

Sermon outline and notes:

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2 Corinthians 1:3-11 “How to Triumph over Trials”

Intro. This morning I will begin a series of messages through Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. Previously, God had sent Paul to Corinth on one of his missionary journeys to preach the gospel and win people to faith in Christ. After about 18 months of work, a church was well established in the city of Corinth. It was a strategic location for a church. It was one of the largest cities in the ancient world, with a population of 700,000! It was a seaport city. Hundreds of thousands of people passed through every year. This church had a great opportunity to spread the gospel. But as the letter of I Corinthians reveals, they had quite a few internal problems. So Paul sought to correct many of those problems with his first letter. Now, his second letter was written to comfort & encourage the Corinthian believers. Evidently they were troubled and suffering from some form of persecution.

So my message today will deal with the subject of trials. Everyone has them. Even a great Christian like Paul had many trials in his life. In fact, Paul refers to a recent trial that he and Timothy endured while serving the Lord Jesus. Notice how he describes these trials. In v.4 he uses the word “tribulation.” The word literally refers to being under painful pressure. In v.6 he speaks of suffering. In v.8 he speaks of being burdened. And in verses 9-10 he speaks of being near death. I suppose that all of us have experienced pressure, suffering, and burdens. Some of us have been near death. It’s quite likely that there are several in my audience who are going through a heavy burden right now. You’re going through one of those trials of life, and you just don’t know how you’re going to make it. So how can we be victorious over these trials of life? Paul tell us how in this text of Scripture. First of all, we must:

I. SEEK GOD’S COMFORT IN YOUR TRIALS

No one wants to go through trials, but the good news is that you can experience the comfort of God when you do. Here in our text we see that Paul refers to God’s comfort in trials. In fact, he uses some form of the word “comfort” 10 times in this text of Scripture! You can count on God to comfort you in your time of trouble.

Now there are two main truths I want to point out to you about God’s comfort. First of all:

A. His Comfort Corresponds to His Character – The reason you can count on God to comfort you is the fact the He is that kind of a God. Paul says in v.3, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.” Paul begins his letter by praising God for some of His wonderful attributes. First of all, Paul points out that:

1. He Is the Father of Compassion – Actually, the word translated “mercies” (*oiktirmos*) refers to feelings of compassion or pity toward those in distress. Showing mercy is the result. We hear much about the power of God, and perhaps less about the pity of God. Our God enters with us into all our troubles; He is not an indifferent spectator. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses...” Ps. 103:13 says, “As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him.” If you are burdened with life’s problems, go to Him. He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7). He is not indifferent to the suffering that we go through.

Now because God has a heart of compassion,

2. He Is the God of All Comfort – The Greek word for “comfort” is *parakaleo*, which in the verb form means “to call alongside.” It is also translated “encouragement.” What a picture this word gives, of a loving, caring person seeing your broken heart, and calling you to their side, putting their arm around you, and saying just the right word to comfort you. In fact, God has sent His Holy Spirit to be with you at all times. He is called “the Comforter” several times by Jesus (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7).

In Isaiah 66:13 God compared His comforting work to that of a mother: “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you...” Do you remember when you were a little child and in some trouble and distress, and your mother drew you into her arms and comforted you? Perhaps you skinned your knee, and she kissed it, and made you feel better. Who can comfort better than a loving mother? Only God can!

Notice He is the God of “all” comfort. That can be translated, “every kind of comfort” [“all” is without the definite article]. The first kind of comfort we all need is the comfort of forgiveness. At times our suffering results from our own sin. It’s comforting to know that God is willing to forgive us. God said through the prophet Isaiah, “Comfort, yes, comfort My people!... Speak comfort to Jerusalem, ... that her iniquity is pardoned” (Isa. 40:1-2). The debt that stood against us has been paid by our Lord Jesus. Now we can be forgiven. Then, we need comfort to help in every time of trial. Finally, when we face death, the greatest trial of our lives, God gives His dear child dying grace, gives us peace, and comforts us with His presence.

I feel sorry for those who do not have a personal relationship with God. To whom do they turn for comfort? Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers (1 Th. 4:13), saying he did not want them to “sorrow as others who have no hope.” If you don’t have God, you don’t have a basis of comfort when a loved one dies. People turn to all sorts of things for comfort. There is a whiskey called “Southern Comfort.” Well, I’m a Southerner, but that is not a comfort, my friend. That will ruin a home, & destroy your life. Others turn to drugs for comfort, but there is no lasting comfort there. Friend, lasting comfort comes only from God. Turn to Him for comfort.

