

“I’m Still Here”

By Chris Ulrich

Sunday, July 20th, 2014

If you could bow your heads for a word of prayer: God, we thank You for this morning. God, we thank You for the music. God, we thank You for the testimonies. We thank You, God, for the encouragement; for the month of encouragement, God, and we pray now, God, for the hearing of the Word, the message, the sermon. We pray, God, that I would get out of the way, Lord, that, God, You’d have for us what You’d have for us, God, that You’d pour out Your blessings upon all of us, God. That we would take Your Word seriously; that we would understand that we have to have a plan to continue in Your Word, God. We thank You, God, for blessing us thus far; we pray that for the rest of this day, and for the rest of this week. In Your name, Jesus, we pray. Amen.

You may be seated.

So, this month is the month of encouragement; that’s the theme. We’ve been having different themes throughout this year.

Luke 22:32 *But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

That’s part of what our mission is as Christians. That’s part of what our mission as brothers and sisters in the faith. Arman, you alluded to it earlier: a family here in the church, but your flesh-and-blood family, too. That’s important, too; we have to have that balance. We have to have an understanding that God does have a purpose for our life—I’m just going to get right into the message; I’m not going to pull any punches or cut any corners. If you have your Bibles with you this morning, if you could turn with me to:

Luke 6:43-45 *For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart [That’s not gender biased; we’ve heard that before] bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

So, the first point, today, is encouraging others by what we say. I know Parrish mentioned last week, or at least relatively recently, that a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver from the book of Proverbs (Proverbs 25:11). There’s another one there that says, “The tongue of the just is as choice silver: but the heart of the wicked is little worth.” (Proverbs 10:20) And while we’re getting some wisdom from the Book of Proverbs—and this is one that I believe God deals with me again and again—“Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.” (Proverbs 18:21) That’s something that—we have to understand that there is power in the things that we say, positive or negative. You look at it in the media, you hear it in the news, we’ve heard gossip, or we’ve heard words of encouragement.

So we’re talking about encouragement today, we’re talking being encouraged, and trying to encourage others. But encourage them to do what? We have to have a mission, we have to understand, we have to be able to convey, that is, about continuing. It’s about getting saved, staying saved, and seeing others saved; we’ve heard that before; that’s something that one of our pastors, Pastor Thomas, has preached many years. That’s something that—I’m not quoting him—but, it’s a matter of looking at that and taking that personal, and looking at it like, yes, that is a personal mission. That is something that’s very important. A lot of our encouragement for each other is to keep going in the faith, plain and simple.

We're not here to try and get too fancy, or dance around life's problems. The reality of being a Christian is facing problems head on. Now, I know nobody expected this, but I'm actually going to sing a very short song this morning. How many expected that? I know you didn't. So, here it goes—it's not a long one:

Oh, give me a home
Where the buffalo roam,
And the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard
A discouraging word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

Who's heard that? Who hasn't heard it? Well, you heard it here first. It's an old, western, traditional, for little kids and it was one—I just thought about that this morning, and I was like, "I think the outdoorsmen would appreciate that." It's like, our sanctuary in God needs to be like that, where seldom is heard a discouraging word.. You look at—now I'm going to ask—I'm going to look for some participation—I'm going to go fast this morning; this isn't going to be a long message—but I'm going to ask for some people to stand—not a testimony, but I want you to share, and I'm talking about, what are some things that you can say—that you either hove said, or that you believe that you could say to encourage people? I want you to stand up and just shout it out.

VINCE: Talk about what you heard in service.

ED K.: If you need some help, you can call on me.

That's a great one.

LENA: Pray about it, and put it in the hands of the Lord.

BRENT: The solitude of the outdoors.

BOB: The day I cannot learn something from somebody is the day I become useless to God.

Amen.

GREG: God is good all the time.

All the time, God is good. And, you know what?

JASON: Jesus is coming back soon.

Amen. These are just things you say.

ED H.: All the answers to life are in the Bible.

Amen. I like that.

KEN: Jesus loves you.

