

D R A F T

Sunday Morning Message given at Central Bible Church on August 21, 1977
by Pastor L. Dwight Custis, entitled "The God of all Comfort."

Reference is II Corinthians 1:3-4

I have been very conscious during these days my family and I have gone through that there is a great fellowship among the people of God where sorrow is concerned. I have realized, in talking to many of you during the past week, that my brother's homegoing has opened some wounds in your own hearts, and many of you have been reliving sorrows that you have gone through. As I mentioned, just before prayer on Friday of this week I was at the graveside of Mrs. McKenna's mother. I was standing there talking with three of our ladies, and I suddenly realized that each one of them had lost ^{her} husband. I had had the funeral service for each one of them, and M. L.'s death had really caused all of them to re-live their own sorrow. I am sure that this is undoubtedly been true with many of you, because we all know that when our loved ones are taken in death, while we rejoice for those who are "with the Lord," they can never actually be replaced in our lives. Sometimes this extends over a period of weeks, and sometimes months and even years. In our case, after I heard of M.L.'s illness, it was only 20 days, and it still seems a bit unreal, ^{that} but it has happened. I think it is Jonathon Edwards who wrote one time that in a world like this it is not surprising that we are in sorrow and testing. The surprising thing is that we are ever happy. And yet I bear testimony, and I know many of you could "amen" this from your hearts, that the Lord is always more than enough. We certainly can rejoice that He is the One who comforts us in our sorrow, whatever may be the circumstances.

In the hope that all of us can be re-comforted this morning, and encouraged, I want us to just look at these two verses; verses 3 and 4 of II Corinthians, chapter one. It has been a very fresh blessing to me again, and I would just like to lift some words out of these two verses and look at them briefly with you this morning and examine them in the light of our experiences and circumstances as the children of God and trust that [REDACTED] the Lord will send

us from this place this morning rejoicing in Him and His wonderful faithfulness to us. If you have the King James, I would like for you to read these two verses. If you don't, perhaps you know them so that you could quote them. But I think it would be good for us to hear all of this in unison.

II Cor. 1:3-4 "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God."

The first word that I would like you to look at in these two verses, is the word "tribulation." "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation..." Tribulations are troubles. Tribulations are those things which put us under pressure. Tribulations are things from which we cannot escape. Tribulations are things which we would never choose. And they take many forms, don't they? If you were to read through II Corinthians, you would find that the Apostle Paul talks about his own tribulations. Sometimes these come to us in the form of physical problems. Sometimes these problems are chronic, like the Apostle Paul's "thorn in the flesh." We may be called upon for years to carry a physical burden with us. And then there are problems that we have with people. Sometimes the greatest problems that touch the hearts of parents are problems and needs that they face in the lives of their own children. Sometimes we have problems that come to us by way of opposition and persecution because of the Gospel from people who do not know the Savior. Sometimes our tribulations are financial. Sometimes it is just the loneliness of life itself, and often the feeling that life really has no purpose. And, of course, there is always the tribulation that we recognize in death. As we face all of these, and I certainly haven't mentioned all, and perhaps I haven't mentioned your particular tribulation this morning, but I wonder how many here this morning came to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, thinking that the Lord was going to save you from tribulation, if not all of them, certainly most of them. So often when we go through these times of testing, the question comes to us, "Why should this happen to me, or why should this happen to my loved one?" We can point to different things in their lives which would seem to indicate that they might be exempt from these things. So I trust that if you came to the Lord Jesus Christ thinking that you were going to be spared from this, that

your reading of the Word has enabled you to see that the Lord does not spare us from tribulation. Often Christians are hit even harder than others because we love more deeply. And our Lord Jesus, when He was talking to the disciples in the upper room, just shortly before He was to go out to the cross, said those words, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." When Paul was on his missionary journies, and he had been stoned at Lystra and then went on to Derbe, and then came back to Lystra, and then visited Iconium and Antioch. Luke tells us, in writing the book of Acts, that as he visited these different places, he was "confirming the souls of the disciples," which meant that he was teaching them and he was exhorting them to continue in the faith, so there was a practical emphasis to his ministry, but then he taught them this, which we hear far too little about, and that is that we must "through much tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of God."

