

Worried about the Church?

✦ **God comforts and sustains us. (vv.10-11)**

✦ **God grants us wealth and peace. (vv.12-14)**

In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer, dear children of God:

In the spring of 1987, a woman shouted across her driveway: “All right! What are you selling?” “I’m not selling it,” I replied. “I’m giving it away.” “What’dya got, money?” “No, it’s better than that.” When I returned a few days later she invited her husband and a neighbor couple to listen. What we have from God and His Word is priceless. No money can buy riches that cost the blood of God’s own Son.

So what’s the problem? Why didn’t they ever come? People tend to ignore their problems and hope they’ll go away. Or, they decide there are too many problems in the church, and who needs more problems? One example came when we requested a building permit for our garage. Neighbors at the City Council meeting expressed concern that our garage might detract from the neighborhood. Afterwards I smiled and suggested: “Join our church. Then our problems can be your problems.”

You know there’s something deeper here than garages and land values. What will you do in the end? God’s ultimate goal is to get you to the Promised Land of heaven. Life here on earth is like living on the porch. Once inside the mansion, who will remember the porch? Christ teaches us to face trouble squarely. He asks us today: **Worried about the Church?** Then He hooks up a fire hose of blessing as...

✦ **God comforts and sustains us. (vv.10-11)**

Reading this graphic text out loud reminds me of a story one of our missionaries used to tell. He was preaching to a Hmong congregation and tried to say to the women something like, “You are my beautiful sisters.” Somehow he used the wrong tone and ended up saying, “You have beautiful breasts.” In our culture we see so much misuse of the woman’s body that we can fail sometimes to appreciate God’s miraculous creation. Infant formula is very recent. In many cultures if a woman could not breast feed her babies they would die. In ancient Israel children were several years old before being weaned. They had no problem with this beautiful picture. A mother’s intimate care, a baby’s complete satisfaction and *“delight in her overflowing abundance”* – these picture the way **God comforts and sustains us.**

It’s hard for Americans to appreciate the anxiety of God’s people in Isaiah’s day. We’re very disappointed if we fail a test, lose a job or a loved one. We may struggle with giving up vacation time for a family in crisis. But who of us have ever been forced from our homes at gunpoint? None have felt the terror of trying not to step on dead bodies of relatives in a pool of blood from Assyrian swords and spears. Imagine northern Minnesota conquered by a cruel enemy. Minneapolis falls. Here sits little Saint Paul and suburbs very vulnerable. In Isaiah’s day northern Israel had been conquered and deported. All the fortified cities of Judah fell to bragging Assyrian King Sennacherib. (2 Kings 18:13ff) Humanly speaking, little Judah and Jerusalem had no reason to obey King Hezekiah and trust in the LORD.

Archaeologists have discovered ash layers of devastation throughout the land. Hand-to-mouth harvests had been ruined for years. Only God’s promise kept their hopes alive. Through Isaiah, the LORD held His people close to His heart like a mother comforting her baby. In spite of what they saw around them, the Good News of the coming Messiah gave them strength to press on. While they fortified the city and blocked the springs, diverting water through Hezekiah’s tunnel, they trusted God’s Word. Finally the Angel of the LORD, the pre-incarnate Christ, destroyed the invading army. In a single night 185,000 soldiers died. While God’s people reveled in victory, the idolatrous King Sennacherib fled home and was killed in the temple of his god by his own sons. (2 Kings 19:35-37) **God comforts and sustains us.**

Again and again God explains through His prophets that Jerusalem and the Promised Land are pictures of heaven. When you realize you are sick with sin, isn't it wonderful to hear God's invitation? **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."** You know this is far better rest than sleeping late on Sunday morning because Jesus says, **"...rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:28f NIV84) God wants to lift our spirits when we come to His house. This is His loving command in graphic terms: **"Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourn over her. For you will nurse and be satisfied at her comforting breasts; you will drink deeply and delight in her overflowing abundance."** Dear children of God, don't break the Third Commandment and despise the Lord's Sabbath Day of rest. You'll miss the nourishment, comfort and satisfaction of God's overflowing blessings in Word and sacrament. Hopefully, your week will be miserable and God will discipline you. He does not want you to go happily to hell. It's not pleasant, but **"the Lord disciplines those he loves, and scourges everyone he accepts as a son."** (Hebrews 12:6 TPA)

✠ **God grants us wealth and peace. (vv.12-14)**

For this is what the LORD says: "I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream...." The Good Shepherd is speaking. He knows how much His sheep need good clean water to be healthy. So guess what happens every time you open your Bible? Every time you hear God's Word in church or on the Internet? Every time we turn to the Word, God always has something for us. Try this sometime on a river nearby. Sit on the bank and close your eyes. Wait for it.... Now open your eyes. Look, kids! The water is still flowing! Try it again. Try it a hundred times. Go away and come back in a few weeks and look! The water is still flowing. God's Word is not like the dry gulch of the Aqua Fria River in Phoenix or the wadis in Israel. Yet God's promise is even bigger. God says He will stretch the river of His peace to where you are. God brings His peace to us. And when He does, we cash in on **"the wealth of the nations"** which is our Lord Jesus Christ. Priceless blessings like forgiveness, comfort, peace and security – money cannot buy. Our offerings say, "Thanks be to God!"

It grieves us when loved ones do not share God's **wealth and peace** with us. They think we want something from them like the woman shouting at me, "What are you selling?" They don't realize that God's **wealth and peace** are like a mother's overflowing love as she cradles her child in her arms or bounces them on her knees. **"As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem."** Even if your loved ones don't get it, make sure you don't lose it. Come anyway. Give them a good example. Let God's grace strengthen you to be a picture of grace. **"When you see this, your heart will rejoice and you will flourish like grass"** – in this Minnesota springtime of 2013! **"The hand of the LORD will be made known,"** known by experience, **"to his servants,"** but **his fury will be shown to his enemies."** (TPA) Only in times of testing can we really appreciate God's **peace**.

It was November of 1873, and a Chicago lawyer named Horatio G. Spafford was devastated. Everything he owned was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire. So he took his wife and four daughters – Maggie, Tanetta, Annie, and Bessie - to New York and put them on a luxury cruise ship. He was nervous about their first cabin, so he moved them closer to the bow of the ship, said good-bye and promised to join them in France. On the voyage their ship collided with an iron sailing vessel and sank. Mrs. Spafford was found nearly unconscious, clinging to a piece of wreckage. For over a week, Horatio Spafford did not know what happened to his family until his wife's telegram arrived. Two words: "Saved Alone." On the way to join her, his ship's captain told him they were passing over the place where his four daughters drowned. In his cabin he knelt at the cross and said to himself, "It is well; the will of God be done." Later Spafford wrote his famous hymn based on those words: **"When peace like a river attendeth my way, When sorrows like sea billows roll, Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul."** (CWS 760. Story from Morgan, *On This Day* – November 22. Laridian.)

Our most comforting hymns come from Christian hymn writers' most difficult times. No worries. **God comforts and sustains us. God grants us wealth and peace** – for Jesus' sake. Amen.