That's a simple statement, but, you know what?—We're going to go on—They're simple things to say, but they're things that uplift; they're things that encourage.

The second point is encouraging others by what we do. If you would turn with me to:

James 2:14-18 *What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

Again, point number two: Encouraging others by what we do. Sometimes all we have are words as mentioned earlier, but sometimes we have to do more than just say something. Faith without works is dead. Be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:22). Jesus Himself said, **I must be about my Father's business** (Luke 2:49). These are action words and action statements. Do we have a good work ethic? Do we go the extra mile? Are we reliable, responsible, and dependable? More important, are we Christ-like in the decisions we make, the day-to-day decisions?

This second point isn't about disannulling the first, but sometimes talk is cheap. How many have heard that before? Or things are easier said than done; we've heard that before. Or it's easy to make promises. If anything, though, the first two points should reinforce each other. As we did earlier, I'd like to now ask for some participation in getting to hear from you. But I actually want to do a quick demonstration, here. I'm going to ask, Andy, Sonia, and Malcolm, here, if you three could come up. Just kind of stand—kind of mingle in a circle. Just talk with each other, you know. Shake hands and be friendly—no, you don't have to shake hands, just be friendly. Now, Jesse, if you could come up... Now, you three, kind of be in kind of a tight circle, so that you don't necessarily recognize somebody else coming. Now, Jesse, kind of stand on the outside looking in. Now, you guys recognize that Jesse's here; what do you do? (The circle opens up, and Andy reaches out toward Jesse) Welcome him in. You recognize that, and you get people involved. That's something that I think we all know, but sometimes it takes a little reminder for us to do it. I appreciate that. So, now, I'm going to ask, just stand up if you will, or, if you can't stand, just shout out something that we can do to encourage people. Any volunteers?

GREG: Call someone up.

Call someone up. Excellent.

SONIA: Make soup for someone.

Excellent. Sonia's a great cook.

PARRISH: Listen to them when they speak.

Listen; that's a big one.

MARY: Visit people.

JASON: Coffee.

Coffee. Now we're talking.

ANDY: Take somebody out to lunch.

BRENT: Share with them your passions and your talents.

Amen, amen. Those things are important. Anybody else? I don't want to overlook—

MALCOLM: Volunteer to help your neighbors and co-workers.

Yeah. And, you know what? The Bible says to do good, especially to those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10), but, you know what? we can do good to those on the outside. We can do good; we can show—we can be an evangelist; the Bible talks about doing the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). I'm going to read right now, so if you could turn with me right now to:

1 Samuel 30:1-4 *And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way. So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives. Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.*

Now, think about that for a moment. A lot of us have heard that, but, I mean, that's just a point where you're just gasping for air; I mean, you're just so worn out, it's like—and I don't know if everybody has had—but, I suppose that everybody's had a point where you were just so worn out that you just couldn't even weep any more. You know what? the Bible says weep with those that weep; rejoice with those that rejoice, (Romans 12:15) and there's a time for that, too.

1 Samuel 30:5-6 *And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, [so, now you've got two fronts of battle] because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God.*

So that's a huge one. I mean, when your back's against the wall—I mean, I suppose it is easy to encourage yourself when things are going fine, but blessed be the name of the Lord. I appreciate the music this morning; some of those songs just—I mean, coupled with the first two. I hadn't heard those in a while. That music was encouraging. People that shared testimonies—I mean, that's the kind of thing that makes it click, that makes this ministry go forward.

The last point today about encouragement is that we need to encourage ourselves. Now being encouraged ourselves doesn't mean we're not going to have dry times, challenges, heartbreak, tragedy, we've all heard the list. I've got to say this: I was coming back from conference, and I was coming through Pennsylvania. Now, I've got some older sermons on CD, so I like to play them occasionally, along with music, or silence, at times. It just keeps me—many of you have been on road trips with me, I always enjoy getting out on the road. Anyway, there was one from ten years ago or so that Pastor Paine, our general pastor, for those of you that don't know, he was preaching, and he talked about a point in his life that he had run into a rough patch; just challenges, and he said, "I was just doing what I could, and I got a message from God." But one point he made, one statement that he made, he said, "I've been discouraged more times than I'd care to admit, but guess what? I'm still here." I got to thinking, and that's the title of today's message, "I'm Still Here." I looked at that, and, you know what? it takes a strong leader to admit to be vulnerable at times, to actually show their humanness. To actually show, hey—because, you know what? I've been discouraged more times than I'd care to admit, too. It's not an easy thing, because sometimes—the expression is, "You could give somebody a club, and they could beat you over the head with it." I mean, it's one of those things where it's like, okay, they can protect themselves and they can beat you over the head with it, and it's like, the goal is that they can protect

