

Cheerful in adversity

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- [0 : 0 0] The Gospel of Christ by Matthew 14. And reading again from verse 26. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit. And they cried out for fear.
- But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good fear, it is I, be not afraid. The circumstances which give rise to these words before us are stated in this chapter.
- We saw that our Lord and his followers were assembled in an area some distance from a city or town. And as was customary with him, we preached to those who assembled there and attended to their very physical and spiritual needs.
- And our Lord would seem that night was fast approaching. The people would appear to be reluctant to disperse.
- And our Lord, hearing no doubt, among other things, For their personal safety, if they set off in a weakened physical condition, commanded that food should be served to them.
- [1 : 4 0] And after overriding the objections raised by the disciples, He took what food was available. And having looked up to heaven and blessed it, He had it distributed among us, not most of us, And we read in the 20th verse, That they did all eat and were filled.
- And they took us of the fragments that remained, Twelve basket-spool. Considering the number present therefore, Five thousand in addition to women and children, It's obvious that a great and notable miracle was performed on this occasion.
- It was immediately after this that Jesus constrained his disciples To get into a ship and proceed to the other side of the Lake of Galilee, Intending to join them there in due course.
- In the meantime, he had other all-important business to contact a Lord. And so no human eye saw and no human ear heard Of what was here contacted between himself and his Father in Heaven, As he engaged in communion with him.
- In the meantime, we see in the chapter that the disciples had met with the unexpected. And the unforeseen. This unpredictable stretch of water, due to its character, Turned on them with fury and anger.
- [3 : 1 5] They found themselves tossed to and fro on the raging billows. They were greatly, obviously, greatly alarmed. Although there were, at least some of them, They were sea-faring men and were acquainted with this treasure of water.
- Yet they were filled with fear. And it was at this point that the Lord himself came to them walking on the water, A matter which roused their superstitious tears, For they thought it was an apparition.
- In our probability they imagined it was a forewarning of their own imminent death. But at this point Jesus spoke to them these memorable words.
- Be of good fear, it is I. Be not afraid. Now my dear friends, these words surely have an abiding and perpetual significance for the church and the people of God, In every age and in every circumstance of life.

We see first of all the cheerfulness that is implicated in the face of adversity. And even in the very teeth of adversity.

[4 : 37] The question that may arise is simply, How can a Christian man remain cheerful when all seems to be against him?

When every wind and every tide seems to be driving him back, Or endeavouring to hold him back. How can a Christian man be cheerful under such circumstances?

Let's suggest that he ought to be cheerful even in the face of such circumstances.

And he will be cheerful for one thing by a calm and rational acceptance of the inscrutable. Even when the writing is blurred and indistinct and unclear and it is virtually impossible to give a balanced interpretation of events.

He is still to remain calm and rationally accept what appears to him to be inscrutable.

[5 : 46] This, for instance, This, for instance, is what our Lord was constantly impressing on his followers with respect to himself. After the cross loomed on the horizon, it becomes clear that his followers became more and more perplexed and bewildered at what was happening.

This is not what they anticipated when first they set forth with him. And even as they stood within the shadow of Calvary, we hear them saying, Wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom again unto Israel?

Referring, of course, to material kingdoms. But throughout Jesus was at pain to get them to accept what for them was altogether inscrutable and meaningless.

This, for instance, is what happened, you remember, at the feet washing, at the last supper. When one of them objected to what he was doing because he did not understand.

And you remember the response of our Lord, What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter, Permit me to do what I am doing. Accept it calmly as from my hands.

[7 : 10] This indeed was his own reaction at all times in the face of what was before him. The cup which my father had given me, shall I not drink it?

So a Christian man will, I suggest, remain cheerful by a calm and rational acceptance of the inscrutable.

And a Christian man will remain cheerful in the face of circumstances By rising by faith above the immediate circumstance in which he may find himself at any given time in his life.

We have, I think, a good illustration of this, for instance, in the life of Paul the Apostle. When you remember he was being taken by ship to Rome and he and his companions were caught in a dreadful storm and were completely driven off course.

In Acts 27, where we have an account of this, we read that Paul stood forth in the midst, And exhorted them to be of good cheer, for he says, And so, There stood by me this night the angel of God, Whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Hear not call.

[8 : 28] Thou must be brought before Caesar, And, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Later he proceeded to counsel them to eat, And set an example before them, By doing so himself.

And, so, We read that, They, They, All did likewise. They were of good cheer.

They all did likewise. The Apostle acted in this way because, He himself said, At verse 20, He believed God, That it would be even as it was fallen.

