



▶ DAILY DEVOTIONAL.

Saturday/Sunday, 2/2-3/19

“American Idols: Comfort”

Acts 7:54-60

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

This week we focus on the idol of comfort. Comfort is something that we often, culturally, put in the place of God. This comfort can take many different forms, but at root it is a way that we seek to avoid hardship or privation, be it physically, materially, financially, etc. Rather than putting our time and energy into seeking comfort, we are called to turn our focus to the God who is the source of all comfort. My prayer for you this week is that you would experience the closeness and comfort of God as you pursue a deeper life of faith in Jesus Christ.

— Pastor Jake

Monday, 2/4/19

“Unholy Exchange”

Romans 1:21-23

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

- In chapter one of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul paints a picture of the sinful state of humanity. He goes on, throughout his letter, to proclaim how God in Christ went about setting things right. In his account of how humanity had arrived at such a sinful state, Paul points to idolatry as one of the main culprits. Humanity had entered into an unholy exchange, choosing to worship created things rather than their Creator. They had put images of mortal beings in place of immortal God. It is easy for us to think that this is a problem relegated to people centuries ago. The reality, however, is that we, too, have our own things that we put in the place of God. Comfort can be one of those things. God simply wants our attention. God wants to embrace us as his children, and for us to remain close to him, without letting anything get in the way.
- Being honest with yourself, what are some things in your life that you, knowingly or unknowingly, put in the place of God? What is something you can do today to turn your attention to God?

Prayer: Holy God, we praise you for embracing us as your own and for your faithfulness, even when we become distracted or stray. Enable us, by your Spirit, to turn our focus to you each and every day. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Tuesday, 2/5/19

“Suffering Servants”

Philippians 1:27-30

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved — and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

- I find verse 29 from this passage in Philippians to be very challenging. Honestly, I don't like the idea of having to suffer, and want to think that suffering is antithetical to God's good will. No one wants to suffer, but in our desire to avoid suffering at all costs, we tend to turn our focus from God to other things that we think will bring us safety and comfort. The reality is that, in such a broken and fallen world, suffering is inevitable. This is not God's plan or will, and we know by faith that suffering will one day be done away with. In the meantime, however, God promises to be with us no matter what, even in our suffering. This is what Paul is getting at. He is encouraging the Philippians to persevere in their faith, amid their suffering, because God is with them in their suffering and that their suffering is not in vain. This is what it means to conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Paul also points to the importance of remaining connected, standing firm in the one Spirit and striving together as one for the faith. The Body of Christ, the Church, is a means by which God sustains, encourages, preserves and comforts us, in the midst of suffering, as we seek to be faithful to Jesus as his servants.
- In what ways have you experienced suffering? What is your initial reaction to suffering? Do you seek to avoid or dismiss it? Do you turn to God? Do you turn to others for support? In what ways have you experienced God in the midst of suffering? Think of someone in your life who is currently going through a time of struggle or suffering. How can you extend the encouragement and comfort of Jesus to them?

Prayer: Holy God, we thank you for your presence with us every step of our journeys. Thank you for walking with us in times of suffering. Help us to remain faithful no matter what we may encounter in life, keeping our gaze on you. Empower us, by your Spirit, to be vessels of your mercy and comfort to those who are suffering. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Wednesday, 2/6/19

“Comfort the Afflicted and Afflict the Comfortable”

James 1:9-11

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation — since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

- The word “rich” in this passage could very easily be replaced by the word “comfortable.” This inversion of the humble being lifted up and the proud being brought low is a common theme that runs through Jesus' teaching. The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. This has to do with dissonance that exists between how the world is in its broken state and how God created the world to be. So, in Jesus' upside-down kingdom, God comforts those who are afflicted, but afflicts those who have made an idol of their own comfort. God's comfort is a gift of his grace and mercy to those who experience affliction. However, the affliction that we experience when we have grown too comfortable is also a gift of God's grace and mercy. Such affliction breaks us out of our ruts; it helps us to turn our gaze back to God and other people.
- In what ways have you experienced God's comfort in the midst of an affliction? In what ways have you been afflicted by God in your relative comfort?

Prayer: Holy God, comfort us in our affliction. Afflict us with your grace and mercy when we become too comfortable. Create in us hearts that are full of love for you and for other people. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, 2/7/19

“Selfless Comfort”

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

- There are really two types of comfort: selfish and selfless. Selfish comfort is what would be considered an idol. The pursuit of comfort as a personal end causes us to turn in on ourselves, turning our hearts away from God. Jesus shows us a better way. It is through Jesus that we learn the role that comfort is to play in our lives and the lives of those around us. Comfort is not something we are to pursue. Instead, it is a gift given us by God in times of trouble. Furthermore, it is in this that we learn to turn toward others to extend God's comfort to those in need. Life lived in Christ is a life that reflects his self-outpouring.
- What comfort have you received from God? What is one thing you can do today to extend God's comfort to someone in your life?

Prayer: Holy God, awaken us to your presence today. Bring to mind ways that we can extend the mercy and comfort you have shown us to others. Help us to pour ourselves out to others in love, enabled by the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, 2/8/19

“Resting in God’s House”

Psalm 23

*The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.*

- Try memorizing a few lines of Psalm 23 — maybe you could even memorize the whole psalm! Spend time, throughout the day, reflecting on the words of Psalm 23. As you rest in these words, how is God speaking to you through them?

Prayer: Allow the words of Psalm 23 to guide you in prayer throughout the day.

***This week’s devotional was written by
Pastor Jake Schneider (jschneider@plattewoodschurch.org).***