

The God Who Comforts

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in 2nd Corinthians, chapter 1. I'm just looking at that section, but maybe if we could home in on verse 3.

I want us to look at all the sections, verses 1 to 11, but verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

But verses 1 to 11. Now, a lot of people have the idea that ministers or people who are maybe at the forefront of gospel work are somehow immune from struggles and temptations and trials, and that somehow the Lord has kind of cocooned them and kept them free from these sort of things. But we know that's not the case at all. And in fact, it's probably true to say that those who do the most, not necessarily just in the ministry, but in any gospel work, those who do the most for the Lord are most likely to be targets for the evil one, who will seek to do everything in his power to make life as difficult and troublesome as they can.

Many a Christian has been troubled with dark thoughts. We often think that the nature of being a Christian is that once a person becomes a believer and following the Lord, then that life will be plain sailing.

[1 : 50] But it is anything but. In this world, Jesus said, you shall have tribulation. It wasn't a maybe you might have tribulation. There's a strong possibility you'll have tribulation.

No, he said you will have. In this world, you will have tribulation. But he said, be of good cheer, he said, because I have overcome the world. The end result is overcoming.

But, he said, there will be tribulation. And some of that tribulation involves darkness of mind. We sometimes think that the Christian will always be full of joy.

And while joy is something that the Lord is part of the fruit of the Spirit, we live in a fallen world and we are fallen men and women.

We are fallen people. And it is inevitable, but there are, just as there are ailments in the body, so there are in the mind. And Christians are not immune from that.

[2 : 46] Probably one of the greatest preachers ever in anywhere, but certainly in Britain was Spurgeon. And Spurgeon was somebody who had terrible times of darkness. In fact, he wrote, I am subject of depressions of spirit, so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I do.

Now, a lot of people wouldn't think of the great Spurgeon as somebody who experienced things like that. But he did. And many of the Lord's people have had to go through times like that.

And he was the great apostle of the, the great giant of the faith, the great apostle of the church. He was a man who knew all about hardships. And he was a man who was often taken to the point of almost breaking.

He was taken to areas of life that were really, he experienced, he writes about it, about hardships, about troubles, about mental troubles and physical troubles, about imprisonments, about abandonment, about stonings, about shipwrecks, about starvations.

You could go anywhere and look at all the awful things of life. And Paul was there. So Paul writes about these things. Now, this letter is a very personal letter. The second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul really opens his heart.

[4 : 13] And he kind of says more about himself in this letter than probably any of the other letters. And from the beginning, Paul highlights, now he did this quite often, that he was an apostle.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus, of Christ Jesus. And the reason he did that was people were doubting his credentials as an apostle.

Because, you see, an apostle, there were some qualifications to being an apostle. You had to be somebody who was specifically called by the Lord, chosen by the Lord, and sent out by the Lord on a specific directive command by the Lord, who had, by the risen Lord, somebody to be an apostle, you had to see the risen Jesus.

This was one of the qualifications. To be an apostle, you had to be a witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, this is why Paul referred to himself at times as an apostle born out of time. Because the apostle Paul had never seen Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, prior to Jesus' ascension.

[5 : 34] Remember how Jesus rose from Bethany and that ascension where the disciples were present. But in between the resurrection, in between Jesus' rising from the dead and his ascension, Jesus kept appearing and reappearing to not just his immediate disciples, but to many in the church, to hundreds within the church.

But it is only, only his own people saw him. He never revealed himself or showed himself as a risen saviour to any other than to his own.

Now, the apostle Paul, of course, was alive and would no doubt have actually seen Jesus in the flesh prior to his death because it was very shortly after the resurrection, after the very birth of the New Testament church, when Stephen, who was the first martyr, Paul, or who was then Saul, was party to that execution.

And in fact, he was a young man and it tells us that those who were stoning Stephen, they laid down their outer clothes at the feet of that man called Saul as he put Stephen to death.

So, there's no doubt that Saul would have seen Jesus in the flesh. But he hadn't seen Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, he hadn't seen him in that period because Jesus didn't show himself to any others.

[7 : 06] But we know that the Lord Jesus did reveal himself to Saul. As Saul was making his way, remember, down to Damascus from heaven, remember, the blinding light that came down, shone down, and Saul ended up on the ground.

And Jesus said to him, why are you persecuting me? And we remember all that happened there.

