

God of all comfort

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Seems very apt after that phone call to be preaching on God of all comfort.

! God of all comfort. So, I'm going to read from 2 Corinthians chapter 1. I haven't got it on the screen, so either listen or follow if you've got your Bible with you.

I'm going to be reading from the New International Version. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 3. Praise be, writes Paul to the church in Corinth.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Who comforts us in all our troubles.

So that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the suffering of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

[1 : 17] 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.

And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our suffering, so also you share in our comfort.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.

Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and He will deliver us again. On Him we have set our hope, that He will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.

[2 : 27] Then many will give thanks on our behalf, for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of the many.

First thing to note there is that Paul had a challenge from his friends. How many times can you get comfort in one opening to a letter? And he succeeded.

He got nine comforts in the first four verses. So good for Paul. Next slide, please. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We know that. Paul's, the participants of Paul's letters probably knew that. But I always think it's worth pausing.

This is one of those things that if you are someone who meditates, or allows a verse to bounce around your head for a little while, or for something to just seep into your being.

[3 : 31] This is one of those things that we can easily miss over. We can easily sort of read through, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother to the church, grace and peace.

Grace and peace. Praise be to the God of our Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ. At the very beginning of Paul's letter, but the very beginning of each day, we need to remind ourselves and solidify in our thinking and our praying and our being that day the truth that we have God as our Father, that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, I've put that there just as almost as a beginning of a reminder, a beginning of an encouragement, a beginning of a, when we think about God as comforter, the vastness of God, the truth of God.

God is the Father of compassion. I'm not sure I'm going to pronounce this correctly. Oik trimos, tirimos, use your own, load those letters to make your own word, really.

It's, if you play Scrabble, I'm sure there's something in there. Forgive me for those of you who are Greek scholars. I can't quite get that. I've tried to practice it and I didn't.

[5 : 11] But God is the Father of compassion, of mercy, of pity. So, God is our source of that compassion.

Pity not in a sort of sickly sense. Pity not in a sort of, oh, that's a pity sense. But that merciful, loving pity.

Which says, I am with you in this tough time. And then, where I want to go this morning, God of all, comfort.

Paraklesis. Comfort. Encouragement. Exhortation. Consolation. God is the God of all comfort.

And I suppose that when I was preparing this and I was thinking about this, I just had this sense that we have a number of people, maybe more than a number.

[6 : 28] Which is a stupid thing to say because it's just a bigger number, isn't it? If it's more than a number. Anyway, forgive me. There are people here who need to know God's compassion, God's comfort, God's mercy today.

And I'm speaking, I hope, words of comfort to you from heaven. And so, if that's you today, please, God is saying, I am the God of all comfort to you in your circumstance today.

It might be that only you know about it, except that you and God know about it. God is reaching out for you. Next slide, please, shall I?

Paraklesis. It's a nice word, isn't it? It flows. It sort of, I like it as a word.

The act of calling someone to one side for the purpose of offering comfort or encouragement. It literally means to call near.

[7 : 43] Come on. Come on. As a child who is distressed is called by a parent, come here.

Just come and have a hug. As a friend who sees their friend in distress, as a friend who sees their friend sad, scared, upset, frightened, lonely, discouraged, come on.

That's the depth of that word. Calling someone near. Calling someone to your side for a cuddle, for a hug, for two purposes.

To comfort. To comfort, to offer consolation in times of distress, in times which are upsetting, in times which are a real struggle.

But also, the same word is this idea of encouragement or exhortation in the context of moral or spiritual guidance.

[9 : 06] and that's the other part of our responsibility to receive and to give moral and spiritual guidance.

Come here, Andy. You did not be acting like this. You shouldn't have said that. You shouldn't have done that.

God wants better than that. And that's hard, isn't it? Who do you think you are to tell me? Well, you are my brother and my sister and you're doing this from love.

You're doing this from comfort. From the comfort that comes from God. God. I'm going to come back to that in a moment, but that idea of exhortation is a really important one.

And you can read, if you read history of preachers from the last century or two centuries ago, from the 1800s and the early 1900s, you read of preachers who would stand in the pulpit and point at people in the congregation and say, you, you've done this this week.

[10 : 35] I saw you on Thursday night outside the cat and fiddle. I saw you doing this, being that, doing the other. I don't think that was necessarily what Paul has in mind here and frankly what God has in mind.

