

Down But Not Out
2 Corinthians 1:3-11
Part Two

I know there are people here this morning that feel, in respect to their circumstances, as if they have been thrown into a very cold, dark and stormy sea. And I know that if they cannot find a way to be comforted that they will eventually start thinking about taking off their life jacket, releasing their grip on their capsized boat and floating away into a state of personal hopelessness. But it does not have to be this way. We can be comforted and through that comfort find the strength to hold on just a little bit longer, to find the strength to endure until help finally arrives.

And this thought brings us back to our study of **2 Corinthians** and more specifically to **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**. In this passage we are seeking to answer three different questions. Where should we look for comfort? Can we be assured of finding it? If we find it what are we do with it once we have it?

Before I left for Japan we looked at the first question. Where should we look for comfort? The answer is very simple. We should look to God for comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 1:3**. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”** In light of how Paul, in his outburst of praise here in verse 3, described God, clearly the place we need to look for comfort when we have been thrown into that cold, dark stormy sea is first, foremost and always is to God.

And I would like to think that this is exactly what everyone in this congregation has been doing since my last message to you. But this morning I would like to go on and seek to answer the second question. Can we, if we go to God for comfort, be assured that we will find it no matter how many or difficult our trials?

And what is the answer? No matter how many or how difficult our trials, if we would look to God for comfort we will always find it (2 Corinthians 1:4a, 8-11). How do we know this? We know this based on the experience of the Apostle Paul as he explains it to us in **2 Corinthians 1:4, 8-11**.

My hope as we examine these verses is that we might, when we are the most severely tested, when we feel as if our very life is being sucked out from us by the difficulties that have encompassed us, have the confidence to continually reach out to God, and each and every time know that we will find the comfort we need to hang until help arrives.

So let us go back and read **2 Corinthians 1:3**, the verse we have already considered several weeks ago, but this time we will add the first part of **2 Corinthians 1:4**. **“(3) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, (4) Who comforts us in all our affliction.”** So who is the “us” referring to here in the first part of **verse 4**? It is referring to Paul who is writing this epistle and his missionary sidekick Timothy.

Paul is telling the Corinthian church that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort comforts them in all their afflictions. Now this is certainly an eye-opening statement.

Let me ask you a question. Who suffered more affliction than the apostle Paul? I would think that we would have to say there are not too many people in the history of the world who have suffered more affliction than Paul.

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 11:23-29**. **“Are they (referring to the false teachers) servants of Christ? – I speak as if insane – I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. (24) Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. (25) Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. (26) I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; (27) I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. (28) Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. (29) Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?”**

So, what do you think? Have you or anyone else that you know suffered more than Paul? I would highly doubt it.

And yet even though this is true, what did Paul say to us in **2 Corinthians 1:3-4? “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort, (4) who comforts us in all our affliction.”**

Notice the word “all.” As long as Paul and Timothy turned to God for comfort they were continuously comforted without exception in every kind of affliction.

This was the experience of Paul and Timothy and this should be our experience as well. And why is this? It is because of what Paul said in **verse 3** when he, in expressing praise to God, described God as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Paul and Timothy, when they turned to God for comfort, were not comforted by God because they were special but because God was special (2 Corinthians 1:3). Nothing has changed. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

So where do we need to go when we need comfort? We need to go to God. And will he comfort us no matter how often we go to Him and no matter severe our trials? Absolutely! This is what the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort does when we choose to come before Him and His throne of grace and ask for help in the time of our need. He will comfort us.

Have we lost our job and we don't know what is going to happen to us? Then what do we need to do? We need to go to the Lord for comfort. We need to bow before Him and His throne of grace in order to find help in the time of our need. And what will happen? He will come alongside of us and He will comfort us; or in other words, He will strengthen us so that we will be able to hang on until help arrives.

And how will the God do this? God will comfort us, or in other words strengthen us, through His promises (Romans 8:28-30). And one of the promises that God certainly will use to do this is **Romans 8:28-30.**

Let me read passage for you. **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (29) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; (30) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”**

Do we believe this? Do we believe that God in His sovereignty can and will use whatever situation or circumstance that comes into our lives including our trials to bring us to a better place? If we can then it certainly should be obvious to us how God can use this promise to comfort us and to provide for us the strength we need to hang on until help arrives.

So how does God comfort us, or in other words how does God strengthen us, in the midst of the storm? He comforts through His promises such as the promise that we have considered in **Romans 8:28.**

But we are not done with how God uses His promises to comfort His children when they find themselves in the midst of a cold, dark, stormy sea. And why is this? We are not done yet because I don't believe that we have been stretched far enough yet this morning in terms of what God's promises can do in respect to comforting us.

If we can believe that God causes all things to work together for good, not only will we be strengthened to hang on but we will be enabled to count our troubled situation as a source of joy (James 1:2-4). What an amazing thing!

