

## COMFORT RECEIVED AND GIVEN

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567)

### 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

To go through life without trials and tribulations is truly rarer than either gold or silver. Living in a fallen world of bondage and decay one can't help but experience times of personal illnesses, financial troubles, marital disagreements and the sting of numerous enemies. God never promised an easy life to His own but instead warned us that trials and tribulations would be the norm and so would being persecuted at the hands of those both within and outside of the church. Under the vice of pain, the minds of these fragile jars of clay often feel like they are going to break into a million pieces; letting despair rush in and completely drown all future expectations of joy. To those whose minds are overwhelmed with pain Paul tells them to seek and they will find comfort from God the Father. The first part of this sermon will focus on various kinds of suffering as experienced by God's people. The second and third parts of the sermon will focus on Paul's comfort theology: while suffering is an evitable part of the Christian life it is also an opportunity to take the comfort one has received from God and offer it to others.

### KINDS OF SUFFERING

While there are more kinds of suffering than can be described in this short sermon, I will focus on oppression, trials and tribulations and persecution.

**Oppression and Suffering.** The more contact one has with various groups of people, the greater the likelihood one will find some sort of oppression. While we are all created in the likeness of God (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9) that does not mean that all of humanity respects each



other's differences. For example, at the beginning of the book Exodus we are told that due to the Israelites becoming exceedingly fruitful and great in numbers (1:6), the king of Egypt made their lives bitter with harsh labor and ordered the midwives to kill any male child upon birth (1:11-16). Imagine what it must have been like to go from your leader being second in command in Egypt to being forced into the kind of slavery that was intended to kill you! While you may not face this kind of

oppression, most of us have felt the pain of being oppressed by a group of people just because we don't have the same language, race, religion, preferences and so on. Most of us also know what it is like to live with emotional and maybe even physical scars from the aggressive attacks of a bully.

**Trials and Tribulations.** At the beginning of the book of James we are told to consider it pure joy whenever we face trials of various kinds. While the promise to have one's spiritual maturity increase upon faithful endurance can be a source of great comfort (1:2-4), it is not easy



to persevere when one is suffering from the crushing personal tragedies of Job! To go from being rich, having a large family and considered to be the greatest amongst the people of your area to losing almost everything in a matter of days would be painful beyond what most people could bear! I can only imagine the pain Job and his wife felt when they heard the news that a mighty wind had destroyed the house his family were meeting in and subsequently killed all his

children! My first wife died when we only had been married for six months and the pain almost crushed me but to lose almost all of one's family in one day, now that is pain! To make matters worse, Satan afflicted Job with painful sores all over his body (2:7). While you might not have faced the tragedies that Job had, most of us know the pain and suffering that comes from illnesses, financial tragedies and death of a loved one. Most of us have felt the kind of tragedy that leaves our fragile hearts broken in to a million pieces!

**Persecution.** In their desire to retain their authority and traditions (symbols of national identity, Torah and Temple) the Jewish authorities reacted with hostility when Jesus defined a



spiritual Israel and predicted the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. This conflict per the book of Mark was intensified after Jesus had associated with sinners (2:13-22), touched an unclean leper (1:40-45), forgave the sins of the paralytic (2:1-12), worked and healed on the Sabbath (2:23-28; 3:1-5), and allowed His disciples to eat bread without washing their hands (7:1-23). Jesus faced conflict from his friends, family, and disciples. How hard would it have been for Jesus to face His "mother and brothers" who wanted to drag him back home because they believed He was out of

his mind (3:21; 3:31-32) or to have His closest disciple Peter deny Him three times (14:66-72)! Jesus was spat on, beaten with the cat of nine tails and crucified (15:19-41). While it is unlikely you will be persecuted to this extent, Jesus promises that the world will always hate Christians and persecute them as well.

**If one has never felt the pain of either oppression, trials and tribulations or persecution; then thank God, for your life is truly rarer than either gold or silver!**

## RECEIVING COMFORT FROM GOD

Living in a fallen world often means that suffering and pain are inevitable. Our bodies and minds are truly like jars of clay (2 Corinthians 4:7) that are easily broken and shattered. There are oppressors, tribulations and persecutions that can make the strongest person weep and drown in their own sorrows! What is a person to do when all future expectations of joy are drowned out by the pain of scars cut so deep into one's soul that one is left paralyzed and unable to see any happiness at the end of that dreary tunnel called life? To those who suffer Paul says to seek comfort that comes from God and abounds through Christ.

**<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. <sup>5</sup> For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. <sup>6</sup> If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. <sup>7</sup> And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.**

### 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, NIV

When Paul was crushed in suffering and despair he cried out “Abba” (Romans 8:15) and God, who remembered that he and his companions were mere dust (Psalms 103:13-14) and jars



of clay, comforted them. While we are not told the specifics of the “troubles” Paul and his companions faced<sup>1</sup> we know that it was “a great pressure, far beyond their ability to endure to the point that they felt they had been dealt a death sentence” (1:8-9). Even though he was told he would suffer greatly for preaching the Gospel message (Acts 9:15), did this fact truly prepare Paul to receive five times the forty lashes less one, being beaten with rods, pelted with stones, shipwrecked three times, abandoned on the sea, and often going without food, water or shelter? When he was hard pressed on every side, perplexed and struck