And so, when we come to our Bibles and we read this word "tribulation" and we realize all of the pressure and all of the difficulty, and all of the problems, and the variety of problems that can come to us, we can see very clearly from the Word of God, that this is not something that the Lord removes from our lives, but this is something that the Lord uses in our lives.

Then, as you look at these two verses, it seems that there is a paradox when you find God mentioned in the same passage that deals with tribulation because we would think that when God is sovereign and God is working in each one of our lives that He certainly can spare us from these things. Especially, when you see, as we see in this passage of Scripture, this morning, the way in which the Apostle Paul identifies God. He calls Him not only the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," but he calls Him "the Father of Mercies, and the God of all comfort." Many are inclined to say, "If God is God, if God is what you say He is, if God is what the Word teaches us that He is, then why do His people have to go through suffering?" Death always raises many questions, and I am sure that many of these questions will never be answered in this life. But here the Apostle Paul, as he identifies God as "the Father of Mercies, and the God of all comfort" is indicating to us that our only hope of comfort, in all that this word means, is to be found in God Himself.

My brother talked to me during his illness of some of the problems that he was facing and the prospects for the future and circumstances that he had never faced before, He said to me, "You know when you go through a time like this, somehow everything fades into insignificance, and the one thing that becomes all important is the Lord Himself." Our comfort is not in ourselves. Our comfort is not in our resources. Our comfort is not in our busyness. Our comfort is not in being hard and resentful against the experiences that we go through. While our friends and our loved ones, and especially our fellow believers in Christ are the channels through whom much of our comfort comes to us, we all have to recognize that the One, and the only One, who is prepared to meet our needs in times of trial, is the One, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Father of Mercies and the God of all Comfort."

I mentioned at the Memorial Service the other day that M.L. had been teaching in his class, the using of the guide, Knowing God by J. I. Packer. I have just been re-reading many of these passages. He begins this book with a section that I would like to just read briefly this morning, a section that was written by Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He was preaching in the New Park ~~Beach~~ ^{Street} Chapel in England on the 7th of January, 1855. He at that time was a young man only 20 years of age. You would think, and I am sure you will be impressed with this as I read these few words, that he was a man, instead of being 20 years of age he must have been, should have been, from the words that he used, a man close to the end of his earthly sojourn because it reflects a tremendous insight into what he has to say. But he was talking that Sunday morning to his people about knowing the Lord. He is talking about ^{how} the knowledge of God ~~that~~ is the one thing more than anything else that improves the mind and it causes us to be occupied with a subject that is so vast and so immense, so deep, that we are just overwhelmed with all of the great truths that we find in the Word of God. As we get acquainted with the Lord, Spurgeon said, it "also humbles the mind." Then he went on to say this, "But while humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound. In missing on the Father, there is a quietus for every grief. In the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself into the

