

Down but Not Out
2 Corinthians 1:8-11
Part 3

I know there are people here this morning who feel in light of all the trials they are presently experiencing, that figuratively speaking, it is as if they have been thrown into a very cold, dark stormy sea. And I know that if they cannot find a way to be comforted that they will eventually quit fighting. They will take off their life jackets. They will release their grip on their capsized boat and allow themselves to sink into a state of 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 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? What are we do with it once we have it?

So far we have answered the first question and we are now in the process of answering the second.

So, what was the answer to 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.”**

When we encounter various trials and, figuratively speaking, feel as if we have been thrown into a cold, dark stormy sea, we should, first and foremost, always look to God for comfort. In other words, we should first and foremost always humbly come into His presence and ask Him for help in the time of our need. And hopefully this is exactly what we have been doing.

This of course leads us to the second question that we are now in the process of answering. Can we, if we go to God for comfort, be assured that we will find it no matter how many or difficult our trials?

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? Let me read for you the very first part of **2 Corinthians 1:4. Who comforts us in all our affliction.**”

The Apostle Paul and his missionary sidekick, Timothy, had never been disappointed when they approached God for comfort. He had comforted them in **“all”** their affliction. And this can also be true for us, if we will simply, in the midst of our trials, humbly come before God in prayer.

And what will He do for us if we in fact come to Him in this way? He will comfort us in every affliction no matter how many times we come and no matter how extreme our particular afflictions might be.

He will never fail us. And why is this? He will never fail us because He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort. So will God ever fail to comfort us if we humbly come before Him in prayer in the time of our need? No!

And how does God comfort us? First of all, as we saw two weeks ago, God will comfort us, or in other words strengthen us, through His promises (Romans 8:28-30). In fact, I am quite confident that there are many people here this morning who are even now being comforted by God, in the midst of their trials, through His promises thus finding strength to hold on until help arrives.

But now let me ask you a question. Do you believe that help will in fact arrive if we continue to trust God and His promises? Do you believe that? Or in other words, do you believe that God will in fact in His time and His way actually pluck us out of whatever cold, dark and stormy sea we have been tossed into? I would hope that you do. And why is this? Because I believe that this is the truth.

And this brings us to the second way that God can comfort us when we are being sorely tested. And what is that second way other than through His promises?

God also can comfort us by delivering us (2 Corinthians 1:8-11). You probably are all familiar with the recent attack on the merchant ship the

Alabama by Somali pirates, and how they had taken the ship's captain, a man named Captain Philip's, in order to hold him for ransom. So now let me ask you this question. When do you feel that Captain Phillips was most comforted? When he was bobbing around in the ocean with four Somali pirates on the ship's lifeboat, or when he was plucked out of the lifeboat by U.S. Navy Seals? This is pretty obvious. It was when he was plucked off the lifeboat and delivered from the Somali pirates.

Certainly there is comfort in trusting God for a good result when we find ourselves caught up in various trials, but there is also comfort when we are actually delivered from those trials by God. And I believe that this point is driven home to us by Paul in **2 Corinthians 1:8-11**.

Let me now read this passage for you. **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; (9) indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; (10) who delivered us from so great a period of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, (11) you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”**

So how does this fit in with the flow of our text? Paul made it very clear to his readers that he and Timothy had been comforted in all their afflictions in **2 Corinthians 1:4**. This was a very important statement, but it was broad and not very specific. But now Paul in **2 Corinthians 1:8-11** is being much more specific and is now sharing with the Corinthians how God had recently comforted them in the midst of a very grievous affliction, not only through His promises, but most importantly through His deliverance of them from that very grievous affliction.

So let us begin by looking at the very first part of **verse 8**. **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia.”**

So, what was this affliction, or literally in the Greek this “pressure,” that came upon them while they were in Asia? The specific nature of the

affliction that came upon Paul and Timothy while in Asia is unknown to us. We could guess. We could speculate, but the bottom line is that we just don't know.

Was this also true of the Corinthians? No! This was not true of the Corinthians. The Corinthians, in contrast to us, did know about the specific nature of the affliction.

How do we know this? We know this because if they were in fact ignorant of the specific nature of the affliction then certainly Paul would have felt compelled, I believe, here in these verses to fill them in. But the reality is he didn't feel any such need. Why? Paul didn't feel any such need to do this because they already knew the specific nature of the affliction that had come upon Paul and Timothy while they were in Asia.

So, what were the Corinthians unaware of if it was not the specific nature of the affliction? There were a couple of things.

First of all, though the Corinthians knew the specific nature of the affliction, they were unaware of the severity of it (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:8**. **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength.”**

So how severe was the affliction, or in other words the pressure, that had come upon them in Asia? Paul told the Corinthians that the affliction was so severe that they had been burdened excessively beyond their strength, or in other words, beyond their own resources (2 Corinthians 1:8).

And what is interesting about these Greek words that are translated in our NAS Bibles **“burdened excessively, beyond our strength”**?

What is interesting is that these same words were commonly used to describe a pack animal that has collapsed under its load and was unable to get up. This is how Paul and Timothy saw themselves in respect to the affliction that had come upon them in Asia.

And what did Paul see as the inevitable conclusion to all that they were going through in respect to this very severe affliction? Paul and Timothy saw the inevitable conclusion of the affliction that had come upon them in Asia to be death (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

Let us continue to read the rest of **2 Corinthians 1:8**. **“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life.”**

The word translated “despaired” literally means “no passage,” “no way out,” or “no exit” (2 Corinthians 1:8).

