

I Thessalonians 5:4-16

Encourage those with Weak Knees

Sermon

Hobart, October 16th, 2011

Launceston, November 6th, 2011

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Scripture Readings:

OLD TESTAMENT READING:

Isaiah 35:1-4

- ¹ Even the wilderness and desert will be glad in those days.
The wasteland will rejoice and blossom with spring crocuses.
- ² Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers
and singing and joy!
The deserts will become as green as the mountains of
Lebanon,
as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon.
There the LORD will display his glory,
the splendor of our God.
- ³ With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands,
and encourage those who have weak knees.
- ⁴ Say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, and do not fear,
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.
He is coming to save you.” ¹

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Is 35:1-7). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

GOSPEL READING

1 Thessalonians 5:4-16

⁴ But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.* ⁵ For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. ⁶ So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. ⁷ Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. ⁸ But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

⁹ For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. ¹⁰ Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. ¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

Paul's Final Advice

¹² Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. ¹³ Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

¹⁴ Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.

¹⁵ See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people.

¹⁶ Always be joyful. ¹⁷ Never stop praying. ¹⁸ Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.²

* Some manuscripts read *comes upon you as if you were thieves*.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Th 5:4-18). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

A. JEAN NIDETCH, WAS THE FOUNDER OF WEIGHT WATCHERS.

1. She herself had been desperately overweight, and struggling to stay on the diet a doctor had given her. So she invited six overweight friends home to share the diet and talk about how to stay on it.
2. Weight Watchers meetings now take place around the world.
3. Nidetch explains how she learned to encourage and help others.

When she was a teen-ager, she used to cross a park where she saw mothers gossiping while the toddlers sat on their swings, with no one to push them. "I'd give them a push," says Nidetch. "And you know what happens when you push a kid on a swing? Pretty soon he's pumping, doing it himself. That's what my role in life is--I'm there to give others a push."³

4. There is a story about a man who had lost his job and ended up working on a building site, and being treated very roughly by the foreman;

One man who was ousted from his profession for an indiscretion took work as a hod carrier simply to put bread on the table. He was suddenly plunged into a drastically different world; instead of going to an office each day, he was hauling loads of concrete block up to the fifth level of a construction site. Gone was the piped-in music in the corridors; now he had to endure blaring transistors. Profanity shot through the air, especially from the foreman, whose primary tactics were whining and intimidation; "you [so and so]---, can't you do anything right? I never worked with such a bunch of [so and so's]--- in all my life..."

Near the end of the third week, the new employee felt he could take no more. "I'll work till break time this morning," he told himself, "and then that's it. I'm going home." He'd already been the butt of more than one joke when

³ Irene Sax, *Newsday*, <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/encouragement.htm>

his lack of experience caused him to do something foolish. The stories were retold constantly thereafter. "I just can't handle any more of this." A while later, he decided to finish out the morning and then leave at lunchtime.

Shortly before noon, the foreman came around with paychecks. As he handed the man his envelope, he made his first civil comment to him in three weeks. "Hey, there's a woman working in the front office who knows you. Says she takes care of your kids sometimes." "Who?" He named the woman, who sometimes helped in the nursery of the church where the man and his family worshiped. The foreman then went on with his rounds.

When the hod carrier opened his envelope, he found, along with his check, a handwritten note from the payroll clerk: "When one part of the body of Christ suffers, we all suffer with it. Just wanted you to know that I'm praying for you these days."

He stared at the note, astonished at God's timing. He hadn't even known the woman worked for this company. Here at his lowest hour, she had given him the courage to go on, to push another wheelbarrow of mortar up that ramp. ⁴

S.P.S:

B. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT ANOTHER ASPECT OF THAT PROFOUND AND INSIGHTFUL GREEK WORD "PARAKALEO" THAT WE FIND USED SO MUCH IN THE SCRIPTURES

1. We have seen how God the Father sent Jesus and the Holy Spirit to support, comfort and build up his people
2. Last time we looked at the importance of the "comfort" aspect of "parakaleo"
 - a) Consoling, giving support and comfort to those who have suffered in various ways
 - b) How we are all equipped to be comforters through the comfort God has given us in our times of suffering and loss