And it was there that the Lord Jesus actually revealed himself.

The Saul, who later became Paul, actually saw the risen Jesus. He saw him in his glory. He saw him in his majesty. He was struck blind by what he saw.

But he saw him. And so that is why he fulfilled the qualification of being an apostle. His commission was given by Jesus, he was sent out by Jesus, and he actually saw the risen Jesus, which had to be one of the qualifications of being an apostle.

And so he says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God. In other words, he's saying, I was chosen by the Lord.

[8 : 21] I didn't one day decide I want to be an apostle. Since I've become a believer, Paul is saying, I didn't just take this upon myself. I didn't look at the church and think, oh, there's Peter, and there's John, there's these men, apostles.

Well, I want to go right to the top. I want to be in the highest place. I want the authority of an apostle. I'm going to appoint myself an apostle. No, he said, I am an apostle simply, purely, by the will of God.

This is God's will for me. But, then he says, he identifies Timothy, Timothy as her brother. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother.

And it's lovely the way that Paul talks here, because, as we said, an apostle was the highest authority within the church. But, Paul here, all of a sudden, identifies himself as a brother, not as the apostle over everybody, but as a brother, the brother of Timothy.

And, he is also the brother to everybody within the church. And, I think that's something we've always got to hone in on, is the unity and the familiness of the church.

[9 : 40] We all belong to one another. Every one of us, in Christ Jesus, we belong to one another. We mustn't lose sight of that. And, it's something that's all too easy to lose sight of.

Our identity in Christ, our belonging to one another. And, that's what Paul, Paul is highlighting this fact. You and I belong to one another.

And, we've also got to remember that. I am yours and you are mine. We are all one together. We belong to one Father in heaven. And, we have one elder brother, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember, Jesus makes that, there's that, an amazing expression given in the Bible. He's not ashamed to call us brothers. Not ashamed to call them brethren.

Isn't that wonderful? You and I know that sometimes things happen in families. And, families, oh, you know, I feel really ashamed. And, there might be moments within the family circle that, oh, there's a sense of shame about what somebody has done.

[10:48] Right. You think of what we have done, each one of us. I look at myself and I think of many other things and I'm so ashamed. And, yet, Jesus, at the end of the day will say, I'm not ashamed to stand beside this person and identify this person as belonging to me.

I'm not ashamed. I, and this person, that's you, were one together. And, so, there's this lovely sense of the belonging, the identity that we have with Jesus Christ.

He's not ashamed of us. even though there are times that we are ashamed of ourselves. And then Paul says, to all the church of God at Corinth, to the church of God that is at Corinth with all the saints who are in the whole of Achai.

Now, the word church is used in the Bible in two senses. First of all, the church is used regarding all believers worldwide.

the church sometimes is spoken of in its widest sense in the extension of the kingdom. Every believer belongs to the church, the body of Christ.

[12:02] But then the church is also used in the Bible regarding locality. Here we have the church in Lewis. Here we would, so that we talk about the particular identity of where the church is in a locality, in a place.

So that's what Paul is referring to here, to the church of God that is at Corinth. And then Paul, again, we have to notice this, to the church of God.

We've always got to remember that the church is God's church. We belong to that church, but it's God's. And it's precious to the Lord, and we have to always be careful and remember the church isn't about us.

It's not our ideas or our agendas. The church is based upon the word of God, upon what God has set out for us in it.

And we've all got to remember that. And sometimes people, and good people, can lose sight of who they are and what their obligation is to the church, because the church ultimately is the Lord's.

[13:16] and the Lord Jesus Christ has loved the church so much that he gave himself for it. So we've always got to remember that. The church has been purchased by the blood of Christ.

The church belongs to God. So it's not up to us to make the church what we want, or to impose what we want in and upon the church.

The church belongs to God. God, we've always got to remember that. And it would help things an awful lot, and it would have helped things historically if people could just remember that.

And so Paul then talks, and he's writing, we've got to remember, he's writing from the background of really tough times. And when we're going through really, really difficult times, it's sometimes hard to get our focus right.

Because if you're going through, supposing it's a really harrowing experience, whether it's within your own life, whether it's with regard to your health, with regard to work, with regard to family, whether it's wide, it doesn't matter, just so many different things, but it's a really difficult time, you're having a really hard time.