We are to have this spirit of cheerfulness by rising in faith above the immediate circumstance in which we may be placed.

Suggest too that a Christian man will remain cheerful by a patient acquiescent in the divine wisdom. The divine wisdom that has brought such a situation to pass and has ordained that it should be so.

[9 : 37] You see, there are no miscalculations, No misadventures so far as he is concerned. No event, my friend, takes him unaware.

This was clearly the view of the patriarch Job. When he was faced with a dark and enervating providence in his own life, when he was deluded of all and everything that was dear to him in life.

You remember his response? Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. Thither the Lord gave. The Lord hath taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. In other words, he was wise in his giving in the first instance. And now he is equally wise in removing.

But this unhappily is not always how good and holy men react to mystifying circumstances in the providence of God. When David, for instance, you remember, became impatient with how his quarrel with King Saul was being dragged out.

[10 : 48] And he became faint and fearful. He fled, you remember, to gasp and faint madness. What a tragic reflection on the wisdom and the power of the God who had so graciously and marvelously preserved him in all his wanderings hitherto.

No longer was David expressing that cheerfulness of spirit which had hitherto borne him a lot and sustained him.

And then too, surely a Christian man will remain cheerful in the face of such circumstances by a persevering endurance against all the odds.

And continuing to be steadfast and movable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, even though, as the psalmist says in Psalm 46, the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.

Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. This, among other things, is the grand lesson of the, I think, of the 12th chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews.

[12 : 03] In chapter 11, you remember, the apostles had catalogued a great and noble company of believing men and women who had mightily endured in the face of the most appalling tribulations and sufferings.

They persevered to the end and they obtained a good report through faith. And now he proceeds, wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and a sin which does so easily be set us.

And let us run with patience the rest that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and the finisher of our faith.

For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest you be weary and faint in your mind.

Be of good cheer, whatever the circumstances are in which you find yourself at any time in the wise and good providence of God.

[13 : 15] So we have the cheerfulness that is inculcated in the face of every situation. But then we have in the second place the reason that is adduced for demanding such conduct.

And here it is, it is I. Be of good cheer, it is I. Certainly these words were spoken with reference to the fear that his appearance had aroused within the hearts of his immediate followers.

But we didn't surely confine them to this, knowing as we do that he is God over all, God blessed forever. However, the experiences through which they were going hadn't taken him by surprise.

And he was in no way ignorant of the adjudated condition in which they were. And so in connection with the entire complex orbit of their living and of their faith, he could say, be of good cheer because it is I.

It is I the one with whom there are no contradictions. To them, no doubt, the storm appeared to be a total contradiction of his claim to almightiness.

[14 : 34] They might well have argued if he was all-powerful, then why was this happening? If he was all-knowing, why did he himself not come with them in the boat?

If he was all-caring, why did he allow them to get into this dreadful situation? Everything that was happening now seemed to be a total contradiction of his own claim.

But they didn't have long to wait before they saw how wrong they were in their conclusions and how in fact he was Lord of all. And all too often the church and the individual Christian is taken in by the appearance of things around and within.

His claim to kingship and authority and power appears to be contradicted by events and circumstances. There is little or nothing of any significance happening to change the bleak moral and spiritual climate of the day in which we live.

On the contrary, the very opposite seems to be the case. And the kingdom of darkness is advancing at an unprecedented pace. How can this be reconciled with his claim to being all-powerful and almighty?

[15 : 57] Is there not a contradiction here? No, my friend, there isn't. There is no contradiction because he controls the very wrath of the enemy.

He will in your course cause the wrath of man to praise him. After all, remember that Calvary appeared to be the most blatant contradiction of all.

But was it? It wasn't. We know of course that it wasn't. It was the most signal victory of all.

And so then, it is I, the one with whom there are no contradictions. And he also says, it is I, the one with whom there are no limitations.

It is indeed surprising that the disciples would for a moment doubt this, as their fear would seem to suggest that they did. So when one considers that only a few hours earlier they had seen such an astonishing manifestation of his grace and of his power.

[17 : 11] And within moments they would again see it in another miracle, in another miraculous intervention by him. They would see his authority and the unlimitedness of his power at work.

If there does appear to be a limiting of his power in our midst, in the church and in our own lives perhaps, I wonder where the blame is to be laid.

Who is at fault? I believe scripture itself answers that question for us, whereas believing church in the Old Testament is accused of placing limitations on God.

You remember how the psalmist speaks, for instance, in Psalm 78. How often, he says, did they provoke him in the wilderness and grieve him in the desert?