⁴ Dean Merrill, Another Chance, Zondervan, 1981, p. 138: <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/e/encouragement.htm>

C. TODAY WE ARE GOING TO LOOK AT ANOTHER ASPECT OF “PARAKALEO” – THAT OF ENCOURAGEMENT

1. Focus on the important role of helping others have the “courage” to keep on going
 - a) Of being there for people, giving support and empathy in a way that aids and builds up the other person
 - b) On humbly listening, and being supportive in a way that helps the other person where they are, rather than trying to push our own ideas or solutions on them

D. PRAYER

BODY:

A. THIS ASPECT OF “PARAKALEO” WE ARE FOCUSING ON IS “ENCOURAGEMENT”

1. Helping others have the courage, the hope, the understanding of God and his love, to enable them to move forward in their lives
2. The English word comes from the French = *encourager* *courage*, is from *coeur*, = the heart)
 - a) To **encourage** means to (in a sense) give another person "new heart".
 - b) An older version of Webster's defines **encourage'**
"To give courage to; to give or increase confidence of success; to inspire with courage, spirit, or strength of mind; to embolden; to animate; to incite; to inspirit."
To **encourage** means to fill with courage or strength of purpose especially in preparation for a hard task.
 - c) This meaning is closely allied with exhorting, or urging
3. *Parakaleo* is the word used in the Septuagint (Greek) translation of the Hebrew *chazaq* [khaw-zak]" that means,

to make strong, to restore to strength, give strength, to strengthen, sustain, encourage, to make strong, make bold, encourage⁵

4. It is used powerfully, urgently and inspiringly a number of times in;

Isaiah 35:3-4 NASB

NASB:

3 ^aEncourage the ¹exhausted, and strengthen the ²feeble.

4 Say to those with ^aanxious heart, "Take courage, fear not."⁶

5. The language here is rich and evocative

a) The Hebrew literally means, *tottering knees*

b) It pictures clearly and graphically the need people of Israel needed encouragement

NLT

³ With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees.

6. We all have times when our hands are tired, and we are weak at the knee and faltering

7. Everyone goes through times when they are tired, discouraged, anxious, or fearful,

8. Times when our confidence gets down, our faith is weak, or we feel we aren't making much progress in our lives

⁵Strong, J. *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (H2388). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

^a Job 4:3, 4; Heb. 12:12

¹ Lit., *slack hands*

² Lit., *tottering knees*

^a Is. 32:4

⁶*New American Standard Bible* . 1986; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996 (electronic edition.) (Is 35:3). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

9. Times in our lives, in our work, in our relationships, or in our faith, we need encouragement

B. THE LAST PART OF VERSE 4, IS THE HEART OF THE ENCOURAGING MESSAGE WE ARE ABLE TO SHARE,

1. the reason for encouragement, the source of strength and courage to enable us and others to continue on

⁴ Say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, and do not fear,
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.
He is coming to save you."

II. 1 THESSALONIANS 4:18; 5:11; 5:14

A. PAUL CONSTANTLY ENCOURAGED CHRISTIANS TO ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER WHEN THEY WERE AFRAID, WEAK OR FALTERING

1. Parakaleo is used a number of times in I Thessalonians 4 and 5
2. In I Thessalonians 4 Paul instructed the Thessalonians to encourage those who lost loved ones
 - a) To console and support them, to encourage them with the hope of the resurrection
3. In chapter 5 he raises other areas where encouragement needs to be constantly provided

B. HE IS STILL TALKING ABOUT THE STATE OF THE WORLD, AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

1. And how we are to keep on going in our world of stress and darkness, waiting for the Lord's return.

I Thessalonians 5:4-11

⁴ But you aren't in the dark about these things, dear brothers and sisters, and you won't be surprised when the day of the Lord comes like a thief.* ⁵ For you are all children of the light and of the day; we don't belong to darkness and night. ⁶ So be on your guard, not asleep like the others. Stay alert and be clearheaded. ⁷ Night is the time when people sleep and drinkers get drunk. ⁸ But let us who live in the light be clearheaded, protected by the armor of faith and love, and wearing as our helmet the confidence of our salvation.