[14:37] It's very hard to get focus. You and I know that, it's hard to focus when everything is homing in on you. But Paul is really teaching us here the importance of focusing upon the Lord.

And once we start focusing in upon ourselves and our troubles, you know, you go on a downward spiral. And we've all been there. You just go down and down.

The Lord is, Paul is saying, you know, you've got to focus. You've got to focus upon the Lord. Upon who he is. And that's what, this is what Paul does. And we've got to remember, Paul, see how bad it is.

Verse 8, For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced, for we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength, that we despaired of life itself.

Now, I don't know exactly what it was, but Paul's experiences were so harrowing, so awful, that he felt that they didn't know whether he was going to make it out in the end.

[15:42] It really was so bad. And yet, this is what Paul says, verse 3, blessed he said, be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So you see, Paul, at this particular point, is not looking at himself or his troubles, he's focused on the Lord. That's what he's doing. And that's why it's important for us to do.

Now, Paul, it's quite a unique description that he gives here, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We find this exact quotation, or this description given two other times in the New Testament.

Paul himself uses that in Ephesians, where he describes, where he praises God for, where he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he's praising God for what he has done for us.

Because in that he says, who chose us before the foundation of the world. And you know, that's the pillow or the rock that the believer rests on.

[16:56] That we were chosen before the foundation of this world. And there's many a time you and I go back and we thank the Lord for that. For the fact that before ever this world was, the Lord had knew us and had chosen us and that in due time the Holy Spirit would work within our heart.

And that is something that gives, we rest our life on that. We live our life on that. So, that's the first time. And then in Peter, Peter also uses that expression and he, in 1 Peter, he talks about, 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 3, where he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has caused us to be born again to our living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.

So, Peter is using this exact same description with regard to our future. So, Paul first is looking at our past, what God has done for us, Peter is looking to what God has done in the future for us, and now Paul is looking at what God is actually doing for us just now.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Now, again, when we see here that the salvation that the Lord has given to us is a salvation that is absolutely sure for time and for eternity, and that the Lord is with us all the way, every step of the way.

And the apostle here praises God because he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our Father because of what Jesus Christ has done.

[19:15] And you know, we've also got to remember that as the Father looks on us, he looks on us through Jesus. His love for us comes through Jesus.

He looks at us, and this is sometimes why we forget or we find it difficult to understand. We say, how can God look on me with all my sin with all that I do?

And he's accepting me because he's looking at you through Jesus. Jesus is between you and the Father.

And he, because of what Jesus has done for you, and because you are in him, he is accepting you. Because everything that Jesus has done has been made over to you.

Jesus' righteousness as your Savior has been made over to you. Your sin has been made over to Jesus. And Jesus cancelled that, God the Father cancelled that sin out because of what his son did.

[20:21] So, we've also got to remember this, that we are accepted in the beloved, that God looks at us through his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. blessed. And then we, to praise him, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercy.

That's a lovely expression, the Father of course, for the Jew, the Father meant the originator. For instance, in Genesis, it talks about Jubal, who was the father of all who play the lyre and pipe, and musical instruments.

And his brother, the Father of those who dwell in tents and keep livestock. So, the Father of, was the one who originated, the one with whom this originated, the one who, as it were, like started.

That's why Satan is known as the Father of lies, because lying has originated with the devil. But here, we're told that Jesus, that the Lord, is the Father of mercies.

mercies has originated with God. And, you know, this is a wonderful thing. In grace, God gives us what we don't deserve.

[21:39] In mercy, God doesn't give us what we do deserve. Isn't that an amazing thing? Because it is of his mercies that we are not consumed.

Let us remember that. We're here today on mercies ground, and if it weren't for God's mercy, we would be consumed. That's what it tells us. It is of his mercies that we are not consumed.

So, you see, grace gives us what we don't deserve, and mercy doesn't give us what we do deserve. And how wonderful, as it says in the word, his mercies are new every morning, every single morning.

Today, when you get up, his mercies were new. His mercies for you, were new again today. In other words, there is a constant display and supply of his mercies.

Why? Because he loves mercies. He delights in it. Isn't that beautiful? You know, when you delight in something, it's something that you just really love doing. It excites you, yet passionate about it.

[22 : 51] Well, that's what it says of the Lord, that he delights in mercy. It thrills him to be displaying mercy, to be giving of his mercy. And we also praise him because he is a God of all comfort.

