

Comfort and thankfulness in bereavement - Part 1

(Quality: Average)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 1900

Preacher: Delves, Stanley (1897-1978)

- [0 : 00] With the Lord's help, I will speak from the first epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, the fourth chapter, the eighteenth verse.
- Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. The first epistle to the Thessalonians, the fourth chapter, the eighteenth verse.
- Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. The service this morning partakes of a twofold special nature.
- For one thing, of course, it is the Easter day today. It is not that we ourselves pay all that regard to special days.
- There is nothing, really, in the New Testament to indicate that the early Christians ever observed any special days at all.
- [1 : 17] Neither the day of the Lord's death, which they observed, of course, in the Lord's appointed way, in the Lord's supper.
- Neither do they appear to have paid any special regard to the day on which he rose again from the dead. because they regarded, in a sense, every first day in the week as being a continual commemoration of the Lord's resurrection.
- But still, although there is no express appointment in this dispensation for the observance of days, it is customary, it is customary, and so, at this time, we consider, somewhat especially, though we should never forget it at all, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- And then, this morning, the service is in the nature of a memorial service to our late beloved brother.
- And these two features of the service blend so very well together. For if Christ had not risen from the dead, what a gloomy thing a memorial service would be.
- [2 : 49] Because there could be no hope in it, no joy, no comfort, no expectation concerning those that have died.
- It would be a retrospect only, with no prospect at all. It is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that imparts to these occasions that have a very great sadness in them, in a certain sense, it imparts to them such a blessed comfort and hope and consolation.
- And, if we could be brought in the spirit of our minds, and I could be brought to speak, to this point, it would be ideal that we might feel this morning a blending of comfort and thankfulness.
- For thankfulness is really called for, especially in this occasion. Now, may the Lord grant to us, for many of us, I believe, have prayed that he would, a gracious and quiet and peaceful and thankful and hopeful frame of heart and mind today.
- And I have sought it for myself because I really felt deeply affected by this dispensation of the Lord's hand.

[4 : 33] Now, coming at once to these few words, wherefore, comfort one another with these words.

The substance, of course, lies first in this, these words. For all the comfort and relief and consolation and hope is expressed in these words.

And, taking this short verse as a whole, there are, I think, five considerations that come from it for our minds to feed upon and our hearts too, I hope, with the Lord's blessing for this memorial Sabbath.

And, first, I would very briefly mention this, and that is their authority. These words have an authority.

The Apostle Paul was very careful in this instance, as he was in other instances, as well, to make it clear that he was not expressing his own thoughts, nor his own feelings, nor his own views about the word that he preached and the truth that he wrote he received directly from the Lord.

[6 : 11] And that is very important, brethren, for man's words are not of much consequence all said and done. If they are true, well, then they have an authority outside of men themselves.

If they are not true, then they are utterly worthless. But now the word of the Lord, as Peter says, expressing the same thing, all flesh is grass, and the glory of man is as a flower of grass, and that withereth and fadeth away.

But the word of the Lord endureth forever. and it endures forever, of course, because it is the word of him who himself endureth forever.

And because he is so unchangeable, then his word will never change. And so the apostle is here very careful to let the Thessalonians know that what he is here setting before them for their comfort, he received directly from the Lord.

He said, For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord. If he had not said this by the word of the Lord, it could have been no real foundation, no satisfying cause of the comfort that he would have them to feel.

[7 : 54] He said, Comfort yourselves, one another, with these words because the Lord has said this to me, and I say to you what I have received from him.

The apostle doesn't indicate when he had this word of the Lord. All he says is this, all he says is this, For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.

But at some time the Lord must have personally instructed Paul in these Solomon, these blessed things.

Some have thought that it was possibly when he was caught up himself into the third heaven and had that vision of the glory of that blessed state.

But he doesn't say so, and therefore of course we cannot be sure about that. It may have been that he said this by the word of the Lord in the sense that he was an inspired man and under such an infallible direction and control and instruction of the Holy Spirit as prevented anything of himself, his own mind, independently of the Lord, ever entering into what he said.