⁹ For God chose to save us through our Lord Jesus Christ, not to pour out his anger on us. ¹⁰ Christ died for us so that, whether we are dead or alive when he returns, we can live with him forever. ¹¹ So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

2. Vse 11 includes the verb “parakaleo” to describe how we are to be there for each other, encouraging and building each other up.

a) The context of this, and the comforting the bereaved in chapter 4, is sharing the comfort of God

3. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, makes clear that all comfort and encouragement is based on God's love and his acting for us through Jesus and the Spirit.

Comfort is given by human agents but is real comfort only as it comes from God. God is the God of all comfort who makes the fellowship of suffering a fellowship of comfort. While comfort derives from present salvation, it stands in the light of future deliverance.

But the final comfort is the eschatological act of God which reaches into the present so that those who mourn are already blessed. ...The comfort of present salvation is set in the light of the coming consummation when God will remove all suffering by his glorious presence. For this reason it is eternal comfort and good hope.⁷

4. So our task is not to be heroes or saviours, not to have all the answers for others

* Some manuscripts read *comes upon you as if you were thieves*.

⁷ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged, ed. Geoffrey Bromiley, “parakaleo”, (O. Schmitz, Eerdmans, 1985, p.781-782.

a) Or to have to be unfaltering pillars of strength and fortitude

5. It is to be supporters, comforters and encouragers

a) Sharing the strength, the comfort, the encouragement we have received from the Father, the Son and the Spirit

b) Specifically through the victory we have in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection

6. This is the source and reason for the encouragement Isaiah and Paul wrote about

C. PAUL GOES ON TO SHOW HOW THIS GOD CENTRED ENCOURAGEMENT IS NEEDED IN MANY OTHER AREAS

¹² Dear brothers and sisters, honor those who are your leaders in the Lord's work. They work hard among you and give you spiritual guidance. ¹³ Show them great respect and wholehearted love because of their work. And live peacefully with each other.

1. Leaders, parents, teachers, bosses and ministers all need encouragement as well

a) They are human too, and have their frailties, stresses and discouragements too

¹⁴ Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.⁸

2. Verse 14 covers most of the aspects of "parakaleo", including "exhortation" or "urging" that we will cover another time

D. WHAT I'D LIKE US TO FOCUS ON HERE, IS HOW PAUL VIEWS PEOPLE AS INDIVIDUALS

1. Different people need different aspects of "parakaleo" in different times and circumstances

2. Paul shows that one type, size or aspect of encouragement, doesn't fit all

⁸Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Th 5:1-14). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

¹⁴ Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone.⁹

3. Some need urgent exhortation, a warning to spark them to action, to encourage them not to waste the life they have been given
4. Some who may appear lazy, are actually “timid”,
 - a) and will only be hindered by urgent warnings; instead they need support, help and understanding.
 - b) Their situation, their inner issues and fears need a quieter approach.
 - c) Perhaps more time and a continued reassuring not the more urgent warning type encouragement, which would make them even more timid.
5. The “weak” need tender care.
 - a) They need to be supported, not pushed
6. And as we have seen in I Thessalonians 4, the bereaved need the “consoling” aspect of “parakaleo”

A. EFFECTIVE ENCOURAGEMENT IS BASED ON LISTENING

1. Getting to know the other person and their thoughts, feelings, needs
 2. Building a bridge, a relationship, develop understanding and empathy
 3. Everyone needs to be treated patiently.
 - a) We need to take time and come alongside people, like Jesus did, and the Holy Spirit does
 - b) To build relationships, to seek to know, to hear and understand rather than trying to impose our own ideas and advice
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⁹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Th 5:1-14). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

CONCLUSION:

III. CONCLUDE WITH TWO QUOTES;

A. FIRST FROM WILLIAM ARTHUR WARD;

Flatter me, and I may not believe you.

Criticize me, and I may not like you.

Ignore me, and I may not forgive you.

Encourage me, and I will not forget you.

B. FINALLY LET'S READ ISAIAH 35 AGAIN

³ With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands,
and encourage those who have weak knees.

⁴ Say to those with fearful hearts,
“Be strong, and do not fear,
for your God is coming to destroy your enemies.
He is coming to save you.” .

C. PRAYER