Now, you and I know that when we try and comfort people, sometimes we're not, we often use the expression, we're not very good comforters.

and I'm sure all of us wish that we were far, far better at being able to comfort people. And when we express sympathy and we really feel within our own heart for people, sometimes we can, even with the best intentions in the world, we can make the situation worse because our expression of that sympathy or the way we go about it might not be the best.

we can sometimes actually weaken people. Sometimes you can give, you can be over sympathetic, that might sound strange, but sometimes you can weaken people rather than strengthen them.

Well, the way that the Lord comforts us is that he comes alongside us and he strengthens us, he helps us.

[24 : 11] You know, this word, come alongside, what is used here, of this actual word where he is the God of all comfort who comforts us, comes alongside us.

It's the same word that is spoken of in the Holy Spirit as the comforter in John chapter 14 to 16 where Jesus talks about the comforter, the one who comes alongside.

and that's what the Lord does, he comes alongside us to help us, to strengthen us, to uphold us, to enable us. And it's so important then, when we're going through the troubles, going back to what we said earlier, as the apostle is saying, look, I've gone through, I'm telling you, I am in severe troubles and trials and difficulties.

What do I do? I look to the God. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all mercy, the God of all comfort.

As the psalmist said, I to the hills will lift mine eyes, from whence doth come my need, my safety cometh from the Lord who heaven and earth hath made. You know, isn't that wonderful?

[25 : 30] You look beyond the hills, to the one who made the hills, and that takes your mind to going beyond the hills of God who made everything. And you say, hey, that's where I look. And that's what we've got to do, keep focusing, focus upon the Lord.

And when he becomes a big picture in our heart and in our mind, even that helps us, but he has promised that he will come alongside us.

And we see that as God comforts us in our trials, in our troubles, it's not just for ourselves. See what he says, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in affliction with a comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

This is coming back to family, to belonging to one another. God doesn't just do things in isolation and say, right, this is your life and I'm going to deal with you and it's not for anybody else.

This is just for you. No. However God deals with us, it is for us but it's for others as well. Sometimes God will touch you to get to somebody else.

[26 : 44] But the apostle is showing here when we have experienced God's grace and God's help and God's strength and God's encouragement and God's comfort, when somebody else is in the same situation as we were in, then we are to go to that person and seek to comfort that person in the same way as the Lord.

In other words, we're to share our experiences. We're to tell them how the Lord dealt. This is how the Lord dealt with me. You go to the Lord and this is what the Lord wants us to do, to share in all these things.

And you know, it's wonderful when the Lord strengthens and comforts people. We've often seen it. People are going through really harrowing times and yet there's a strength and there's a faith that is evident.

And you're saying to yourself, whoa, that's amazing. It's amazing that number of times that I've seen people in their pain and in their sorrow and yet they'll say to me, but God is good.

That's what they're able to say, God is good. Even in the dark, in the dark times, because they're conscious that even down there that the Lord is still with them, the Lord is still upholding, the Lord is still enabling.

[28 : 12] And that's a great witness because often, often, and again I have heard from people of the world, they've said to me that they've been so impressed sometimes with the attitude and the spirit of Christians in the midst of trouble and trial.

It's impacted them, it's affected them because they've seen something of Christ at work within that person.

And that's, so as I say, it's all part of everything together. together. And we've always got to remember, of course, that suffering and trials, all these things are but divine appointment.

And again, that helps us. Although we might not in the slightest understand what the Lord is doing, but the Lord knows what we're doing. If we are afflicted, it's for your comfort and salvation.

And if we are comforted, it's for your comfort. Again, that's just highlighting the very thing that we're saying. and so on. And then the apostle goes on to say and tell about this fearful experience that they're going through.

[29 : 29] And Paul is so aware always that the Lord's hand is in everything. That our troubles don't come randomly.

And the Lord is often, what he's doing is he's breaking us. What's he doing? See verse 9. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, but that was to make us rely not on our shells, but on God who raises the dead.

You see, we don't want trouble and trial in our life. You don't. I don't. I want my life to be as plain sailing as possible. I want it to be free from I would just live a nice, gentle, easy passage through this world.

Everybody would. But that's not the way it always works. We've always got to remember there's two sides to the picture. The way we want and the passion that God wants us to be.

And that's a problem. The passion that God wants us to be is not always just who we are. God says, that's who you are, but I've got to change you.