Godhead's deepest sea. Be lost in His immensity and you shall come forth as from the couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing," said Mr. Spurgeon, "which can so comfort the soul, so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief, so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead." Isaiah teaches that, doesn't he, when he said, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee." So that, while these tribulations come to us, they have come, and they continue to come, ~~and~~ perhaps one of the great fears in your own heart has to do with the future and how you may go to heaven, or the trials and difficulties that you will face obviously causes all of us deep concern, that it is wonderful that we know that tribulations belong to the people of God, and they are going to characterize your life and my life in different ways and many ways, we can always put above and around those tribulations, the fact that our God and Father, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the Father of Mercies, He begets these mercies, all of them come from Him, and He is the God of all comfort. So that while I have tribulations on the one hand, I have the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort on the other. And Paul brings these two together when he says, and this is a wonderful statement of these two verses, that He comforts us in all our tribulations. There are two things in this statement that I want you to see at the beginning of verse four. One has to do with this word "comfort." Now it is actually found five times in these two verses. God is the Father of Mercies, and the God of all comfort. And you have it four times in verse four. "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we are ourselves are comforted of God." This word "comfort" which Paul uses five times here, and he uses it a total of 17 times in the whole Epistle, is like a precious jewel, and it seems like every way you turn, this word "comfort!" It reflects the new and wonderful glory. It means basically that he helped them. Since He is the God of all comfort, it means that He never leaves us alone in our tribulations. He uses the tribulations. It means that He consoles us. And it is just impossible to describe how God meets us in our times of sorrow. But then life has to go on, and our loved ones would certainly have it that way. This word "comfort" means that God encourages us, and He does this in a multitude of ways.

I turn to this word again, and I see that this is a word which means that God teaches us. I don't think I will ever forget my brother's saying to me, when he found out what his difficulty was, and he said right from the ^{very} beginning of the trouble, that he was sure that this would mean the end of his life. He said to me one day, when we were talking together, ~~he said~~ (As I mentioned at the service the other day, he always called me "Cus.") He said, "As the Lord gives you things during these days, will you jot them down for me? And then tell me about them when we are together, because I want to learn everything that the Lord has to teach me through this time." And I am sure that as you have gone through times like this, this has been your prayer that though there are many things that you don't understand and sorrow is heavy and the grief lays upon your heart, yet you realize that God is in absolute control and that the sudden change in our circumstances have not made any change in Him and that He was the God of Mercies and the God of all Comfort before and He still is. One of the reasons that he lets us go through these things is because He has things to teach us that we can't learn in any other way. That word is bound up in this word "comfort." And then it means that He ^{exhorts} us. What person has gone through a time of testing and trial and realized that God was dealing with him without also recognizing that there are changes in his life that need to be made and things in his circumstances that need to be corrected.

And, so He comforts us. He helps us. He consoles us. He encourages us. He teaches us. He exhorts us concerning our own lives. But then did you notice the second thing about that expression, "He comforts us in all our tribulation?" So many, many times I have been thankful, in reading my Bible, for that little word, "all." You have it in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." So that whatever my need is, whatever your need is, this morning, whatever the pressure upon me, whatever the pressure upon you, whatever your sorrow, isn't it wonderful to know that He comforts us in all our tribulation? I don't have to go to the Lord, the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort to find that He has made provision for everything except the particular thing that I have to be going through at that time.

Some of you dear people may not have lost loved ones. But the time is coming when you will. Oh, let me encourage you on the basis of this Word this morning, that though sorrow lies heavily upon your heart, no words can possibly express the grief that you feel when someone dear to you is taken away, yet let me assure you, on the basis of the Word of God, that the Lord will never leave you alone. ~~And that~~ when you go through a time when you have need of special grace, the Lord is there. Whatever He may lead you through, He is the "Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort," and whatever that testing, that pressure, that trial, that grief may be, it is wonderful to know that He is sufficient for them all.

Now Paul doesn't tell us how the Lord comforts us, at least, other than the fact that we need to get our eyes upon Him and our hearts occupied with Him and His wonderful mercy and His grace. Obviously all of this comfort has to come from Him, but how does it come to us? I know that I am just reflecting what many of you have found in your own times of need. Of course, I have learned this before and in other occasions, but it is good to have this re-emphasized in all of our hearts, isn't it? ~~Of-course~~, we would have to say ~~that~~ the only way that we can learn about the Lord, the only way that we can possibly know that He is the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort, is through His Word. Do you ever stop to think what your life would be like if you didn't have the Word of God and you couldn't drink in these wonderful truths, you couldn't learn of Him, you couldn't see His promises. As the Lord leads in tribulation and testing, ~~you couldn't learn of Him~~ then the verses that we have learned before, passages of Scripture that we have known, and possibly some that we have never discovered before, suddenly take on new meaning, and we find that through the Word of God, the Lord is bringing us much-needed comfort and encouragement to our hearts. Then we see it in the Lord's providential leading in our circumstances. His people have a way of ministering to us, and no one can fully appreciate the comfort of the blessing of families as a source of strength. I will have to confess that last Tuesday at the service, as I looked down I could see my own family there, as well as Marilyn and her family, and just their presence there was used of the Lord to bring great encouragement and comfort and strength to my own heart.