There was a Salvation Army worker who went to minister to the town atheist. No one came to the door, but she could hear people inside. As she listened, she realized that the atheist’s son was inside on his death bed. The atheist was trying to comfort his son in his dying moments. He was saying, “Son, just hold on, & it will all be over in just a few minutes.” The boy looked up to his dad & said, “Dad, you’ve told me that human life is no different from animal life. You’ve told me to hold on, but there’s nothing to hold on to.” However, for the Christian, we have Someone to hold on to as we face death. God is indeed the God of all comfort.

So God’s comfort corresponds to His character. Furthermore:

B. His Comfort Corresponds to Our Condition – Notice in v.5 Paul says, “For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.” This is such an important truth. Do you see how Paul teaches that God’s promise of comfort is in proportion to our suffering? The more you suffer, the greater will be God’s comfort. We don’t need much comfort when the sun is shining and someone is patting us on the back. But, my friend, we really need comfort in the time of trouble. Someone has said, “When the need is greatest, God is nearest.” Yes, there are times in our lives when we especially need God’s comfort, and He will do so. He will comfort you in the hospital. He will comfort you at the funeral home when you have a loved one there. He can comfort you in any place and at any time.

When someone goes through great suffering, or a great trial, you may think to yourself, “I don’t see how I could handle such suffering.” No, you can’t. But if you are a Christian, God assures you that the greater your trial, the greater the comfort will be.

Now notice what Paul says in the last of v.7, “as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.” Because of their commitment to Jesus Christ, many of these Corinthians were suffering also. Jesus warned His followers that they would suffer because of their connection with Him. The very same hatred that killed Him on the cross now hurts His believers who are one with Him. But Paul assures them that if they partake of suffering for Christ, they will certainly partake of the comfort given by Christ. Paul and Timothy knew how the sufferings and the comforting go together. He in His infinite grace is waiting to minister to your deep need. Just trust Him, and He will comfort you.

Secondly, to have victory over trials, we must:

II. UNDERSTAND GOD’S PURPOSE IN OUR TRIALS

When bad things happen to us, one of the most common reactions is, “Why?” Well, God answers the “why?” question right here in our text. Contrary to what some people teach, one truth that is clear from the Word of God is that God never promises to protect us from all suffering, trials, and difficulties. In fact, He permits us to suffer for some very good reasons. And if you will understand God purpose in your trials, you will be better equipped to handle them.

A. To Be Better Able to Comfort Others in Trials – Paul says in v.4 that God “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” When we go through trials, we typically are not thinking of others but ourselves. We want people to take notice of *our* suffering; we want sympathy and a kind word of love. But we forget that there are others all around us who need it too, and if God comforts you in your trial, it is that you may comfort someone else. Everything that you and I have has been given to us not just to meet our needs, but also for the benefit of others. Regardless of what you have, God has given it to you so that you can share it with others. If you have health, wealth, talent, or a gift, He wants you to use it to share with others. When people see us suffer, and when they also see us exhibiting peace and joy because of God’s comfort, what a witness we can be for Christ!

Let’s suppose you just lost a loved one. Your heart is grieving the loss. Now who will you appreciate receiving words of comfort from the most? Will it be from someone who has never experienced such grief, or from someone who has tears in their eyes because they know what you’re going through? You know the answer.

As most of you know, my mother was diagnosed with a very aggressive brain tumor. We prayed for her healing, but as far as we can tell, it was not God’s will to heal her. I do not believe that God *caused* her brain tumor, but one reason He did not intervene is found in my text. As a pastor, I have an important ministry to grieving families. But I had yet to experience the loss of a loved one as close as a mother, spouse, or child. I had yet to experience God’s comfort at such time. But after her death I experienced God’s comfort in a very real way. Now I am better able to minister God’s comfort to others. So God took something bad, and made something good from it.

Well, God wasn’t through with my training in ministering comfort. Just a couple of years later my sister died a tragic death at the age of 51. If you have lost a loved one, so have I. If you have wept over a child, so have I. If you have lost a job, so have I. If you have had an automobile accident, so have I. I sure hope I have graduated from the school of sympathy by now! And if I haven’t experienced your particular sorrow, it’s likely that someone in this church has, and God has a special person who is ready to minister to you in your time of need.

