ps. 90:10). Today, even with all the advances in science and medicine, despite his frantic efforts to improve conditions on this earth, man is just as little free from troubles as he was when Job and Moses spoke.

Being Christian brings no exception to the rule. We too must bear trouble which is common to all men, but perhaps we could even be bold enough to suggest that simply because of our faith, we have other troubles of even *greater burden* of which the unbelieving world knows nothing. We have the added burden of the temptations of the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. Even if this is true, we still have every reason to remain victorious while the world sinks into despair. How is this so? It is because we do not deceive ourselves with false hope and comfort, instead, we obtain our strength from God’s true, unfailing source.

The Apostle Paul declares that he and other Christians were **hard-pressed, but not crushed... perplexed, but not in despair**. The word translated “**hard-pressed**” has in it the idea of pressure. The Greek verb, in fact, was used for pressing grapes. There were times of great pressure during Paul’s ministry. Think of the almost constant opposition and hostility he and believers of his time faced. There were times when Paul and the others were “**perplexed,**” at a loss. They

were severely persecuted, even to the point of death. Through all their trials, Paul describes their condition as extremely uncomfortable and distressing.

While it may not be as bad in our society today as it was for Paul, yet we do find ourselves harassed on every side. We have our woes and ills, the daily onslaughts of Satan, the taunts and sneers of the world which day by day are growing in their chorus against us, the allurements and baits with which the unbelieving world tries to trap us, and we also have the added weakness, folly, and sin of our own hearts.

Now, in all this distress and perplexity there is one chief danger, and that is of seeking help or comfort from false helpers or hopes. These false hopes, these false comforts that the world offers, have been given different names, but in their essence, they have remained the same. We could classify them under the head of worldliness and self-righteousness. Let's summarise these two.

The first cure that the world offers for all our troubles is *worldliness*, that is, devotion to pleasure. The world will tell us, *“Drink deep from whatever joys you can reach, do not be a sour-faced saint, get the most out of life, have a good time, be one of the crowd on the broad way where hilarity, cheer, laughter, and fun is the order of the day.”* This is worldliness. At other times it has been called epicurean philosophy. Solomon tried it and tasted its bitter fruits, and Paul had a run in with these kinds of people while he was waiting for Silas and Timothy to meet with him at Athens.¹ Because such people believe that there is no afterlife in which they will be called to account, our warning for them is that they had better enjoy life now and get the most out of it while they can, because life in this world is brief, and after this life comes the judgment.² Those who reject the one true God, those who instead make worldly pleasures their god, have nothing to look forward to except everlasting misery and hopelessness. While we certainly can and should have pleasure on this earth, it will never be at the expense of the One who gives true pleasure in our lives.

The second cure that the world offers for all our troubles is what we call *self-righteousness*. Self-righteous people tell others or themselves: *“I am not going to make a fool of myself by drinking deep of the pleasures of this life. That is the curse of those ignorant, inexperienced fools who think they can find satisfaction in a dissolute, reckless life of selfish vice. The pleasures of the world are salt water,*

¹ Acts 17:18

² Hebrews 9:27

which promises to quench your thirst, but only increases it, even to desperation.”

These are the respectable people of this world. They consider themselves far better than the Christian, or anyone else for that matter. They will insist that they do no wrong, that they are temperate in the use of all things, that they are honoured by their fellow-men, and that they serve the community faithfully. They are just like the self-righteous Pharisees whom Jesus once spoke of.³ They like to look down upon everyone else, all the while trusting in, and exalting themselves. In doing so, such people think they shall be free from trouble. But are they?

Many people who trust in themselves, when trouble comes upon them, complain, *“What have I done to deserve this? It’s not fair! I’m too good a person to have this happen to me!”* Some will even fall into deep depression because they consider themselves unjustly treated by their fellow-men. When we find ourselves feeling condemned and having despairing thoughts, then we do not look inward at ourselves, instead, we pour out our hearts to the Lord who has promised never to leave us nor forsake us.⁴

The point that we wish to make from these couple examples is that all around us are people perishing simply because they try to find comfort in a false comforter.

We thank God that we are protected against these ruinous and murderous errors. We know and face sin, evil, and the woes of life. St. Paul expresses that in our text when he says, **we are hard-pressed, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair**. We are hard-pressed, we do not deny it. We are perplexed; we realise that. We face these evils honestly. Our sin, weakness, and suffering are real. We will accept no false comfort. We will not try to escape evils by denying the truth or by sacrificing our faith.

