

Praise for Comfort – 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Speaker: Pastor Michael Engle, *Clearcreek Chapel*

Introduction

As a Bible reader, you should often feel as though you live in an upside-down, topsy-tervy world that rarely makes sense to the unbelieving world around you? You live in a world where the best thing to do is love your enemy. Where you are not only accountable for your actions, but the very intentions of your heart. Where Kings are servants and God allows himself to be murdered like a common criminal on a cross. And today we'll learn another way in which God's world looks strange to the eye of an unbelieving world, and often times to the church as well. In God's word he is the comforter of all comforters and to bring you into that comfort he allows suffering. If this doesn't make much sense to you, please stick around and listen to the rest of the sermon. You'll find that you are not the only one who doesn't understand, and perhaps, by the grace of God we will find the answers together and begin to live and pray in a way that the world will surely ask why we live the way we do.

Well, turn in your Bibles to the book of 2 Corinthians. We'll spend our time this evening in the first chapter from verses three through eleven. This is actually the fourth letter Paul has penned to the Church in Corinth and he is at least partially writing to defend himself and his apostleships. You see Paul has been through some tough times. He has suffered much for the Gospel and much like Job's friends and many, so-called, churches in our day the Corinthians doubted whether Paul was really a Spirit-filled apostle if he was going through all of this suffering. I mean, God wouldn't let his children suffer here on earth would he. Especially one called to such a high position as that of an Apostle. It just doesn't sound right does it. God only brings suffering to those who are disobedient, or if you were to listen to the false prophets of our own day, those who do not have enough faith. One must wonder if the Corinthians read the Old Testament they had in hand or not. Did they not know of the suffering servant of Isaiah? Did they not read what happened to Job. Were they not aware that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was crucified on a cross? Apparently not, and so Paul in this beginning section of second Corinthians is going to explain what it looks like to live in a world turned upside down by Jesus Christ.

Who is the author?

Paul starts out like the opening ceremony of the olympics only WAY better. He will parade before the church at Corinth the greatness of God in a way they weren't thinking of. Hold on to your hats 'cause he's going to come out swinging for the fence in praise to God the Father. Look down in your Bibles at 2 Corinthians, Chapter one, verse three. This is what Gods word says,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Stop! Corinthians, did you here what he just said? His first swing of the praise bat is the calling out to God. What God? The only God, the Father of the Lord Jesus. These Corinthians, and perhaps some of us here, are thinking that suffering does not come to the spirit filled believer. How can that be?! How can you claim that no suffering should come to you when you follow the very suffering servant. The one who was despised, full of sorrow, acquainted with grief, smitten by God himself, pierced through, crushed, chastened, and scourged without so much as a grumble or complaint to utter. Could he not have stood and said, “ENOUGH”. I am the holy one of God sent to save you wretches and you dare cause me pain and suffering. But no, he did not. He suffered for God and for us.

The Corinthians may have been surprised by these opening words but then only get more intense, more confusing...especially if you have no place for suffering in you theological grid. If your Bible glasses are rose colored, Paul is about to smash them.

Look down at the rest of verse three. God's work says this,

the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

Maybe they don't yet understand what Paul is doing. Can you see that many might be shaking there heads in agreement. Many of them being the ones who are doubting Paul's filling of the Spirit. Thinking in their minds, “That's right, God is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”. You can see there heads a waggin' and there fingers shaken. “You know it's not right, that people full up on God should be going through such suffering.

As a side note, do you, Clearcreek Chapel, believe this. This is a capital B Big Truth about God. It is one of his attributes. He is full of mercy and comfort. He is the Father and God of mercy and comfort. We like to say, when someone excels in some area, that he has done it like a “boss”. Right, well God is not just dolling out mercy and comfort like a “boss” he is the author of them. He is the first to give mercy and comfort and no one can compare to him. You may do something “like a boss”, but you will never be the creator of it. Paul here, marks out God as the originator and the one from whom these attributes flow. Without him we do not have any mercy. Without him we do not have any comfort.

Do you sit around waiting for the proverbial “next shoe to drop”? Why? I think it's because we don't understand the mercy and comfort God provides. We wake up with some aches and pains and we paw at the pain relievers on our night stand, questioning the goodness of God while next to those pain relievers is a Bible with a small gold leaf cross etched into the cover. And we miss it. We miss the comfort and hope of the Gospel. It's not what we want. Our hearts are not tuned to the mercy and comfort that God is. What a shame. We are much like our brothers and sisters in the church at Corinth.