So the next time you go through a trial, and God comforts you and helps you through it, remember that He is also doing so that you might be better able to help others in their time of need.

Who can minister to a widow better than someone who has become a widow herself? She can give comfort to that grieving widow as she testifies to the comfort that she has received. She can testify that God has provided for her. Listen, there are hurting people all around us. What greater ministry could you have than ministering comfort to the hurting? Don't waste your sorrows. Don't dwell on your sorrows. Allow God to comfort you, that you may be able to comfort others! God wants to turn that experience into a ministry.

Another reason God allows trials into our lives is:

B. To Bring Some Spiritual Good to Others – Paul says in v.6, “Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.” Here we see that Paul was willing to suffer as a missionary that others might come to Christ & be saved.

Even so, if God allows you to suffer, He is not just doing some spiritual good in *your* life, such as building character. He is also probably seeking to bring about some spiritual good in the life of someone else. Perhaps someone will be saved as a result of seeing how you handle a difficult trial. Or perhaps your suffering will open the door to their heart for the gospel. Suffering the various trials of life is the price we must pay to be used of God to minister to others.

I heard a story about two pastors who were together in west Texas for a revival meeting. They were traveling on one of those long, deserted Texas highways when a tire blew out. Unfortunately, they discovered that they did not have a jack to change the tire. One pastor said to the other, “Well, the Bible says, ‘In everything give thanks.’” Well, his pastor friend was not interested in hearing that, and he wasn't very thankful. A few moments later a young man driving a pickup truck stopped & asked if they needed any help. They said, “We sure do. We don't have a jack to change this tire.” The young Texas cowboy volunteered to help them out. As he was changing the tire he found out that they were both pastors and he said, “What a coincidence. Just this week I have been thinking about my life, & I have some questions for you guys.” As a result of that flat tire, they were able to witness to him about the Lord!

C. To Bring Us to Trust Totally in God – In v.9 Paul says, “Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.” This is wonderful. This explains why God permits us to have trouble or to be sick. So often in life, we think that *we* can handle our problems. But as revealed here in my text, Paul and Timothy reached a point that they did not have even the least confidence in themselves or in their own resources. That was the very purpose of God. They had reached a point where there was nothing else they could do but trust in God. And Paul gives a very good reason why we should trust God. He says in the last of v.9 that “God... raises the dead.” Listen, death is the greatest problem we face. Since God can raise the dead, then He can help with any problem you face!

However, do you know what we do when a trial or burden comes our way? We first try to handle it ourselves. Isn't that right? We struggle, and do everything we can to handle the problem we are facing. But all too often we realize we can't handle it, and then we get to the place where God wants us to be all along. He wants us to trust wholly in Him.

That reminds me of when the disciples were on the Sea of Galilee, and a great storm came up. And the harder the wind blowed, and the higher the waves, the harder they struggled to row the boat to shore. Then finally, when they had exhausted all self-effort, they called out to the Lord & asked Him to save them.

Indeed, God wants to take away your self-confidence, & replace it with God-confidence. God cannot work where there is self-confidence. He wants to bring you to the place where you fully trust in Him.

Finally, God allows trials:

D. To Bring Us to Praise the Lord – In this text of Scripture Paul begins by exploding in praise to God as he thinks about God’s comfort and deliverance in his times of trouble. He says in v.3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” The word translated “blessed” is *eulogetos*, which refers to the act of speaking well of someone. When God comforts us, or strengthens us, or delivers us in our time of trial, that causes us to praise Him! On the other hand, if you seem to get yourself out of your trouble without God’s help, who gets the praise? You do! So God allows us to get over our heads, and when we trust in Him & He helps us, God is praised!

So considering all these reasons God allows trials in our lives, we should not get too upset when they come. See them as opportunities for God to work. In fact, this is why Paul wrote, “in *everything* give thanks.” Even trials should cause us to thank God for His comfort, and the other good things He is doing through our trials. David says, “I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psa. 34:1). In trials we can experience God’s presence in a wonderful way. And when we do, we should overflow in praise to God. Psa. 50:23 says, “Whoever offers praise glorifies Me...” So instead of complaining, we ought to give thanks!