The Lord has many, many ways. My hymnbook has been a source of great comfort. As I have read words again like, "How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!" And the Lord just has many ways of bringing comfort and encouragement to us. But He comforts us in all our tribulation, and I want you to notice the word, "in." While He has promised that there is no testing taken us but such as is common to man, He doesn't lift us out of them, but He shows the infinite greatness of His grace in comforting us in all of our tribulation when he leads us right through the midst of all of the difficulty and the testing. But what is the purpose? If you were to take your Bible and read the passages that have to do with suffering and testing and death and trials and problems of various kinds, you would find that God has many different reasons. I want us to just concentrate this morning upon the one that is mentioned here because it certainly is indicative of the very heart of God. He is the Father of Mercies, and He is the God of all comfort. And the Bible gives us many, many illustrations of this. I am sure hundreds of you could stand this morning and give testimonies of the way in which God has comforted you. In fact, I am sure that one of the most wonderful services that we could have would be for us to get together and one by one just tell how God in His infinite grace has manifested Himself in our lives and shown Himself to be the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort. I know that many of you have been through a lot deeper things than I have, and you have tasted of the riches of the grace of God. But you see, because He is the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort, He wants to dispense His mercies and His comfort as widely as He can. So there is one purpose that is expressed here as the Apostle Paul begins to write to this church that was so greatly troubled, and you remember the difficulties that he talks about in the first Epistle, and all of the problems that they had. The second Epistle is a book of a completely different character. They were a people who needed comfort. They needed encouragement. They needed instruction. They needed exhortation. They needed all of these things that are bound up in this wonderful word, "comfort." The purpose that is stated here is that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble. We don't all go through the same kind of troubles. If we do go through the same kind of troubles, they

don't all come in exactly the same way. But that we may be able to comfort them in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Some of you may have heard me tell the story - I never tire of thinking of this - when I was a student in seminary. When I went to the seminary Dr. Chaffer's wife had been in a coma for many months. Before she went to be with the Lord, she was for two years in a coma. She recognized Dr. Chaffer I think he said just two or three times in that whole two-year period. He kept her at his home. He had nurses come in to help with her care. He lovingly spent time in her room - hours in her room - even though she was not able to recognize that he was there. Then while I was there, and some who are here this morning were students at the same time, the Lord took Mrs. Chaffer to Himself. He had her body in the living room, and we at the seminary went out to see him. He would take us up to the casket and talked about Mrs. Chaffer and their wonderful life together and how the Lord had used them in ministry. Then we had the funeral service, and at the funeral service Dr. Ironside was the one who brought the message. That very year before school started we had one student in our student body who was about as tall as Dr. Chaffer was short. He (the student) and his wife had been out doing Child Evangelism work, and on the way home his wife contracted a strep infection in her throat. In a matter of just a few days she went to be with the Lord. I remember standing at the back of the church (I had already gone by the casket and seen Dr. Chaffer) and as the students and friends were walking by, I caught this young man, Allen Hamilton, as he was approaching Dr. Chaffer, and as he got to the casket, instead of reaching out and shaking Dr. Chaffer's hand, as the rest of us had, these two men embraced each other and the tears started to flow. As I looked at that, I realized that Allen was the one who could really enter in to what Dr. Chaffer was experiencing. He was able to comfort him with the comfort wherewith God had brought comfort to his own heart. Here was a younger brother in Christ comforting a seasoned, servant of the Lord Jesus who had ministered so faithfully and touched so many lives. You see the time comes, regardless of who the servant of the Lord may be, when he needs to be ministered to, as he has ministered to others. And God comforts us in all of our tribulation because we live in a world where people need comfort and they need encouragement. God doesn't give us this comfort just to make us comfortable. But God gives us this comfort so that we can be more conscious of the needs