That, then, is the first reason why we are not conquered by sin and trouble, - we do not, we will not, take our refuge in the false hopes and comforts of this world.

But there is another reason why we are able to triumph over all our foes, and it is this: we know and obtain help from God’s true and unfailing source of comfort and power. What is that?

Paul had mentioned it just before he asserted that Christians are never crushed or in despair. He writes: *“For it is God, who said, “Let light shine out of the*

³ Luke 18:9-14

⁴ Deuteronomy 31:6

darkness!” who has shone in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.” Paul is thinking back to what the Lord had done for him. At the time of creation, God had said, “*Let light shine out of darkness.*” That same God had removed the veil from Paul’s heart and brought light to it. He defines that light as knowing, that is, personally experiencing “*the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.*”

This was a reference on Paul’s part to the day of his conversion when quite literally a light from heaven penetrated the darkness of his heart. On that day he came face-to-face with God’s greatest glory. He saw Jesus and, seeing Jesus, saw the glory of God’s love.

By faith, we have seen God “*in the person of Jesus Christ.*” In other words, we have learned to know God as revealed in Jesus.⁵

Where have we found this wonderful knowledge? In the Word of God. In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul remarks, “*As Scripture has said, ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has comprehended, what God has prepared for those who love Him.’*”¹⁰ Nevertheless, God has revealed it to us through His Spirit,” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). From this Word every day we learn again the precious truth of forgiveness of sins. In this Gospel, God has prepared a wonderful fountain of cleansing, of healing, and of power. He has prepared a table before us in the presence of our enemies.⁶

Nowhere is all this offered to us more richly than in the Lord’s Supper. In that blessed Sacrament He gives us His body and His blood, the body that was crucified, and the blood that was shed for us, to assure us that the sacrifice which Jesus made upon the cross for our sins has been accepted by God and that therefore our debt which we owe to God has been wiped off the books. ALL our sins are forgiven. Our account with God has been paid in full. God has nothing against us; He is our Friend. Unbelieving, worldly people have no such comfort. Their conscience accuses them, but they cannot say: “*The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin,*” (1 John 1:7). Perhaps they do know that there is a just God, who hates sin. Perhaps they see how He punishes sin continually; yet they have no comfort, no consolation, whereas we, in the Sacrament are assured that we receive the very price that was paid for our redemption. God would not permit us

⁵ John 14:9

⁶ Psalm 23

to take it if He did not intend it for us. What blessed assurance and peace! We can, therefore, lift up our heads and our hearts and face, no matter what may be confronting us, knowing that God is for us, that everything which could separate us from God, all our transgressions, have been perfectly removed. No wonder we can say in the words of our text: “**we are hard-pressed, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair.**” That is the reason why we are triumphant amid our perplexities and our troubles.

Yet we have even additional assurances and comforts. The Word of God tells us that “*all the promises of God are “Yes” in Him (that is, in Jesus), for that reason also we speak the “Amen” to God through Him, to glorify Him,*” (2 Cor. 1:20). Are we able to fully comprehend how much is included in these words, “*all the promises of God*”? That means everything good that God has promised for this life and for the life that is to come, for instance, that He will never forsake us; that He will make our cause, our welfare, His special business; that He will look after us, support us, provide for us, lead us, keep us, help us; that He will bless all those that help and bless us and curse all those, and oppose all those, that curse us and oppose us. All these promises are fulfilled only to those who are in Christ Jesus, only to those who believe in the Lord Jesus, who believe what we are told in the Sacrament, that the body of Christ was given for us and that the blood of Christ was shed for us. No wonder, then, that we can say with Paul, “*If God is for us, who can be against us?*” (Rom. 8:31). No wonder we can repeat in the words of the 27th Psalm, “¹ *The LORD is my Light and my Salvation. Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the Fortress of my life. Of whom should I be afraid?* ² *When evildoers came against me to devour my flesh, my oppressors and my enemies stumbled and fell.* ³ *If an army were to pitch camp against me, my heart would not be afraid. If a war were to break out against me, in this I would be confident...* ⁵ *For He will hide me in His shelter in the day of trouble. He will conceal me under the cover of His tent. He will set me high on a rock.* ⁶ *Now my head will be high above my enemies all around me.*”

How blessed we are in having nothing to fear! Yes, troubles abound, but we have a Father and a Protector that is almighty, with whom nothing is impossible! Of Him we are assured in His Word that He has chosen us for eternal life. We belong to the Church of God, we are members of Christ’s own mystical body. He is our heavenly Bridegroom. How sorry we must feel for those who do not know of this fountain of strength or do not approach it.