Let me read for you **James 1:2-4.** **“(2) Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, (3) knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. (4) And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** Now what James is commanding us to do here might seem absurd but really it simply is a further application of God's promise that Paul recorded for us in **Romans 8:28-30** and is therefore the logical consequence of God's comfort.

Let us first of all look at **verse 3**. **“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”** So, what does James mean by this statement? First of all, let us consider what he does not mean. James is not commanding that his readers be gleeful when encountering trials, nor is he commanding them to enjoy their trials. He knew as the writer of Hebrews also knew that no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful (**Hebrews 12:11**).

Rather he is commanding his readers, and therefore us, that we consider the various trials we encounter as joy, not for what they are but for what they are producing, as we have already seen based on **Romans 8:28**.

The bottom line is this: God has promised us that through the trials He permits to come into our lives that good things can and will be produced if we would simply in those times choose to believe in Him and the promises that He has made to us.

So, what in this context are the good things that God has promised us that can be produced through the various trials we are encountering? The testing of our faith produces endurance (James 1:3).

Let us go back to **James 1:3** and read the rest of the verse. **“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”** When James speaks of endurance he is speaking about toughness.

This is how it works. We develop toughness or fortitude by repeatedly being tested and prevailing. The more tests we pass, the tougher we become. The endurance and fortitude of Paul or Timothy did not come overnight and did not come apart from trials. Paul, in **Romans 5:3**, confirmed this when he said, **“And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulations brings about perseverance.”**

Nature teaches us the same principle. Free a butterfly from its cocoon, and thus from the struggle of liberating itself, and you destroy its life, for it will never develop the strength to take flight and to soar as it should. And the same thing is true for us. With this in mind perhaps we can now better understand the rationale for the command found in **James 1:3**, **“To count it**

all joy when we encounter various trials.” We need trials in order to develop endurance or in other words toughness.

And why is toughness so important? We need endurance, or in other words toughness, in order to proceed forward toward spiritual maturity (James 1:4). And where do we see this? Let me now read for you **James 1:4. “And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”** So, what is the second good thing that James mentions that is associated with trials if we by God’s grace and as an expression of our faith are able to endure? Spiritual maturity!

As we endure, as an expression of our faith, economic stress, disappointments, criticisms, domestic pressures, persecutions, illnesses and other things these things will all be used by God to mature us into the people we need to become thus allowing us to soar higher and higher into the blessedness of Christ likeness. This is Christ’s promise to us and it is this promise that will not only allow us to hang on until help arrives but even in the midst of our troubled situation to count it as all joy. This is the kind of comfort that is available to us in Christ Jesus as we, in the midst of our trial, turn to God and choose to trust in His promise to us that He through the trial will produce good things for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

So now let me ask you a question. Why is it that some Christians never find this kind of comfort even though they might ask for it? There are numerous answers that could be given, but there is one that I would like to particularly draw your attention to.

One of the reasons why a professing Christian might not receive comfort, though asking for it, is because he is double-minded (James 1:4-8).

Let me read for you **James 1:5-8. “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (5) But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”**

James has just commanded his readers to count it all joy when they encounter various trials in **James 1:3** for the reasons that he stated in **James 1:4**, but unless God supplies wisdom they will never be able to see those trials clearly nor fully profit from them spiritually. In other words, if we are going through a trial let us not waste it. And if we don't want to waste it or simply to marginalize it then let us ask God for wisdom.

But we need to be careful how we ask. What does it say? **“But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, (8) being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”**

Like the writer of Hebrews, James sees faith as the essence of spiritual life. What **does Hebrews 11:6** tell us? **“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him.”**

Does this mean that we have to have perfect faith? And what is the answer to this question? No! We do not! If our faith had to be perfect, few would ever receive anything, for we are all doubters in some sense in that way. Abraham and Moses were great men of God, but they were not perfect in their faith.

Being free of doubt in this context does not mean that we possess perfect faith but rather that we are not double-minded.

To be double-minded means that we have two minds: one mind that seems to trust God and wants what God wants while the other continues to trust in ourselves and wants what we want. To approach God in this way with two minds will prove futile and will deprive us of God's comfort.

I know there are people here this morning that feel as if they have been thrown into a very cold, dark stormy sea. And I know that if you cannot find a way to be comforted that you will eventually begin to think about quitting, about taking off your life vest, releasing your grip on your capsized boat and simply allow yourself to drift off into a pit of despair.

But this does not have to happen. If we are a genuine born-again believer we can come into God's presence and ask Him for help. And if you do so with a

single mind trusting Him and seeking what He wants in the midst of this trial rather than what we want, I know what will happen.

He will comfort us. He will come alongside of us in the midst of our personal storm and provide us the strength to hold on until help arrives and not to simply hold on but even more than that. He will also provide us what we need to see more clearly the purpose of it all so that we might, even in the worst of it, count it all joy.

May God give us the grace to continually and wholeheartedly come to Him for help in the time of our need so that we might be continually comforted in each and every trial that we might face.