[9 : 26] For that is how I understand inspiration. It was such a control of the mind and the feelings and the thoughts and the words of these inspired men that what they wrote or what they spoke was the word of the Lord.

and there was nothing in it otherwise than that which came from the Lord himself. Now my friends, when the gospel in any part of it, any truth of it, has a gracious power upon your heart and it does have, doesn't it?

Sometimes it comes to us with a power that is not of man at all, not of eloquence or utterance, but with a power that is essentially in the truth itself.

When we feel an influence in it, gracious, attracting, humbling, nourishing, feeding, that is because it is the word of the Lord.

If it was not the word of the Lord, there would not be that power and graciousness and that effect of it in our souls. This we say unto you by the word of the Lord.

[10 : 59] Now, we need to be clear about that, that all this that is contained in these words is really the word of the Lord.

And then, if it is the word of the Lord, what is it but that we should seek faith to receive it and to mix with it that it may be profitable to us.

For the word of the Lord, however true it is in itself and however blessed in its teaching and meaning will profit us nothing unless there is faith given to us in our hearts to believe it and to receive it and to mix with it.

For it was said of those of old that the word preached did not profit them not because it was not the word of the Lord but because it was not mixed with faith in them that heard it.

well first then there is the authority of these words this we say unto you by the word of the Lord in a certain sense I just paused to remark this is still true with regard to a faithful ministry of the gospel not that the Lord's servants now have the authority of personal inspiration we do not for one moment claim that our thoughts and our feelings and our words are so under the entire control of the Holy Spirit and his direction and influence that every word we say is certainly true we do not claim that but we do claim this and that is that what we say as far as it is in accordance with the teaching of the Holy

[13 : 09] Scriptures is as much the word of the Lord as though the inspired apostle uttered it isn't it it is as much the word of the Lord now I come to another consideration having laid this down at the start that there is a divine authority for these words and that is their foundation that is the foundation of the comfort that the apostle would have the Thessalonians in their sorrow and sadness and bereavement comfort one another there was a foundation for this comfort and these words express it and what is the foundation well it is this that Jesus died and rose again that is it if it were not that

Jesus died and rose again there would be no comfort for us at all we have only to pause a moment and consider what our state would be now and when we come to die and when we stand before God and enter into an eternal and unchangeable condition what our state would be if Jesus had never died for the word of the Lord is so true on this point that there is no remission of sin no forgiveness no cleansing of the soul no reconciliation with God apart from this that Jesus died for he came into the world to save sinners that was his chief purpose he did much good in this world did

Jesus all along his life's pathway he strewed blessings comforts to some that were in sorrow healing to some that were diseased instruction to some that were ignorant he strewed blessings all along his pathway in this world but he never came into this world for that purpose alone he strewed blessings if I may put it so all along the pathway that led to Calvary that was it the pathway led to Calvary to the cross to the tomb and to the resurrection he came into this world to save sinners by death Jesus died and rose again the whole truth and the blessedness of the gospel and all that it means to us as it comes to us with power and all that it will mean to us yet in the future it all rests upon these two things first certain events and then the doctrines that expound their real meaning and they must both go together here are the events

Christ died and he rose again what are the doctrines he died for our sins his death was a substitution for us who are the Lord's his death was a sacrifice to atone for sin and to be a propitiation for us before God that is the doctrine of his death and his resurrection it is a fact that he rose from the dead but oh how much there is involved in that wonderful truth he rose again for our justification first my brethren this comfort rests upon this that Jesus died and as the apostle in writing to the Corinthians refers with this addition that I've already mentioned

I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you which you have received and wherein you are saved for I declared unto you first that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures if he had died without that other word for our sins his death wouldn't have been any foundation of comfort to us for there can be no comfort to us as we are sinful unless it stands in that which takes away our sin now my brethren when the death of Jesus Christ is made effectual in our hearts by the Holy Spirit it takes away our sins personally then it takes away their guilt it takes away their filth it reconciles us to