Paul moves on in verse four to tell us when and why of God's comfort. God's word says this in verse

four,

4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The Father of mercy and comfort is so in our affliction. He does so when the world is against the Gospel we proclaim. Whether that is shipwrecked or shamed, mocked or beaten, fired or set a flame, he is our comfort at all times of affliction. Can you feel the crowd starting to shift uncomfortably. “Maybe we don't get this quite as clearly as we thought. Maybe those guys from the east didn't know what they were talking about”.

And then there's this, and really, we should have seen this coming, “*so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction*”. His comfort to us is not only for us. It is for others. Did they understand that their whole lives were now about God and others? If not, they just started, by the Spirit and through the word, to understand that very thing. Your life is not primarily about you. You are to love God and love others and one of the ways you do that is to be comforted by him in your affliction and to in turn comfort others, the end of the verse, “*with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God*”. I know many here are suffering in ways I can only imagine. Hold tight to your Savior and know that he not only comforts you, but will comfort others through you. Be encouraged in your affliction, God is sovereign over it and will use it for his glory beyond all that you can ask or imagine.

Praise God, for He is the author of all mercy and comfort!

Paul continues his theology of comfort in verse five. Please look there in your Bibles. God's word says this,

How do we receive it?

5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

If the people were hard of hearing or didn't get what Paul was getting at before, they do now. They know the Gospel and the sufferings of Christ well. They had been taught in person and through various letters from Paul and now they see the foolishness of the lies they had been told. To say that the Godly would not experience suffering would require them to forsake their very Savior. Praise God Paul doesn't leave them there. He finishes off the sentence with a great encouragement for them and for us here at Clearcreek. Yes, tough as the news may be to hear, we will share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, just as we will share abundantly in comfort too. See this is the issue at hand. They, and often we, want to pick out the parts of being “in Christ” that we like. We want to share in abundant blessing, but we balk at the abundant suffering that comes with our life “in Christ”. I wonder why, if the reason believers, who are afflicted all over the world, don't ask first to change the situation they are in, but that

they be faithful Jesus lovers in it, is that they have they found this comfort “in Christ” to be more valuable than a comfortable situation on Earth. We may soon find out.

Praise God, he has sent Jesus to provide a way for us to be comforted!

What does it look like?

In these first three verses we have learned the who and the how of comfort. Next, Paul continues his theology of comfort by showing us what it will look like on earth. He will break verses six and seven up into sections of *affliction*, *comfort* and *hope*. He first give us an overhead view of his theology and then he will dive down into the muck and mire of his own situation to make his point crystal clear.

God's word says this in verse six,

Affliction

6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;

He doesn't spend a lot of words on what this affliction will look like or how it came to be, just that in this world, when affliction comes it is for the comfort of others. Period. You can rest and know that if you are experiencing affliction due to your belief in Jesus Christ...you are not there for yourself only. You are there for others. God is so much bigger than the little world we often picture ourselves in.

Comfort

Look down at the end of verse six and we'll see comfort. God's word says this,

...and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.

Now stop here and concentrate for a moment. Did you get that? If Paul is comforted, which he is because he is in Christ, it is for the comfort of others. And you might say to yourself, “how does that work?” Paul tells us, you will experience the comfort we experienced for you when you go through the things we did. Think about it like this, Paul is saying that God is the author of comfort and while we may not be experiencing the affliction he is at this moment, when we do, God will, by the Spirit bring back the memory of Paul being comforted to comfort you.

You may have heard this before, but what is the answer to the question, “How do we know God is at work?” Answer, “Because men are at work”. It fits here. Imagine if you are scared, fearful, and running amok in panic at the first sign of affliction. Are you a comfort to the next person who experiences those afflictions. NO! You are, at best, an example to be avoided. However, watch and see the steady trust of a seasoned saint in the midst of great affliction and you will know the comfort of God first hand. God is working through his people in all things, comfort included.

And Paul takes this one step further in verse seven. God's word says this,

Hope

7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Paul told us above that the only way we would be comforted in affliction was through Christ. Now he moves past circumstances to the truth that will comfort and sustain them on into Glory. No one is sustained just because their affliction will help others but because the very reason for their affliction is the hope of Glory, The Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, Our hope for you is unshaken, WHY? For, or because “we know that as you share”. There is no “if” here. Paul's knows they will share because he knows in whom they have believed. Jesus is Paul's “unshakable hope”. How do you whether the storm, by knowing you serve others yes, but that only goes so far. You weather the storm because you have a hope that is unshakable. It's not an “if” we suffer, or an “if” we are comforted for the Christian, it is a when, and your hope that will sail you home is the life giving blood of your Savior who suffered that you might be brought home to Glory. He is your hope. And he is unshakable.

