

Dear Fellow Redeemed by the blood of God's own Son,

I know that at least one of you shares my appreciation for the paintings of Claude Monet. Monet was one of the French impressionists of the late 1800's. If you view a Monet painting close up, focusing your eyes on a small area of the scene, you will find it very difficult to make out exactly what you are looking at. But if you back away and view the whole picture, you will see what the artist painted in the smaller area.

Some women who could be mothers, focus on the discomfort and pain of carrying and delivering a baby, and decide that they don't want children at all. But those who focus on all the blessings and joy God gives with the birth of a child are not so troubled by the difficulties that come with it. How important it is to see every event in life not by itself, but in its whole setting.

Think again about the promise God made to Abraham. When God called him from his home in Haran, He promised to make Abraham a "great nation." God said that He would be with Abraham all the way, in order to carry out the promise that the Savior of the world would be born of Abraham's descendants. (Gen. 12:1) Abraham believed God. But when God brought him to the land He had promised, Abraham forgot the promises God had made.

He became afraid of the people who lived in the land. Because his wife Sarah was so attractive, he was afraid that the men would kill him in order to take Sarah. In order to save his own life, Abraham told King Abimelech that Sarah was his sister! Abraham focused on one uncomfortable circumstance – took it out of context. He became fearful and frazzled and nearly fouled everything up!

But our great Savior God wants us to see the whole picture –

THE COMFORTABLE CONTEXT OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!

I.

We read in the book of Acts, before our text that Paul had

returned to Jerusalem for the last time, and that a Jewish mob had dragged him out of the temple to kill him. But the Roman commander grabbed Paul and brought him to the safety of the soldier's barracks. On the following night, our text tells us that **"the Lord stood by him and said: Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome."**

By this promise the Lord had encouraged Paul, so that the threats of the Jews seemed as nothing to Paul. He was filled with even more hope when the Roman commander sent him to Caesarea to be tried before the Roman governor, Felix. Again and again Paul testified that the Jews had seized him only because he preached about the resurrection of Christ from the dead. But for two whole years governor Felix refused to decide Paul's case, because he hope that Paul would give him a bribe of money for his release! (Acts 24:6)

Then a new governor came. His name was Festus. Again the apostle defended himself before the authorities. But Festus wanted to do a favor for the Jews, so he asked Paul if he would be willing to go back to Jerusalem to stand trial. Then Paul appealed to Caesar in Rome. Since Paul was a Roman citizen, Festus had to let him go to Rome to make his case before the emperor.

But there was yet another hang up, another disappointment! After many days Festus mentioned Paul's case to King Agrippa. When Paul appeared before King Agrippa and preached the gospel of Christ to him, the King answered: **"You almost persuade me to become a Christian."** (Acts 26:27) King Agrippa did finally send Paul off to Rome because Paul had appealed to emperor Caesar. But Paul did not get to Rome until he had spent three months at sea, suffering storms, shipwreck, and snakebite! (Acts 27-28)

How amazing the hand of the Lord is in all of this! On many occasions Paul might have stymied himself with the "if only" game. – "If only I had not gone to the temple; "If only I had offered the bribe Felix wanted, or said this or that differently!"

But Paul saw everything in the context of the promises made to

him in connection with the shed blood of his Savior from sin and the work he had been called to do. Paul did not dwell on the disappointments and set-backs along the way, because he kept his heart and mind set on the promise of God that He would make it to Rome in one piece! He regarded the events of each day as the appointments of His Savior God!

Rather than grieving over the unfairness and injustice of it all, Paul saw opportunities to bring the good news of the resurrection to the highest offices of the land! When he arrived in Rome, Paul was placed under house arrest for two more years! But during that time many people came to him and heard the Gospel from him. His words to the Philippians at this time show that Paul was living within the comfortable context of the Christian life." He wrote: **"I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content."** (Phil. 4:11)

II.

Each of our lives is filled with "If onlys" – If only I had a better education. . . . If only I were married, or not married. . . . If only I had not failed that test, or missed that sale. . . . If only I didn't look the way I do. Sit down sometime and make your own list of "if onlys" – your disappointments, delays, frustrations, and mistakes. But don't take them out of the context of your blessed life in Christ Jesus!

What happens if you stand too close to a famous masterpiece by Monet, Renoir, or Vincent Van Gogh? The little dots and squiggly lines of color will frustrate and annoy you. But if you stand back and view the whole painting at the right distance, you may be delighted with the work of the artist! You might say: "He sure knew what he was doing. He had a plan!"

Like Paul, you and I also experience many especially trying circumstances in life. The temptation is to quit, to cut corners, or to look for the easy way out. But the blessing is always in viewing everything in the context of our Savior's promises to us. In spite of all his difficult circumstances, Job knew that his Redeemer lives, and after the Lord was finished testing him, he would "come forth as

pure gold.” (Job 23:10)

By His own perfect life, sufferings, death and resurrection, our Christ has stopped up the mouth of that fierce Dragon who once used our sins to threaten us and scare the life out of us! Christ has slashed a way for us through the bleak, black forest of fear, temptation, and the power of Death!

Sure, He has left some stones and small branches in the way to knock us off our high horses. And there are a few hills left to climb in our various callings in life. But these are left in our paths so that we may be strengthened by the exercise of our spiritual muscles and not grow lazy, impenitent, or indifferent along the way. They are left so that we may show to others how His saving power is at work in us.

Our Savior stands behind us as the **Author** of our salvation! He stands ahead of us as the **Finisher** of our faith! And He stands beside us as He did with Paul in Jerusalem! How comfortable the context of our Christian life really is! Amen.