[19 : 26] God and what is more it entirely takes the sting out of our death for the sting of death is sin and Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures it is because Christ died for our sins that death is just asleep in Jesus to believers no guilt strikes them in their passing moments no terrors of judgment to fright them when they breathe out their spirit to the Lord they fall asleep because Christ died for their sins now comfort one another with these words Paul would say to the Thessalonians don't look on death as a horrible thing something terrible ghastly forbidding for Christ has died and his death has taken everything that is terrible out of death everything and then further that he rose again according to the scriptures

Christ died and rose again even so they also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him my friends it is impossible to overestimate the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ I know that he died for our sins the resurrection doesn't affect that but the resurrection proves it and besides if it were not for the resurrection everything with regard to the truth and teaching of Jesus Christ would have been left in doubt the resurrection confirms everything it is such a confirmation as is necessary to confirm things that are so momentous and so profound and there could be no confirmation equal to the resurrection of Jesus

Christ from the dead the apostle saw this so very clearly and emphasized it so powerfully when he said if Christ is not risen your faith is vain yet in your sins then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished if in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable but now is Christ risen from the dead there is no question about it and become the first fruits of them that slept I think there is no need for me just now to go into the many proofs of the resurrection of Jesus Christ nor upon the significance of his varied appearances to the disciples after he rose from the dead it is sufficient to say that they were perfectly satisfied that he was risen although they had been so doubtful about it they were so hard to believe it it seemed to need evidence after evidence and proof after proof to satisfy them that

Jesus Christ was alive but once they were satisfied with the truth of it oh how it strengthened them how in deal with the Holy Spirit they could go out into the streets of Jerusalem and preach Jesus Christ to the very people who had crucified him and go forth into all the world to preach Jesus Christ for they knew that he was risen from the dead that he was a living saviour and very very much living he was to them my friends if Jesus Christ had not risen from the dead his death would have been the death of his teaching and of the Christian religion he would never have survived it never when Peter for instance said after the resurrection though before the

Lord had really sent them forth again into the ministry Peter said I go a-fishing and the others said we also go with thee and they would have gone fishing for the rest of their lives and that would have been the end of it that would have been the end of it and we should never have known never have read never heard the least thing about the Lord Jesus Christ and when those two disciples on the way to Emmaus expressed their sorrowful and yet strangely wondering feelings for although they couldn't believe that he was risen they couldn't think such a thing could be true but still they had heard these things the women had said and they couldn't dismiss them from their minds although they seemed to them like idle tales but somehow they couldn't dismiss it from their minds there was something wonderful that happened but they really couldn't think that he could be alive and so they said to that that mysterious stranger that drew near to them and drew their hearts out to him in his inquiring as to the cause why they reasoned together and were sad why they said don't you know what's happened there was

[26 : 00] Jesus of Nazareth and he was a wonderful man did mighty works but our people they crucified him and that was three days ago and we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel well now if Jesus had never risen from the dead and it would have ended there we trusted but alas alas it all came to nothing it all came to nothing you see what the resurrection of Jesus Christ meant to them it was a resurrection of their faith it was a resurrection of their hope it was a resurrection of their love the resurrection of Jesus Christ means so much to us to this day and always will do it means that we have a living saviour and that he is death's conqueror he left the tomb as a conqueror not as a fugitive he never fled away from death death fled away from him quietly orderly he left his grave closed behind him very significant and came forth to a risen glorious blessed power of an endless life he was death's conqueror he would never have been death's conqueror if he hadn't first died he died to conquer death and he rose to show that he had done it for those triumphant words of the apostle could never be if

Jesus Christ were not risen oh death where is thy sting Jesus has taken it away by his death oh grave where is thy victory Jesus has conquered the grave by his resurrection now that's the foundation of this comfort it rests on the death and resurrection of Jesus and all that his death and resurrection means now quickly I come to the next consideration that rises from these words and that is the instruction concerning those that fallen asleep how far the Thessalonians realized or did not realize this we don't know