Paul, having passed on to us a glorious theology of comfort will now bring it down to the world the Corinthians live in. He is about to get personal and share with them what these truths look like to he and his traveling companions. And again he will start verses eight through ten off with *affliction*, then *comfort*, and finally *hope*.

Look down in your Bibles at verse eight. God's word says this,

Affliction

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

Paul digs in right at the beginning. If the folks at Corinth were able to be fooled by the false teaching of what we could compare to our modern day prosperity Gospel then they must not know what's going on in the life of Paul. He does not want them to be ignorant of his sufferings – not because he wants lots of sympathy or to be some sort of hero martyr, but because he doesn't want them to be taken in by a comfort-robbing, hope-stealing lie that hardship and affliction aren't a part of the spirit filled life.

Paul goes on to explain the kind of affliction he was dealing with. This wasn't the affliction of being made fun of for your faith. This wasn't whispers at the water cooler kind of affliction. If I can say it this way, he was like, “dudes, we almost died!!”. Yeah like, we almost didn't make it. This was no suffering for Jesus like you couldn't go out tonight 'cause your buddies were going to see and R rated movie. They were close to meeting Jesus in Glory. This was serious stuff.

But even in the very serious affliction they experienced they were comforted. Look down at the end of verse nine. God's word says this,

Comfort

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us.

This affliction, near unto death, was what it took for them to stop relying on themselves and start relying on God. Doesn't this help when you think of yourself and your own faith. At least Paul and his companions struggled with pride and self-sufficiency like we do. It took a near death sentence for them to stop relying on themselves.

And don't you love Paul's language there at the end. They are relying on "God who raises from the dead"! I love this! Not only is he pointing back to his own circumstances and what he should have been thinking while he was relying on himself, but he also points the Corinthians and us to the suffering servant who is always to be relied upon.

Paul continues on with the fact that God delivered them (past tense) and will deliver them (present tense). Paul is showing them the reality they live in. This is not pie in the sky comfort. This is boots on the ground, God raised his Son, he delivered us from death and he will continue to deliver us from death until our time has come. And don't worry, Paul is not done. But rest for a moment in the present. This is comfort for them and for Paul.

And again as he did in verse seven he will bring us hope. Look down at your Bibles to the end of verse ten. God's word says this,

Hope

On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.

Glory to God! Stand and cheer, your God of comfort is not only in the business of bringing you comfort in this life! He has delivered you from death at his resurrection. He is delivering you from the power of sin presently as you walk in holiness and praise the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort he will deliver you again from the presence of sin! This is your hope believer. In your afflictions you will be comforted by God. You will be a comfort to others, and ultimately you will be delivered from this world and comforted in the presence of God for ever and ever AMEN!

Well, this is a series on prayer and you may wonder if I've forgotten to get to that. I haven't. Here at the end of our section today we see the call to the body at Corinth and to us the body at Clearcreek.

God's word says this in verse eleven,

How then shall we live?

11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

There you have it. The church in any age, must pray. Pray, Paul says, that it will help them. How so, you might ask, because somehow your prayers cause others to give thanks. Sounds like what we have just seen doesn't it. Even your prayers are not only for your good, but for the good of many that they might give thanks.

And finally, look at what they are giving thanks for. For the “blessings granted us through the prayers of many”. What are those blessings? They are the blessings of affliction, wherein we are comforted, and the blessings of comfort that cause us, sons and daughters of “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort”, to be filled with hope. The hope that is Jesus Christ, our great Savior!

Praise God for His comfort of the afflicted until our hope is realized in Glory!

Reflect and Respond

If you love the Lord Jesus Christ I pray our time together in this passage will encourage you to praise God for his comfort in afflictions. Praise God for the hope of Glory, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you do not know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior I would encourage you to call out to him in prayer to save your soul from a hellish eternity without him. Your current sufferings and afflictions are no comparison to an eternity without Christ. Seek him and find rescue from your rebellion against him. In finding him, repenting of your sin, and believing you will for the first time in you life find comfort and that comfort will produce in you hope, a hope that will never end, but only be made more real when you meet him face to face in Glory!