

The Christian's Comfort!

Ps 46:1-3, 10-11; Rm 8:28-39; LD 1 Q & A 1

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(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What is comfort?

Well, it has been said that “*Comfort is a good thing that takes care of a bad situation. Yes, comfort does not always take away the bad situation, but the good thing is, comfort makes us strong enough to endure the evil... Comfort acts as a tear-dryer. Sometimes it is a ‘shot in the arm.’*”¹

So, comfort gives strength to survive.

Now, here's the reality: sooner or later, all people need comfort...!

And let's be honest & level-headed: God has indeed given us certain things on earth that can (& do) give comfort:

- for the body He gave:
 - food & drink: a nice roast on a cold winter's night or... a glass of wine;
 - also: a comforting fireplace in winter or a hot soaking bath – these are all comforts for the *body*!
- But then, for our *emotional/spiritual* needs, He gave:
 - a caring family;
 - friends;
 - pets (a dog, cat, bunny, guinea pig, bunny);
 - also: absorbing & uplifting music/art;
 - and He has also given us, for our comfort & support, loving husbands & wives...

So, it's true: things & people can, by God's gracious providence, comfort us!

And the Bible agrees with that, for, look, do we not read that when Noah was born, his dad, Lamech, “*named him Noah saying ‘This (boy) will give us comfort from our work, yes from the toil of our hands from the earth which the LORD has cursed*”²

And is this not why the Bible says about Isaac..., *Isaac brought her (Rebekah) into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah (her). So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*³

God did indeed give us things & people for our comfort! And let us be thankful for them!

But look, there comes a time when everyone should realise: ultimately, no created *thing* or created *being* can give lasting comfort!⁴

¹ My amendments to KUYVENHOVEN, A. 1988. Comfort & Joy: a study of the Heidelberg Catechism. Grand Rapids, MI : Faith Alive. p. 13.

² My translation from Gn 5:29 וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ נֹחַ לֵאמֹר זֶה יִנְחָמֵנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹן יָדֵינוּ מִן־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אָרְרָה יְהוָה:

³ Gn 24:67 וַיָּבֵאָהּ יִצְחָק הָאֵלֶּלֶל שָׂרָה אִמּוֹ וַיִּקַּח אֶת־רֵבְקָה וַתְּהִי־לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה וַיֵּאָהֲבָהּ וַיִּנְחָם יִצְחָק אַחֲרֵי אִמּוֹ:

You see, that comfort which your mother gave you when, as a little child, you had a nightmare – that comfort served its purpose – was temporary; it's gone!

And, ultimately, the comfort of a nice meal/drink, the comfort of friends & family they will all go.

Boys & girls, even the music that you now find so comforting & uplifting – that will also go!

So, here's the point: We should not expect *lasting* comfort from things that are in themselves *not lasting*!⁵

The Christian's Comfort

Lasting (earth-surpassing) comfort is only found in God!

And, of all the gods revered by people, who surpasses them all? Who has proved that He alone is real – that there are no other gods?

Only the God Triune!

For only this God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son (over to death) so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

Well, how come you & I (anyone) have comfort in Jesus Christ?

My brother & sister, let's start the answer to this question with one word – the word “belonging,” – belonging to Jesus!

Belonging

“Belonging to Jesus” is a sentence used by the Apostle Paul when he wrote, “***Whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord***” (Rm 14:8).⁶

Well, during my nearly sixty-seven years of life – but mostly during my near-fourteen years as a pastor – I have seen many a Christian brother or sister on his/her death bed!

You know what has always been the greatest comfort for them (and for me as their pastor)? – the knowledge & sure conviction that they were not just drifting in a vast ocean of time, space & history – detached from an eternal anchor & rudder! No, but that they belonged to the One who created them, who willed them into being, who saved them, and who would be receiving them with open arms when they blew their final breath on earth. This knowledge/conviction of belonging gave them great comfort and assurance!

The same with you & me, and all who have received Jesus as Lord & Saviour of their life. We all are not simply drifting in time – just a number here today & annihilated tomorrow! No, we belong to the One who, although He *can* operate in time, is *above* time – our Lord Jesus!

And *belonging to Jesus* means I am His possession; His property; His own!

Now, if I am His own, then (even if I lose all my earthly possessions – yes, also my body (when I die) I still belong to God!

My brother & sister,

Two godly men wrote the Heidelberg Catechism:

- Zacharius Ursinus, a young professor in Theology, and...
- Caspar Olevianus, a young pastor.