[30 : 48] I have a goal for your life, and that goal is I have to change you more and more to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it's going to hurt because I have to break you.

I have to bring you to rely upon myself more and more and more. And you know, there's many a time that the Christian will pray, oh Lord, lessen the burden on me.

Sometimes the Lord does, but sometimes what he does is he strengthens us. And sometimes he actually gives us more of a burden. Have you ever prayed for the Lord to take away something and he's made it worse?

Well, it is very simply that the Lord says, I know what I'm doing. It's like the refiner where he's standing by the furnace and he knows how much heat has to be there.

He knows when the dross is going to be coming away. We think we say to the Lord, oh, that's enough. I'm sorted now. The Lord says, no, you're not. Got to turn up the heat a wee bit more.

[31 : 52] And it's, we don't like it. Of course we don't. We fight against it. But the Lord brings us down so that the fighting, we fight less and less and learn to submit more.

That's what the apostle is saying. to make us rely not on ourselves. We want to rely on ourselves. We don't want by nature to have to rely on somebody.

You know, when you see a person, maybe in a wheelchair, who was, I know somebody who was incredibly active, a great athlete, and is now through a debilitating illness, is in a wheelchair.

wheelchair. And has really struggled with it, because he was so fit. And I was saying, that must be really, really, really difficult. You're somebody who could run forever, and he can barely move.

He can't anymore choose to get up and go and say, he's depended upon somebody else to wheel him here or wheel him there. And in a sense, that's what the Lord is doing with us.

[33 : 02] At a spiritual sense, he's saying, you've been too busy going here and there on your own. I have a path for you. I have a plan for you. And I'm going to have to break you.

And I am going to take you in the spiritual wheelchair. I'm going to be taking you. I'm going to guard you. I'm going to guide your life. This is the way it's to be. And so we've got to learn in the furnace to rely upon the Lord more and more and more.

Paul saw this as all a necessary breaking. And then he says in verse 10, he delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us. On him, time is gone, on him we have set our hope that he will

deliver us again.

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. Verse 10, he delivered us from such a deadly peril.

And you see again the past, the present, the future. He's done it in the past, he's doing it in the present, and he will continue to do it in the future. But Paul is saying you also must help us by prayer.

[34 : 16] You know, you might think your prayers aren't doing very much. You have no idea how much benefit they are doing. Prayer is absolutely essential to the work of the gospel.

It is essential to everything that we do. And we must pray for one another. Don't forget, remember we're family. Pray for one another. The apostle, he was this great man, as great an ambassador for Christ probably, whoever lived, you could almost say that, who just gave himself entirely.

And how often through the different letters, Paul is saying pray for me. Pray for us. Pray, pray, pray. He's always asking the church, pray. That's something you can do. Sometimes you say to yourself, what can I do?

Well, that's something we can all do. In fact, it's something we can't do enough of, is to pray. And that's what Paul is so conscious of. You must pray for us.

Let me ask as we conclude, do you know Jesus Christ as this great deliverer? The one who has delivered in the past, continues to deliver in the present, and will finally deliver you into the glory of Emmanuel's land.

[35 : 35] Well, today Jesus is saying, if you don't know me, I'm here, and I will do everything that my word tells you, that I will do for you. Cast yourself into his care.

let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray that you will indeed bless us with every spiritual blessing. Help us, Lord, to see you and to realize that the troubles that come into our lives, although there will always be trouble because of the sin that is part and partial of life, we recognize that because of our love for you, because we are your disciples, then there will be troubles that are unique to this.

That is how it was. Jesus was rejected in this world, and we will often be rejected because of our love for Jesus.

And help us to remember this, but help us also to lay hold upon your strength and your deliverance. And so we pray to bless everybody here today. Bless us with health and strength of body, mind, and soul.

Take us to our home safely, forgiving us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. We'll conclude singing in Psalm 125.

[37 : 01] Psalm 125. God gives you Luke.

Cimichel Foppelfeen. Naraan Hansen Psalm 125 Han draum nie dokes an een jere. Han draum nie dokes an een jere.

Han draum nie dokes an een jere. Znach tefosel karocheel.

Znach tefosel karocheel.

Znach tefosel karocheel. Znach tefosel karocheel.

[38 : 50] Znach tefosel karocheel. Znach tefosel karocheel.

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