I mean how far they realized the blessed state of those that had fallen asleep but it would seem as though their minds were not very clear about this the apostle said I would not have you to be ignorant brethren as though they were somewhat ignorant still concerning those that were asleep and this is not to be surprised that because they had not very long received the gospel and the first reception of the gospel is to receive it as the gospel that brings salvation to our souls but there's such a great deal more to learn and to be instructed in with regard to the gospel but it cannot all be received and understood in a very brief time the Thessalonians had not been Christians very long and so probably they had not much learnt yet of this part of gospel truth

I mean concerning those that were asleep and of course their ignorance concerning those that were asleep did not in the least degree affect their blessed state who were asleep in Jesus oh no but it very much affected the comfort or the lack of comfort to the Thessalonians very much for all our comfort concerning those that are asleep rises from the instruction concerning them that is in these words and because the time is passing I can only just look at just one expression and then I must come to the other part of the service this morning I will not have you to be ignorant brethren concerning them which are asleep asleep now it is a remarkable thing that almost every reference to death was different after the death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ it would take me some time to show you all that I mean in that but after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the very reference to death in the New Testament altered and there is scarce one reference to death in the New Testament that leaves it just simply and plainly as death there's almost always in fact I think there's only one exception in which even if the sleep of believers is referred to as death there's always something attached to it the only I think reference to death in the New Testament unqualified is with regard to the death of Dorcas or Tabitha that Peter raised from the dead and of course it was necessary that she should be referred to simply and plainly as dead because otherwise there might have been a question whether she was ever raised from the dead or not whether she was just in a trance or in a sleep so in her case it just says she was dead but in almost every other case in the New

[32 : 52] Testament death has something attached to it that it had not before the resurrection of Jesus Christ for instance it is said to be a dissolving of the earthly house of this tabernacle a breaking down of our present temporary and it means tent that word tabernacle abode a dissolving not the destruction of the tenant the inhabitant the soul but a dissolving of the body that it has lived in back into its original elements of dust and ashes it's a dissolution of the body that's all not the destruction of the soul and it's referred to as a departure the apostle said the time of my departure is at hand and that expression departure has something more in it than appears in just that translation it means a departure of course the soul departs from the body but the usage of that word departure implied the loosening of things that held a person whether it might be in a house or what not the word departure meant the loosening or the breaking down of some things that held a person so that being free he could depart well now there's something beautiful about that you know we don't like to think of illness and pain and the breaking down of strength and all the natural sources of vigor in our constitutions but what does illness do to a child of

God it's just the way of loosening loosening the things that bind him to the body sometimes they are quickly loosened they just drop apart sometimes it's a long process and the Lord's will is to be recognised in it but pain and sickness and weakness it's just the loosening of the bonds when the apostle said I'm ready to depart he meant my bonds that hold me here will very soon be broken he doesn't envisage the means he doesn't think about the sword that would bring his life to an end no he said the bonds the bonds will soon be loosed and my spirit will be free to be with Jesus now that's the view of death the gospel gives us but that which is most frequently used of course and a most beautiful expression it is that of falling asleep they that sleep in

Jesus now it is very important to take one scripture in connection with others and if death was always and only spoken of as asleep it might be thought well then the soul knows nothing knows nothing any more than we do when we are asleep the soul just passes into a state of absolute sleep and knows nothing but you see the other scriptures that describe the death of a child that God put it differently from that for to depart and be with Christ is not just to go to sleep and know nothing very beautiful is this expression more beautiful than I can now go into this morning but this is the comfort of these words first they sleep in Jesus not only that they sleep but they sleep in Jesus that is they sleep in union with him the union that was formed in their souls by the grace of

God by the new birth that brought the life of Jesus into their hearts by that living faith in which they did cleave to him and that heavenly love that Christ like love that never faileth the union that was formed between them and Jesus still goes on just the same they lived in it here and they sleep in Jesus now it's still in Jesus in Jesus always in Jesus for once in him you see in him forever thus the eternal covenant stands and none shall pluck thee no not death itself shall pluck thee from the strength of Israel's hands now that's the teaching of these words