In fact, Paul saw their death as so certain that he went on to say in **2 Corinthians 1:9** **“indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves.”** The word “sentence” (APOKRIMA) refers to an official judgment, a legal decision, or resolution (2 Corinthians 1:9).

So what in effect was Paul saying here? When Paul said that they had the sentence of death within themselves he was saying that from their standpoint they were as good as dead in respect to this affliction that had come upon them in Asia. This is what they expected. They expected to die.

So was this affliction that had come upon Paul and Timothy while they were in Asia severe? Absolutely! And Paul wanted to make sure that these Corinthians were not unaware of its severity. But this is not all that he wanted to make sure that the Corinthians knew. He also wanted to make sure that the Corinthians were not unaware of something else. And what was that?

Besides the severity of the affliction, Paul did not want the Corinthians to be unaware of its purpose (2 Corinthians 1:9). Let us now continue to read **2 Corinthians 1:9**. **“Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”**

So let me ask you this question. What was the purpose of the affliction, this very severe affliction that had come upon them in Asia? Paul told the Corinthians that the purpose of the affliction that had come upon them in

Asia was teach to them not to trust in themselves but in God who raises the dead (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Trusting in ourselves is not an easy thing to root out of our lives. This should be apparent from what Paul has just shared with us here in **2 Corinthians 1:9** when he spoke to the Corinthians about the purpose of the great affliction that had come upon them while in Asia.

This is why it is sometimes necessary over the course of our lives to be put under the crushing weight of a very grievous affliction, but let us not despair. We can be assured that if we truly are a child of God, and are seeking to please the Lord by trusting in His promises, and looking to Him for His deliverance that it will in fact come about.

And is this something that is important for us to learn? Absolutely! Those who look to God for deliverance in the midst of their trials will never be disappointed (2 Corinthians 2:10). This is the way it is. This is the truth.

Is there any doubt about this? Paul doesn't have any doubt about this. Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:10**. **“Who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.”** Did Paul believe that if he turned to God in the time of his trouble, he would in each and every affliction be delivered? Absolutely!

Paul saw God's hand of deliverance whether he looked back, around or ahead. Is this obvious from what we read in **verse 10**?

Can we, if we trust in God and His promises, see this same hand of deliverance? Absolutely! This is what I have experienced. I have lived 63 years. I have been married 41 years and have three children and have six grandchildren. I have been a pastor of this church for 35 years. Have I had trials? I would say that I have had my fair share.

But in the midst of all those trials, as I have learned to trust in God and His promises, and by His grace, have seen His hand of deliverance over and over again. And I am convinced that I will continue to see His hand of deliverance in whatever else life might throw at me until that time when God grants me the most blessed deliverance of all; when I by His grace pass out

of this life into the next, where in the presence of Christ my Savior there will be no more pain, sorrow, tears or death. And it is this deliverance, this final deliverance, I believe, that Paul was alluding to when he in **2 Corinthians 1:10** said, **“And he will yet deliver us.”**

So how confident was Paul that he would continue to experience God’s comfort both through His promises as well as His hand of deliverance? He was very confident, but he was not about to take anything for granted.

Even though Paul was confident that he would continue to experience God’s comfort, he asked for prayer (2 Corinthians 1:11). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 1:11**. **“You also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”**

Though the Apostle Paul’s hope is firmly fixed on God, he also relies on the prayers of fellow-believers on his behalf, especially of those to whom, like the Corinthians, his ministry of the gospel has closely linked him. Their prayers on his behalf, to his mind and in fact in truth, play an important role in his expectation of deliverance. Isn’t this exactly what is happening in the first part of the verse when Paul exhorts the Corinthian church to join with them by helping them through their prayers? So how does this work?

Prayer is indeed a mystery, but though a mystery, it is stressed over and over again in the New Testament as a vital prerequisite for the release of God’s power.

It is true that it is God who delivers, and that God stands in no need of human prayers before He can act on behalf of those who are afflicted. Yet there is the manward as well as a Godward aspect that is implied in the deliverance of which Paul is speaking of here in **verse 11**, and the manward side is summed up in the duty of Christians to intercede in prayer for those who are enduring affliction.

A man named Philip Hughes has said it very well, “In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence.” This is what we are doing when we pray.

Thus the duty of prayer is not a modification of God's power, but rather the glorification of it through its display as it is released in response to our prayers of intercession. And what will be the result of this display of power? Thanksgiving and praise will be the result.

What does the last part of **2 Corinthians 1:11** say? **“So that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”**

If you are here and you do not know what ministry you can perform in this fellowship, then I would strongly encourage you to engage in the ministry of intercession.

So, what do we need to do when we are afflicted with trials? What are we to do when we feel as if we have been tossed into a very cold, dark and stormy sea? We need to immediately turn to God for help, trusting in God and expecting His deliverance.

And as He strengthens and as we wait for our deliverance, what should we do? We need to ask for prayer. We need to ask our fellow brothers and sisters to pray that God might comfort, not only through His promises, but ultimately in an expression of His power as it reaches down and delivers us from the affliction that has come upon us.

May God give us the grace, not only to be comforted through His promises and by the hand of His deliverance, but may we, by our prayers of intercession, help others to find comfort as well.