themselves, not to have them lash back on us. But it was one of those things where it was like, it might seem a little strange to talk about encouragement, and you first talk about discouragement, but, isn't that the way life is? It's a roller-coaster ride; there's emotions... I appreciate what you said, Parrish, when you asked Alex and Elmira to come up, because there is a lot of turmoil in Ukraine and that part of the world. It's one of those things where it's like, our prayers are going to continue with you, Elmira, as you go to Russia to be with your family and that's the kind of thing where I'm talking about, you know what? When I heard about that, that jet airliner that was blown out of the sky—who really knows? I don't know. I mean, I'm not going to sit there and eat up what the media says it necessarily is, but, here's what we know: There was a plane that went down, and there was a lot of people lost. It's not about the blame game; it's not about, "What about them? What about this country? What about who did this, that, or the other?" It really comes down to, you know what? it's a discouraging thing, but we can still get encouragement in God, because God is ultimately where our reward is. If we're right with God, it's a matter of looking at it like, if ever something like that ever happens to any of us, we are ready. That's a lot of what this comes down to. You look at the situation that King David found himself in, with all the struggles—you know, their families were taken captive, and it just—sometimes the depression of this world can engulf us. I mean, Bob, you mentioned a couple of months ago about, hey, there are times of being lonely. There are times of living with depression, but, you know what? we can't live there. we can't, and, Bob, you mentioned that; you said, "I can't live there." That's something that, we're going to feel every emotion that everybody else does, or, whatever we felt before. It's not like when we become Christians, "I never get discouraged. Never!" It's like, "Good; that's great." Nobody here is saying that. I think sometimes that the world has an impression of religiousness like we're completely unscathed by the things of the world, and that's not true. We're affected just like anybody else. We're emotional people just like anybody else.

So, what do we do to encourage ourselves? Again, I'm going to ask, and I think I'd like to spend just a little more time here for people to share something. Now, I'm going to make this point: It could be, "I encourage myself by reading my Bible." "I encourage myself by taking a walk in the woods." "I encourage myself by reading my Bible while I'm walking through the woods." It doesn't have to be—but make it a spiritual connection with whatever you do, whether it's coffee or calling somebody up. Whatever it is you do to encourage yourself. Why don't you go bow-hunting; we all know what that is. Make it something with a spiritual connection. So, I'd like to hear from people, please.

BOB J.: Personal praise and worship.

Amen.

ARMAN: Prayer.

Prayer. Anybody else?

LORRAINE: Just talking to the Lord.

Talking to the Lord encourages you.

DELLA: Count my blessings.

I like that.

GREG: Calling and encouraging someone else.

Yeah. I mean, it's not always going to be where-- The first two points message were really encouraging others, but, a lot of times, when we encourage others, it does encourage us. That's a fact.

BRENT: Just finding your place, wherever you do. Someplace to not be distracted, and just take in what God has.

Amen. I believe that God wants us to enjoy this life, and we're going to have enough struggles, but I think it's got to be in balance, because he Bible talks about the Children of Israel, at one point, sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play (Exodus 32:6). That's one of those pints where it's like, "Okay, I've got to have the right balance. My whole life is not about R&R." It's not, but there has to be a place for that. Is there anybody else?

ANDY: Having fellowship. Finding a like-minded brother or sister and allowing them to encourage you.

Amen. Anybody else?

LAGOZE: Let God meet us where we are.

PARRISH: Studying with other brothers and sisters.