It's not about humiliation. Humiliation. paraklesis is often, very often, mostly, associated with the work of the Holy Spirit.

John 14 verse 16 springs to mind where the Holy Spirit is described as the comforter or the helper. So we have this dual role or this dual understanding of comfort, one which we mustn't lose sight of, neither of which we mustn't lose sight of.

Of course, Barnabas was called the son of paraklesis, the son of encouragement, Barnabas the encourager. Next slide, please, Shelley. Now, this is what God does.

He comforts us in all our troubles, says Paul. He comforts us in all our troubles. And I just want to deconstruct this verse just for a moment.

[12 : 01] All. I looked at the Greek and I did a deep study on it, and what that word in Greek means is all. It took me a while.

The whole of every part, every kind of trouble. There is no trouble that God cannot comfort us from.

And again, that's just so encouraging. It needs to be so encouraging. It needs to be something that we need to celebrate. There's nothing that we can take to God that He won't comfort us.

He won't draw alongside us that He won't comfort and courage or exhort us on. Nothing. All of it. Every bit of your life.

Every bit of your situation. All of that struggle, all of that struggle that you're facing, saying this is just a labyrinth, this is just too hard, this is just too scary or upsetting or shameful.

[13:15] God comforts all of it. He can comfort us in all of our troubles. Troubles, tribulation, affliction, distress, persecution, and so it goes.

We are comforted in all of our troubles. And then verse 5 goes on to say our comfort abounds, it overflows.

If you are struggling, as all of us do from time to time, if you're struggling with a single situation, maybe a family situation, if you're struggling with a work situation, a finance situation, a relationship situation, a health situation, for yourself, or if you are feeling the pain of somebody else in that situation, God's comfort abounds.

God's paraklesis abounds in that situation. love of Father God.

And I confess that for me, sometimes, quite often, I guess, in my daily routine, I forget the size of the all-encompassing love of God.

[14:57] I know, intellectually, I know, but it just feels that maybe I'm missing out. I'm forgetting how vast it is.

Nothing, Romans 8 says, nothing can separate us from the love of God. Now, again, we know this. This is not deep theology, but it's truths that we forget, or let me own it, I forget, in the busyness, bustle, and challenge of life.

And as I've been preparing, it's really been helpful to bring myself back to this notion. that God comforts us in all of our troubles.

Let's move on. Okay, Arthur, snuggle in God's arms when you're hurting, when you feel lonely or left out.

[16:09] Let Him cradle you, comfort you, reassure you of His all-sufficient power and love. I rather like that, and I rather like the carving, that picture of a carving, isn't it nice?

I don't know where it's from. Snuggle in God's arms. Allow yourself to know that comfort. Now, next slide, please.

Oh, gosh, you've gone too, that's it, thank you. Either that's a hint from the back, carry on, Andy, it's getting late. Now, there's a bit of a deal here, and there often is a deal.

There often is a deal with us as a fellowship of believers. He comforts us so we can comfort others. So, it's not just God's job to offer comfort, it's our job too.

It's our job too. It's an important part of God's economy. As we are forgiven, so we forgive. As we are comforted, so we comfort.

[17:26] We're comforted so that we can comfort others. As we're comforted, and as we comfort others, it produces in us pain.

Patient endurance. I was looking at that and I was thinking about this yesterday afternoon actually, patient endurance. And let me be really honest, there are times I don't want patient endurance. I'm sorry, and I should, and I confess that not necessarily just as a flippant remark, I confess that as something I need to work on.

patient endurance. Getting on, getting on, getting on, patiently. I can blame it on my Celtic roots, my Welshness, we're an excitable bunch.

I can blame it on my personality and character, I'm an excitable bunch. but God is asking me to grow in patient endurance as I receive comfort from God and as I comfort others.

[18:43] And God is asking you to do the same because we have hope, we have hope. Nothing can separate us from God's love. and ultimately, ultimately, our future is secured in heaven.

But while we are on earth, patient endurance through hope is a fruit of the comfort we receive and the comfort we give.

and this emphasizes the importance of church as community, as a fellowship, as a fellowship together.

There's 80 something people here this morning. It might have gone up, I'm not spoken to Ray recently. 80 something people here. We are a fellowship. We're a group of people drawn together by Jesus.

in order, in part, in order to do lots of things, but one of them is to comfort each other with the comfort that comes from God.