⁴ If you never come to that stage, then it means you may have idolised created things – lifted them to a level of ultimate importance...; the stage where a comforting/soothing drink becomes binge drinking; or when ...

⁵ For a whole list/description of false comforts, cf. Lammers, W.H. The Price of Possession: The Heidelberg Catechism Part 1. Chino, CA : Reformed Fellowship. p.19

⁶ ἐάν τε γὰρ ζῶμεν, τῷ κυρίῳ ζῶμεν, ἐάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τῷ κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκομεν. ἐάν τε οὖν ζῶμεν ἐάν τε ἀποθνήσκωμεν, τοῦ κυρίου ἐσμέν.

Both these men had seen confusion, war, persecution, and death in their world – they knew these things first-hand!

And both men came to see with great certainty that only belonging to God through Jesus could possibly give any lasting comfort to anyone!⁷

The psalmist of Ps 46 knew the same, that's why he wrote, "***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...***" (Ps 46:1-2a)

See the comfort/strength in knowing that you belong to Jesus – that you are His property!?

How did you become such property? How did you come to belong to Christ?

Well, a commentator tells this story...

It's the story of this boy who, with much care & passion, had made a little toy sail boat for himself.

However, on the first day that he went to the river to try it out, everything started out very well, but then, suddenly, his precious boat got ripped by a fast current. The boy ran along the river trying to keep up, but to no avail! The last thing he saw was how his boat disappeared over the edge of a waterfall.

Well, several months later, the boy walked into the toy shop in town. Guess what he saw on the shelf? His very own little sail boat!

Straightaway, he told the shop-owner, "Sir, this is my boat!"

"No," said the shop-owner, "it's mine!" "I found it and repaired it." "If you want it, you'd have to bring money and buy it!"

So, that very same day, the boy returned, paid the required price – all that he had saved – and walked home carrying the little sail boat.

As he walked home, this was what he said, "Little boat, you are mine – you are *doubly* mine:

- Firstly, because I made you!
- Secondly, because I purchased you!⁸

My brother & sister,

God, through Christ, has not only created you with love & care; He also *purchased* you dearly – at the cost of His own Son...

The Bible says, "***You are not your own; you were bought at a price***" (1 Cor 6:19b-20a).⁹

Question: Why did Jesus have to give His precious blood?

Two things:

- To pay the penalty, which was due us!
- To, at the same time, *prove/show the unbelievable extent of God's love...!*

My brother & sister,

Jesus created and bought His loved-ones – bought at a price – a costly one...!

Does He have the right to be called their Lord!?

⁷ cf. Lammers (ibid:21)

⁸ cf. VAN DEN HEUVEL, L. 2011. God's unfolding promise: from shadows to SONlight. Chino, CA: Reformed Fellowship. p. 17

⁹ It also says, "***God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves***" (Col 1:13).

You bet!

Boys & girls (young people), have you yet received Him as Lord & Saviour of your life?
If you have, then, by grace, you have the comfort that you are His treasured possession!
Then you belong to Him!

How much of you?

How much of you belongs to the Lord?

Well, the Catechism says, all of you! “Body & soul!”

So, what does it mean that you/I belong with our *body* to Jesus?

Well, it means what 1 Cor 6:19-20 says, “***You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.***”

Now, what does it mean that you/I belong with our *soul* to Jesus?

That my soul, straight after my death, will be awake in heaven with my Lord!

And that, on my Lord’s return, my soul will be reunited with my body and I will live forever with God, freed from sin, pain, and death!

How long do I belong for?

For all times!

The Catechism (based upon the Bible) says, “...in life and in death...” – and that includes, in other words, all my life *on earth*!

Well, how is it possible that my belonging to Jesus can last for all my life?

Because of my Lord’s protection!

Remember: “Not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father.”¹⁰

Does that mean that Christians will not suffer hardship?

No, that “not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father” means that even hardship that comes my way is allowed for me by my Father’s will! (cf. especially Rm 8:28, ***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.***)

So, if such hardship comes by my Father’s will, then, for sure, will no-one and nothing steal away (rob me of) my belonging to Jesus.

Look, is that not why our New Testament passage (Rm 8:28-29) declares that none of satan’s soldiers, neither individually nor all of them together, can separate you/me from the love of Christ.

Now, here’s a warning not to become complacent in my faith because of the assuring words of Rm 8!

You see, although satan & his helpers cannot *separate* you & me from our belonging to Christ, that’s exactly what they will *want* to do!