Let us thank God today with all our heart that He has chosen us to have a share in His glory. Let us ask Him to give us the full measure of His blessings, so that we may go forth, rejoicing in God's mercy and forgiveness, and determine with new spiritual strength to live as children of God, always trusting that He holds us safe in His arms. That is the secret of our triumph in the midst of troubles and perplexities; that is the reason why we can truthfully say these words of St. Paul: **“we are hard-pressed, but not crushed. We are perplexed, but not in despair.”** Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, our strength and our stay, we praise You for creating all things by Your power, and for sustaining the earth and all who live on it. Help us to hear the witness of Your creation and to see the wonder of Your glory.

Father, we praise You for revealing Yourself to us in Your Word, and for showing us Your holy will. We thank You for the inspired writers of Your wise and true Word, for through them You have shown us Your forgiving love and given us rich promises of hope. We praise You for Your grace in Christ Jesus, by which You have provided us our escape from Your judgment on all disobedience. Pour out Your Spirit on us so that we may grow in knowing You.

We praise You for leading us from death to life through the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Your Son. We praise You for our freedom from the condemnation of Your Law, and for delivering us from the ceremonial shadows of the Old Testament Law. By Your love for us, move us to the love and mercy that is the concern of Your moral Law, so that we may not love in mere words but in deed and truth. Give us sympathetic hearts for those in need, that we may share with them the things You have given us. Grant that through our love they may learn to know Your love, and praise You.

We thank You that You have prepared for all people the rest of eternal salvation, and that through the Gospel You invite all to it. Enable us faithfully to spread the good news of this great relief to all whom we meet in our lives, that they also may

respond to Your mercy with happy and thankful hearts. Grant that the spiritually poor may taste and see that You are merciful and good.

Almighty Lord, rule over our nation, and guide all to whom You have given authority. Bless our society with pure motives, noble goals, and moral strength. Give all Australians the desire to live before You in loving trust and obedience.

Bless our homes, and make them places of true learning and love, that all who live in them may find peace and joy in harmony with You and with one another.

We pray for Your special protection and help for the sick, the sorrowful, the aged, and the lonely. Meet their needs with Your mercy, and show them the wonderful things You have prepared for all Your children. Father, hear our prayers, and if there is anything else we should have asked for, grant it for the sake of Jesus Christ who has saved us and pleads for us. Amen.

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 5:12-15

¹² Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD, your God, has commanded you! ¹³ You shall labour and do all your work for six days! ¹⁴ However, the seventh day is a Sabbath for the LORD, your God. You shall not do any work, you, your son, your daughter, your manservant, your maidservant, your ox, your donkey, any of your domestic animals or your foreign resident, who is inside your gates, that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do! ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD, your God, brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm! Therefore, the

LORD, your God, has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

⁵ We do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as the Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is God, who said, "Let light shine out of the darkness!" who has shone in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. ⁷ However, we have this treasure in clay jars, with the result that this all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us. ⁸ In every way we are hard-pressed but not crushed. We are perplexed but not in despair. ⁹ We are persecuted but not forsaken. We are struck down but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We are always carrying around in our bodies the

dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies.

¹¹ For we, who are alive, are always being given over into death because of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal human nature. ¹² Consequently, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6

²³ Once Jesus was going through the grain-fields on a Sabbath. As the disciples walked along, they began to pick heads of grain. ²⁴ The Pharisees began to tell Him, “Look! Why are they doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

²⁵ Jesus asked them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were in need and became hungry: ²⁶ how he went into the house of God at the time of Abiathar the Chief Priest and ate the loaves set out before God, which are unlawful for anyone to eat except the priests and how he also gave some to his companions?”

²⁷ Then He went on to tell them, “The Sabbath was made for the sake of man, not man for the sake of the Sabbath. ²⁸ For this reason the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

^{3:1} Then He went again into the synagogue, and a man was there who had a shrivelled hand. ² They were watching Him closely to see whether

He would heal him on the Sabbath, that they might accuse Him. ³ He told the man with the shrivelled hand, “Stand up in the middle!”

⁴ Then Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save a life or to kill?”

However, they remained silent. ⁵ Jesus looked around at them with anger and was distressed at the hardness of their hearts. Then He told the man, “Stretch out your hand!”

He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. ⁶ Then the Pharisees went out and immediately began to plot with Herod’s supporters against Jesus that they might destroy Him.