[19 : 59] And that's a wonderful thing. But it means that we have to work at it. And it also means that we have to grow in our lives that patient endurance.

next slide, please. A couple of verses or bits from John's Gospel and one from the reading this morning.

My prayer is not, this is Jesus praying for his disciples before he is crucified. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is the truth. I'll read the next one in a minute. This is a really important prayer in John 17.

He's praying for his disciples. It's a lovely prayer to read. It's a great template for praying for each other. But here is Jesus saying to his father, I don't want you to take them out of this world.

[21 : 13] They're here. They're part of it. What Jesus wasn't saying is create an enclave where everybody within the enclave is marvellous, lovely, God-fearing Christians who do no wrong.

And get all those baddies out the way. It's not what God's saying. It's what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying, my friends, my, these people I love, these followers of mine, and by extension you and me, these people live in a world full of all sorts of wickedness, challenges, struggles.

And Jesus is saying, I'm not going to take you out of that. Oh no. I'm going to pray that you are protected from the evil one. Do you see what's happening there?

We're not being promised a clear run, a free hit at life. In fact, quite the opposite. We're being almost promised that there will be challenges.

But the point here is, we can be protected from the evil one through our prayers and the prayers of each other.

[22 : 43] And we need to be people who pray for our own protection and for our protection, the protection of others in this fellowship.

If you're visiting us, you're part of us. Our protection. If I'm driving somewhere, and I'm driving somewhere almost all the time, I ask God to protect me on my journey.

If I'm going on the M62, I pray really hard. That's okay. Do I pray quite as hard as I pray about the M62, about walking around Whitby and some of the influences and the wickedness that I might see there.

Or in my job. Or in my life. I don't mean Fiona. That would be really unkind, wouldn't it? Fiona is not as bad as the M62.

too. We're not immune from struggle.

[24 : 02] We're not immune from attack of the evil one. But the victory is in God. In the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Do not be uninformed. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death.

This is Paul talking about the riot in Ephesus, where Paul challenged the silversmiths, particularly a fellow called Demetrius, who was very big on making silver icons of Artemis, and selling them, and making a decent deal.

And Paul said, it's all nonsense, come and follow the true God, come and follow Jesus. And people didn't, stopped buying Demetrius' goods. And he got really grumpy, and stirred up a riot.

And they took Paul and his friends, and they charged him, and they did all sorts of things. That's what Paul's talking about. And they had to flee.

[25 : 22] And Paul says, don't misunderstand. I don't live this life, this charmed life, where everything goes swimmingly all the time. Paul is saying, they were really up for hurting me.

They were really up for causing me great damage, and possibly killing me. And that wasn't just idle words, that was true.

Don't be uninformed, says Paul. When I talk about comfort, the context is, there are times in my ministry, in my work, where I get threatened with my life.

Don't be uninformed. We will face tribulation. We will face tough times.

Next slide. But remember, we have paraklesis in and for every and any situation that we face.

[26 : 25] God's comfort is available for us. God's comfort is available through His love of us, through the Holy Spirit, and importantly, from each other.

God's is God's love to God's love to the Israelites, the tribes of the Israelites, just before he died.

At the end, it's recorded at the end of Deuteronomy, he went round each of the tribes and he blessed them. And he said to the tribe of Asher, a number of lovely things, including the eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

That's a fridge magnet verse, isn't it? That's on nice fridge magnets, it's also true. The everlasting God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

Wonderful stuff. The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The Bible is a very realistic book.

[27 : 40] The Bible doesn't just have motherhood and apple pie, even with custard. It's tough stuff. Our lives are challenged.

There are those who are crushed in spirit. There are those who are broken hearted. There are those who are facing real trial.

There are those, by the way, not to be so miserable about it. There are those having a great time, by the way, and that's good too. And if you are, don't try and find something to make you feel miserable. Just enjoy the fact that you're having a good time.

But my sense is that there are folk here today who are brokenhearted and feeling crushed in spirit. And God wants to speak directly to you.

Speak words of love, speak words of comfort. He is holding out his arms to you for a hug. If that's you, please allow yourself to be embraced this morning.

[28 : 53] And so, to finish, next slide please. Just remember and allow this to be part of your meditation this week.

Our God is the God of all comfort. Whatever you're facing, God is with us and in us by his Holy Spirit.

We, as a fellowship, have a responsibility to comfort you. But, most importantly, our God is a God of paraklesis, of comfort.

Let's pray.