Yea, they turned back and tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel. Ah, yes, unbelief is the great antagonist of God and the great spoiler of the believer's own life.

[18 : 21] It asks questions which are dishonouring and displeasing to God. Can God provide a table in the wilderness? Can God give us water to drink?

It poses a question, can God deliver us from our enemies? Can he bring me out of this particular situation in which I am placed? And belief causes a question mark to be placed against God's rightful claim.

But he says, it is I, the one with whom there are no limitations. He says, too, it is I, the one with whom there are no negative dealings so far as my people are concerned.

In other words, the one who never operates against the Christian, whatever the appearances may suggest, whatever unbelief may say at any given time.

You see, blind unbelief is sure to err and scan his works in vain. This doesn't mean that he never says no to the Christian as his own word makes abundantly clear in, for instance, his dealings with the apostle Paul.

[19 : 47] I besought the Lord thrice, says the apostle, with regard to the thorn in the flesh. But God said no. The thorn must remain what it is for.

But I will do something infinitely better for you than what you are requesting. I will deluge you with my grace because I am for you and my grace is sufficient for you.

And so my grace and your thorn will form a grand combination for making you into the kind of man that I would have you to be.

My dear friend, never rebel. against the God-given thorn that may be placed in your own life. And so we see there the reason that is given for being of good cheer.

It is I be of good cheer. But in the third place we notice the gentle rebuke that is being administered to the unbelief of these men.

[20 : 57] Be not afraid. Fear was the dominant emotion here and it stemmed not only from the Saviour's appearance on the water but also from the actual circumstances in which they themselves were placed.

And fear is clearly the offshoot of unbelief. we see the opposite to this in the 46th Psalm from which we have already quoted in these words of the Psalmist.

therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea because God is our refuge and he is our strength.

We have it also in the third Psalm where we hear these words I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people that have set themselves against me round about because thou O Lord art a shield for me my glory and the lifter up of mine head.

Now my dear friends when unbelief is in the ascendancy and expresses itself in fear and trepidation what in practical terms is taking place in the life of a Christian?

[22 : 18] What is the Christian doing and saying? Well for one thing he is clearly questioning the wisdom and the necessity of adverse circumstances.

He is not prepared to accept that adversity is an indispensable part of the divine physician's prescription for the good and the soundness of the whole believing man.

Like the prophet Jonah he is perhaps exceedingly glad of the good which God had provided to shadow him from the scorching heat of the sun.

But ah when a worm destroys that good he is just as bitter as he was happy before. He doesn't accept and he will not accept that the worm is just as necessary in its own tears to teach him the essential lesson of the marvel of God's grace and God's love just as the good was doing at an earlier moment.

In itself of course adversity is altogether unproductive. We wouldn't seek it for its own sake. It is quite futile in itself.

[23 : 41] It pains and it hurts and it desolates. No chistening for the present is the apostle seemeth to be joyous but grievous nevertheless afterward it yieldeth a peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them who are exercised thereby.

And to be exercised thereby is simply to see the hand of infinite mercy and grace and love in all that is happening. It is to be still and know that he is God it is to calmly acquiesce in what he is bringing to pass in the life at any given time.

Unbelief questions the wisdom and the necessity of adversity in life. And then too unbelief is a casting of doubt on the love and the concern of God.

It is saying God has forgotten God is no longer gracious his love has lost its intensity his compassion as they have failed his tender mercies have been withdrawn his face is turned away in displeasure he is frowning and he is angry.

The psalmist you remember in Psalm 77 asks a series of questions will the Lord cast will the Lord be favorable no more is his mercy clean gone forever doth his promises fail forevermore had God forgotten to be gracious have he in anger shut up his tender mercies and the psalmist is making it clear that he is in the grip of this very condition of soul and belief is ravaging his life and he is firmly in its grasp and so casting doubt on God's integrity God's faithfulness God's love and as he himself not proceed to admit this that his doubts and his misgivings stemmed from his own weakness and his unbelief when he says at verse 10 this is my infirmity all the questions I have been raising this is a result of giving way to unbelief

[26 : 06] I reflected adversely on the character of God on the love and the faithfulness and the compassion of God for his compassions fail not they are new every morning great is life faithfulness unbelief is a casting of doubt on the love and the concern of God and unbelief also is a murmuring against the hard things to which we are subjected or the imagined hard things to which we are subjected a murmuring spirit is the strongest proof there is of unbelief and some elements of unbelief are found in the most notable of God's sense because sin still remains uncrucified and unmortified and because of this some elements of a murmuring spirit will always make their appearance if of course we want to see one who never murmured although he had abundant cause to do so we must look to the one who did no sin neither was guile found in his mouth who when he was reviled reviled not again when he suffered he threatened not and if we my friends want daily deliverance from a murmuring spirit we must simply look unto

Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith unbelief is greatly dishonoring to him and he must administer a rebuke wherever it appears in the Christian life how frequently does he do this during his earthly ministry and as frequently it shows its ugly features unbelief shows its ugly features in the lives of those who are his followers I simply want to in closing to reemphasize two things the negative and the positive note that we have in these wonderful words of our Lord and I want to reemphasize them as they relate to ourselves be not afraid be not afraid why are you fearful and why do thoughts arise in your heart our Lord said to his followers in one of his post-resurrection appearances he is calling on them to rationalize their conduct and give an explanation for their behavior and this is good logic so far as we ourselves are concerned why are you fearful and why do thoughts disturbing thoughts arise in your heart why my

Christian friend are you afraid if in fact you are in a crisis situation in your life you are not in that crisis situation unknown to him and you are not in it without him having a purpose of grace and mercy for you thought you not to relate this crisis situation to his own world and to his own to the blessed promises of his own world and what he says to you in those promises when when thou passest through the waters I will be with thee and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee because I will never leave thee I will never never forsake thee and when we are enabled by the grace of God calmly and devoutly to do this to relate our crisis experiences to his word and to his promises then the fears and the misgivings will melt away if he says that there is no occasion to fear under any circumstance of life then we can confidently take him at his word and so be not afraid but there is also the positive note in these wonderful words it is not simply not to be afraid it is to be of good cheer even as you are tossed and buffeted to and fro on a raging sea of providence or spiritual adversity you see

Jesus spoke these words before he had performed the miracle of stilling the waves it is easy enough to be cheerful after the event after we have seen his mighty hand in effecting deliverance for us and bringing us out of the circumstance the particular circumstance that desolated us it is easy enough then to see his hand and to be cheerful but that is not what is demanded but cheerfulness in the very jaws of death you would have read I'm sure of the some of the last words of the the covenant of the great James Guthrie who died in this city of ours when he was on the scaffold and in his words there is this positive note of cheerfulness in the face of the most appalling circumstance

I take God it is to record upon my soul I would not exchange this scaffold with the palace and mitre of the greatest prelate in Britain blessed be God who hath shown mercy to me such a wretch and has revealed his son in me and made me a minister of the everlasting gospel Jesus Christ is my life and my light my righteousness my strength and my salvation and all my desire him oh him I do with all the strength of my soul commend to you bless him oh my soul from henceforth even forever Lord now let us thou thy servant depart in peace for mine eyes have seen thy salvation be of good cheer in the face of the most desolating providence and to words from the pen of the noble marquess of argyle writing on the evening before his execution in the same city writing to lady

[33 : 08] Sophia Lindsay his daughter in law he penned these words what shall I say in this great day of the Lord where in the midst of a cloud I have found a fair sunshine I can wish no more for you but that the Lord may comfort you and shine upon you as he does upon me and give you that same sense of his love in staying in the world as I have in going out of it is this not what Jesus intended when he said on another occasion in John chapter 16 in this word ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer I have overcome the world and you see in both instances he connects being of good cheer with himself in this world ye shall have tribulation but be of good cheer

I have overcome the world and here it is I be of good cheer and this can be a lone basis for our cheerfulness to be cheerful apart from him and a right relationship to him is like the crackling of thorns under a pot and so then my believing friend you have every conceivable reason to be cheerful yea to shout for joy because your lord is at the helm Christ himself your master is in a vessel with you whatever your particular situation may be in the providence of god at this time or at any other time this is how you are expected to act be of good cheer be not afraid because it is I

I am there I am with you there I am directing your life and bringing it onwards and bringing it forward to that day and to that hour and to that moment when you shall be with me and when you shall forever enter into the joy of your Lord be of good cheer it is I be not afraid amen and may God add his blessing to our meditation upon his word shall we pray oh Lord our God we pray thee to draw out our mind and our heart to what thou art speaking to us in thy holy word and thou seal thy truth to the hearts of each one of us with power may the spirit take the incalibable words of thy truth and make them meaningful to each one of thy people this day according to their need and their own varied circumstances we pray thee to bless us as we have met in thy name and we pray thee to bless us now as we disperse and go to our different places of abode watch over us throughout the day bring us again together in the evening to worship thee and to glorify thy name in our gathering together for

Jesus sake Amen