VINCE: I like watching Christian music videos on YouTube.

JASON: Thank Him.

MARK: Whenever I need to encourage myself, I find a recipe I've never made before, and I make it.

Mark does good. Mark's a cook, and he's working towards being a chef.

MIKE: Find some people that need encouragement, and they'll encourage you right back.

Encourage people. Thank you; thank you.

Ultimately we need to allow God to encourage us; that's where our source comes from. Every good and perfect gift comes from above, from the Father of lights (James 1:17). Just think for a moment about all the healings you've gotten over the years. Think about, like you said, Della, counting your blessings. It's like, one thing that God dealt with me about years ago, I've got a lot more things to be thankful for than things to worry about. It's like what you mentioned, Linda, about a prayer journal, a thankfulness journal. I mean, things like that, where it's like, I don't want to forget it. Sometimes, when you do, Satan going to act like, when you get to a point of battle, "You got ripped off. You've got nothing to show for it. What about all this? What about what everybody else is getting?" and it's like, "Wait a minute,, what about this time..." and it might have been ten years ago, it might have been last week, it might have been thirty years ago, it might have been this morning. But, Terry Jones, I appreciate the feedback you gave a couple of weeks ago, when it was like, people looking for a sign, and you had said,, "You know what? just waking up this morning with the breath of life is a sign." I appreciate that feedback. It makes me look at it like—it reinforces an awareness that waking up and having the breath of life is a sign from God. It is a sign from God.

I'm going to close by sharing about one of the workshops from the conference that we had in Virginia. Pastor Thomas had the privilege of sharing about "40 Years In Ministry" and he talked about a lot of the highlights, and some of the lessons along the way, and some of the struggles. You know, we had humble beginnings. Having someone like that, who's been around a long time, to be able to share that and to elaborate on it... You know, a choir went to Africa in 1999. You had, maybe, people that got

baptized over the years, different congregations, congregations that got started, like in Sri Lanka. Pastor Hubert Ulysse was baptized, and he went to Haiti a few years later; we saw an explosion of growth in Haiti. To this day it continues. Things like that, again, we've had a rough points, as a ministry. We have. I mean, I'm not going to gloss over that, and act like it's all been smooth sailing, because it hasn't. But when you look at like, and I think, Linda, you maybe alluded to this in your testimony, Satan's going to fight this message harder than anything else. He's going to fight it because it's the truth. People are out there—and this is not a month of sound doctrine—or false doctrine—but there is plenty of false doctrine. Malcolm, I think you mentioned in a testimony that like 99% of churches don't teach baptism in Jesus' name. That's huge thing, because that's the cornerstone. I mean, it's not like, "Oh, well, we'll get to it." It's right here, right now, today. I'm not talking about pushing people, but I know when I was first asked about it—I was a Friday night, by the way—and they were like, "So, do you want to get baptized Sunday?" and I was like, "Pffffh! I want to do it tonight!" It was like, "Okay, okay!" It was like, no doubt about it, coming up out of—and I think all of us can attest to that, having done it. There's—it's a no-brainer. I mean, without a shadow of a doubt. But, getting back to that workshop, I appreciate him talking about Pastor Davis, and Sister Davis, who is still alive, and the sacrifices they made. She took a job to support Pastor Davis, for a number of years, at Abbott laboratories. Stuff like that where it was like—Sister Davis is eighty years old now, but she got baptized, I think it was 1947, or 1945, and it's like, what an incredible legacy. So, that final point was not just about the last 40 years, but the next 40 years. What about it? What's it going to look like? Where are we going to be? Some of us might be here; some of us might have gone on to be with the Lord. Hopefully, I pray to God, there will be many that aren't here today, but will be here, because that's a lot of what this is all about. Getting saved,, staying saved, and seeing other souls saved.

So, will we encourage those around us by the things that we say, by the things that we do, and the life that we live? Will we encourage ourselves when the going gets tough and the world looks a lot more appealing than taking one more step in the God? It may not always look like the most appealing or glamorous life, but guess what? we're still here. And that's what makes all the difference.

Thank you very much, and God bless.