God allows trials, but I am glad to report that as soon as God has accomplished His purpose in allowing them, He often removes them. The old black preacher used to say that his favorite Scripture was “it came to pass.” That phrase is found 452 times in the King James Bible. He liked that Scripture because that’s the way it is with trials. They come to pass.

Finally, to have victory over trials, we must:

III. ANTICIPATE GOD’S DELIVERANCE IN OUR TRIALS

Even though Paul was in the center of God’s will, serving as a missionary, that did not mean that God protected him from experiencing trials. In fact, Paul described one of his recent trials in v.8, “For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia...” Paul is probably referring to a time when they were almost martyred for the cause of Christ, perhaps by a mob. In fact, Paul says in v.9, “Yes, we had the sentence [*apokrima*] of death in ourselves...” We don’t know if they actually were convicted to die by a court, or if the original language means that they responded to the situation by saying they were sure to die. Either way, they thought they were about to die. As a result, he says in the last of v.8, “that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.” The pressure got to be such a weight that Paul and Timothy crumbled under it. This is encouraging. Paul was such a great Christian, but even *he* reached the point of despair. He just about lost hope of being rescued.

Now let’s see the good news. Paul says in v.10 that God “delivered us from so great a death...” Yes, perhaps just in the nick of time, God delivered them by some means. What a wonderful God we serve!

Now I want to share a few thoughts about God’s deliverance. First of all:

A. Past Deliverance Gives Us Confidence that God Will Continue to Deliver –Notice that in v.10 Paul speaks of a threefold deliverance. He not only reports that God delivered him in the past, but he goes on to say, “and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.” Essentially Paul says here, “God has delivered, and as we continue our service He does deliver, and as we look forward to the future He will yet deliver.” This is faith’s confidence in our gracious God and Father. After such a supreme deliverance will God ever fail them? Ever since that great deliverance, when God so signally proved Himself the Deliverer, Paul and Timothy achieved new strength of hope for deliverance from anything that might still come upon them. Hope grows in a

twofold way: by means of the promises in the Word, and by means of our past experiences of God's deliverance, especially such as reveal the delivering hand of God in a manner not to be mistaken.

So the next time you face a great trial, just reflect back on the times that God has delivered you in the past. Then you will have greater faith & confidence as you trust God to deliver you or provide for you this time as well.

However, God will not *always* deliver us from death. Some Christians have been martyred. Others have suffered death from some terrible disease, or some terrible accident. And unless Jesus comes again first, we will all face physical death at some point. But even then, we will be delivered from the sting of death. It is only like going to sleep, & waking up in heaven. For as the Scripture says, "absent from the body, [is] to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8).

B. Deliverance Was Aided by Prayer – Paul says in v.11, "you also helping together in prayer for us..." Those of us trying to preach the Word, seeking to do public service for the Lord Jesus Christ, will never know until we get home to Heaven how much we are indebted for sustaining grace to the prayers of God's children. If there is any power at all in my messages I know it is because somebody at home or in the audience is praying for me. Was there ever such a man of God as the apostle Paul in all the centuries since? And yet how dependent he was upon the prayers of believers. Time spent in praying for the servants of God is not a waste of time or breath. It can result in a great work of God.

When you go through a trial, one of the most important things you should get people to do is pray for you. It is the prayers of God's people that will result in God comforting you, strengthening you, and delivering you. Don't hesitate one moment to ask people to pray for you when you go through a trial.

C. Deliverance Results in Thanksgiving – Paul says in the last of v.11, "that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many." When you get people to pray for you, they are more aware of what you are going through. Then, when God works on your behalf, guess what happens? People offer up prayers of thanksgiving to God, and He is glorified.

Conclusion: So the next time you go through a trial, remember that God will comfort you in a way that only He can do. He will accomplish a number of good purposes in your life, & the lives of others. And praise God, often times He will deliver you in due time from your trial.

As you go through trials in life, do you know for sure that God will walk with you, & comfort you? Do you have a relationship with Him? Until your sins are forgiven by repentance & faith in Jesus Christ, I can tell you that you do not. Don't go another moment without knowing that Christ is your Savior. At some time in your life you will find out how much you need Him.

Sources: H.A. Ironside, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1939); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); Alan Redpath, *Blessings Out of Buffetings: Studies in Second Corinthians* (Old Tapan, NJ: Revell, 1965). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). Nothing available from Maclaren.

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