I've tried this morning very briefly to show you their authority and their foundation and just a little of their instruction my friends we have need of this comfort on such occasions as these it has been desired of me that I should not fill the sermon this morning with references to our departed brother and so I have somewhat restrained myself there is a word that has been much on my mind ever since our brother passed away from us and I thought it might have been the word for this morning but perhaps it might have rather too much filled the discourse with our feelings to him rather than the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus

[39 : 39] Christ forever this was the word a brother beloved especially to me how much more unto thee in the flesh and in the Lord a brother beloved especially unto me how much more unto thee in the flesh and in the Lord and that is exactly what our dear brother has been he has been a brother in the spiritual sense of the word we have been united with him as brothers all of us who have been in that spiritual affection with dear Alfred he has been a brother to us and so much of course there again is expressed in that term brother it means oneness of life life derived from the same parentage and to be a brother is to be one in the life that is derived from

Jesus Christ that he has been a brother beloved is beyond all question none could have been more so and especially to me for these reasons our union together in the things of God and in the church of God and in our personal affection has been so long as I mentioned yesterday he was amongst the first that it was my privilege to receive into this church and that was 42 years ago and for 42 years we have walked together in absolutely unbroken affection and union I won't say unbroken because of course it cannot be broken but I mean uninterrupted then nothing has ever interrupted the affection and mutual esteem we have felt together he loved me as his pastor he loved me greatly and I loved him greatly as a brother greatly and there was so much in our dear brother that didn't dare him to us especially his humble and his gracious spirit and demeanor you know the

Lord's people are eminent often in different ways one is eminent in one way and another in another way some are eminent in gifts and forcefulness of character and the like others are eminent in tenderness humility gentleness and meekness and if I might say if Alfred was eminent in anything he was eminent in the gentleness and in the meekness of Christ mark that as Paul says I beseech you by the gentleness and meekness of Christ not merely gentleness and meekness which a man may have by reason of his natural disposition and which our dear brother had but it was that of

Christ we may never have another quite equal to our brother in this particular and in every feature of his life and work amongst us he always manifested that same tender and affectionate spirit even in the way in which he would speak to us it has been very noticeable where I've travelled this week and reference has been made to him they say he always gave you such a kindly welcome such a word made you feel you're hard drawn to him he had a remarkable manner in that way without diffusiveness or overdoing it he could give you such a word as drew your heart out to him and what a suitable gift he had with regard to our worship said sometimes to him on a

Sunday night Alfred those hymns have been good to me tonight or today and he will say yes and it's a great exercise to me to give out the hymns I pray I often pray to the Lord that he would show me what hymns to give out and that that accounts for a great deal a hymn is a hymn of course but if it's given out by a man who prayed over it and sought the Lord to guide him there's often a blessing a sweetness a suitableness in that hymn and I'm sure it comes from the exercise of a good man's heart often the hymns that Alfred has given out have been a blessing to us often and what a peacemaker he's been a lover of peace and a peacemaker such as the Lord blesses blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God he has meant much to me my heart has safely trusted in him all these years and even now

[46 : 03] I just can't seem to realise that he is with us no more I just can't seem to realise that we haven't him still but then to some of you this is true how much more unto thee in the flesh and in the Lord and you who have lost one who has been doubly dear to you the Lord comforts you with these words and because these feelings in our hearts are so very sensitive I won't dwell upon them now we should feel as I said when I began this morning a blending of comfort and thankfulness comfort concerning his state we have no cause to mourn for him whatever he is with the Lord he is asleep in Jesus he has departed the bonds that bound him to a suffering body are broken and his ransomed soul has fled we have no cause to mourn for him and we would comfort one another with these words and we have much cause for thankfulness 42 years of useful gracious tender faithful service and steadfast life in this church is not to be just thought of and left it calls for real thanksgiving to God this is a memorial service this morning

I pray it may be a really thankful one the Lord had his blessing for as ■■■ sh it and you had his I I