They strive to create distance between you and Christ!

And remember: When a soldier in battle is separated from his unit/platoon, then he becomes an easy, vulnerable target!¹¹

Well, here’s good news: if you belong to Jesus by faith, then you cannot be defeated by the evil one, no matter how hard he tries!

He cannot take away the fact that you belong to Christ!

How do you/I know it?

Assurance!

¹⁰ Cf. e.g., Mt 6:26-35

¹¹ cf. Lammers (ibid:17)

LD 1 says: Because “Christ, by His Holy Spirit, *assures* me of eternal life!”

My brother & sister, the Christian has assurance of belonging to Christ – an assurance not just based upon a good feeling – yes, that, too! But an assurance which has started by hearing & believing the historical fact that Jesus died & rose also for me!

And it was such a head-heart assurance of belonging to Jesus, which made the Frenchman, Blaise Pascal, cry out “*Certainty, certainty, feeling, joy, peace. Joy, joy, joy – tears of joy!*”¹²

And it was also this head-heart assurance of belonging to Jesus, which made the Apostle Paul cry out, “*I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I’ve committed unto Him against that day.*”¹³

Congregation, LD 1 answers one last question re belonging to Jesus, the question...

How do I show it? (How do you show that you belong to Jesus?)

Well, let’s say it this way: When school students form a group, e.g., a music group, they want to show their belonging by wearing similar T-shirts with a logo. They want to dress alike & act alike!

And a young woman who is engaged to the man she loves – well, she does a similar thing! She wants to wear his ring!

Why?

Well, this is what she says, “I want to show that I belong to him!” And I still remember how my oldest sister, when she got engaged, loved to show off her engagement ring. As she walked or worked, she would hold her left hand and ring finger in such a way that the shiny new engagement ring would catch everyone’s attention! And, indeed, she loved to show that she belonged to her fiancé!

Well, a young woman who loves her fiancé will even do more: If circumstance demands it, she will be devotedly willing to follow him and to live with him after their wedding – even if he needs to move far away from her family.¹⁴ (Many a woman in our denomination has experienced this first-hand – leaving parents & siblings in the Netherlands to follow her fiancé to New Zealand in the 1950’s). See? Showing your belonging!

Here’s the shocking part: If someone follows satan, his life will tell also *that*! How shocked was I last week when I saw two young ladies walking along the creek where I always walk our dog! The one wore a T-shirt on which it says, “Satan’s Girl!”

Would a heartfelt Christian ever wear such a T-shirt!?

Some years ago, when Annette & I were driving through the Remutaka Gorge, members of a motorbike gang came from behind and, one by one, they were passing us. Guess what the words were saying on the back of their leather jackets: “Satan’s slaves”!!!

My brother & sister,

¹² “*Certitude, certitude, sentiment, joie, paix. Joie, joie, joie, pleurs de joie.*” (<http://www.alalettre.com/pascal-bio.htm>)

¹³ The hymn version (cf. the Australian Book of Worship for the refrain of no. 372) of 2 Tim 1:12b ***I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.***

¹⁴ cf. LAMMERS, W.H. 2011. The price of possession. Part I, Chino : CA. Reformed Fellowship. p. 22.

If you belong to God through Jesus Christ, you carry the name “Christian” with you. And it will show! If you belong to Christ, you will demonstrate that relationship by your commitment to Him.

And in your faithfulness, behaviour, speech, and life-style *it will show!*

Yes, if your love for Christ is real, you will be wholeheartedly willing to follow your Lord in whatever He asks of you!

Well, that’s Lord’s Day 1 – the Lord’s Day about belonging to Jesus; the Lord’s Day of comfort – comfort that takes care of a bad situation; comfort that makes us strong enough to endure hardship; comfort, without which living on earth becomes senseless, and dying is hopeless!

So, we often read this Lord’s Day to dying Christians.

But shall we wait making its message our own until we are dying?

Well, perhaps you know Lord’s Day 1 off by heart!

But can you answer this question – the question of belonging to Jesus?

Can you, convinced by head & heart, say, “Lord Jesus, I belong to you!”?

You see, here is a scary thought...

If you do NOT belong to Jesus, guess to whom else you would belong?¹⁵

Christ says, “***He who is not for Me is against Me...***” (Mt 12:30 and parallels)

Do you belong to Jesus?

If not, why not, when you hear His word, surrender your heart to Him – today!?

AMEN (2,378 words excluding footnotes)

¹⁵ cf. Lammers (ibid:23)