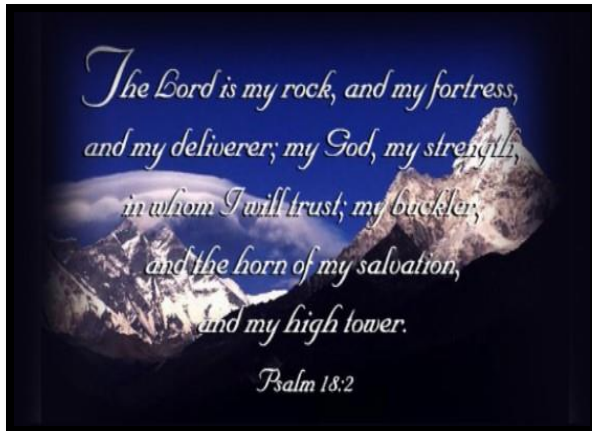
down, Paul was not crushed, abandoned or destroyed (4:8-10). He did not lose heart (4:16) but found great comfort in knowing that his momentary troubles were nothing compared to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Linda L. Belleville, [2 Corinthians](#), vol. 8, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 2 Co 1:8.

eternal glory he was about to receive (4:17)! Even though Paul knew he would share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, he also knew comfort abounds through Christ as well!

While Paul could have been referring to God as comfort in relation to the glorious future that he would receive at the Parousia, Paul could also have been referring to the hope that one gets from relying on the sovereign power of God in the present. For example, in Psalms 22



David had hope that his suffering was about to end because he knew his sovereign God would deliver him. At the beginning of the lament David describes his dire circumstances. In verse 6 he says “I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.” He goes on in verse 12 to say many strong bulls encircle him, roaring like lions and ready to tear him apart as if he was their prey. In the face of such adversity David explains that he feels like he is being poured out like water, his bones out of joint and his heart turned to wax (verse 14). As the “dogs surround him and a

pack of villains encircling him (verse 16),” David wonders if he is not about to be laid down into the dust in which he came (15). While he could have easily drowned in his own despair by the end of the lament David rejoices because he knows that God had heard his cry. David had hope for he knew that in such perilous times he could take refuge in God, his rock and fortress (18:1-2). In a similar manner, Paul believed the tribulations that he and his companions faced happened so that he might learn to rely on God rather than on themselves (verse 10). Like David, Paul believed the same God who has the power to raise the dead, would once again come to his aid to deliver him from his peril. From David and Paul, we learn that there is always hope for God is sovereign, firmly in charge of all things seen and unseen.

## GIVING COMFORT TO OTHERS



In verse number four Paul states that the comfort received from God is to be given to others. “One human being cannot effect divine deliverance *from* affliction for another, but it is possible to share with another sufferer the encouragement received *in* the midst of one’s own afflictions.”<sup>2</sup> There are many practical ways give comfort to those who suffer: if a person is going through financial

---

<sup>2</sup> Colin G. Kruse, [2 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 8, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 62.

difficulties then give them some money, if a person is bed ridden then offer to cook or clean their home, if a person is depressed because they have no friends then visit them, if a person is going through an emotional crises then lend an empathetic ear. Above all share your own personal testimony of how you have experienced God's grace amidst your own tribulations for such stories not only give the other person hope but is a powerful testimony that Paul says might even lead them to salvation (verse 6)!

Even though we know we are to share in the comfort that we have received from God, there are many reasons why we do not do so. First, we do not take the time to get to know the people in our community. While some people are willing to share their trials publicly, most



prefer to keep their pain private. A relationship of trust needs to be established before most are willing to open and share the tribulations that they are going through. This of course will take time that many Christians simply do not want to give! Living in a society where every moment of the day has been scheduled, time is a commodity far more precious than either gold or silver. While giving money certainly helps the poor and starving of this world there is a limit to how much we can give to others.

Furthermore, since the majority of the people in Canada have their basic needs met, what most people truly need is to have genuine relationships with those who are willing to empathically help them through the tribulations that are attacking their minds. While walking a mile in some else's tribulation shoes is difficult, because it means sharing in their pain, this is how others will know we are Christians by our selfless acts of love.

Another reason that stops Christians from sharing the comfort they have received from God is fear that they will not have the right words to say. What does one say to a person who just found out they have cancer and only three months to live, to the person who just had their



20-year-old son or daughter die or to the person who lives in physical pain 24/7? Often Christians are so frightened that they will not have the "right words" to say that they choose to stay away from helping others so that they might remain silent! While human words are limiting when it comes to helping the broken minds of others, the Spirit of God is more than capable of not only giving you the "right words" to say but also to enable those words to penetrate even the darkest regions of their

minds! When it comes to helping others, God does not ask us to do what only He can do, i.e. heal their minds, but only to be an open vessel willing to emphatically listen and speak the words of comfort given by the Holy Spirit.

## CONCLUSION

Paul concludes this passage by giving us one final, practical way to share comfort, prayer. Paul knew that the best way that the church at Corinth could help him and his friends to be delivered from their life-threatening situation was through their prayers. What could ever give a person more hope than asking a sovereign God to change another person's circumstances? Like Paul we too should believe in the efficacy of intercessory prayer because the prayers of a righteous person are truly powerful and effective (James 5:16). When faced with oppressors, trials and tribulation and persecution; we are to seek comfort from God and in turn offer that same comfort to others. Even when there seems to be no practical way to comfort another, Paul says one can always kneel and pray to our sovereign God who has control of all things seen and unseen! Once God grants deliverance don't forget to go back and thank Him!