that others have and we can dispense from this wonderful supply of comfort that still comes from Him but God makes us the channel so that we are able to be used in the lives of others with the same comfort that we have experienced from the Lord in our times of need. "The Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we are ourselves are comforted of God. So His purpose is to bring comfort to our own hearts.

But now, having seen all of this, I purposely passed by the beginning of the verse because this is the thing that has been impressed upon my own heart. God is the God of all comfort, and God does comfort us in all of our tribulation, and God through this makes it possible for us to minister to each other. I am able to minister to you and you are able to minister to me and you are able to minister to each other. It doesn't all go by any means from the pulpit to the pew. But we are in a bond of fellowship together where the Lord enables us to be an encouragement to one another. This is one thing that puts us all on the same plain, doesn't it? But we are anyway by the grace of God. But when we go through times of testing and trial, it can produce different feelings and different reactions in our heart. I had several telephone calls from people who said, "I know that your brother is going to be healed." I hope some day I get the chance to get back to them because I, too, was praying for his healing. Right up to the very last I had hoped that somehow God would touch him. God has done it before you know. God is still able to do it, but God in his wonderful grace and in His infinite wisdom, sought rather than to heal him to leave him here, he delivered him from the disease and took him to heaven where he will never be sick again. Some people get angry with the Lord because He doesn't do what we would like for Him to do. Some begin to get doubtful and suspicious and concerned because prayer hasn't been answered in the way that they have been praying. There are many different reactions. Some people just get hopeless in their attitude. Some have a feeling of despair. Some look on circumstances and say, "What can any of us expect in circumstances like this?" You know it has been a real blessing to me to see that before the Apostle Paul mentions who the Lord is, what He does, why He does it, so that we can dispense the same kind of comfort to others who are going through times of need, he begins it by saying, "Blessed."

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." You know, I am thankful this morning that I can stand before you and tell you that God is the Father of Mercies and God of all comfort, and that we can't go through any time of trial or testing (whatever it may be) but what God is absolutely sufficient and that He blesses us so that we can be a blessing to others. I am thankful for all of that. But you know, as difficult as it may be, I want also, and you and I can only do this by the grace of God, to look at the circumstances of trial and tribulation where a loved one has been taken from us and will never be back again in this life, to be able to come to the Lord, not with anger, not even with doubt or despair or suspicion, but to come to Him with that word "blessed." And you know this word means, literally ~~mean~~, that you are speaking well of God. If I had a burden on my heart for the service last Tuesday and the service here this morning, it would be that no one would go away thinking ill of God. You may not understand what the Lord is doing. He doesn't always explain things; in fact, when we say that most of the time we don't really understand the circumstances of our lives. But, oh listen, never, never, never come to the place - the Lord in His wonderful grace can make sure that we are kept from this - let's never get to the place where we speak ill of Him. He is worthy of our praise. He is worthy of our trust. He is working all things out according to the counsel of His will. He loves us with an infinite love. And I wouldn't, and I am sure I say this for most of you this morning, I wouldn't change places with a person for a fraction of a second who doesn't know the Lord and know something of His infinite grace and see how wonderfully sufficient He is to meet our needs. "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And so I am thinking this morning mainly of your trials and your testings, and I know you have them, and I know some of you have laid loved ones to rest years ago, and yet things like this, as I say, can open it all up again. And yet, isn't it wonderful that we have a Heavenly Father who is sovereign in all of our circumstances and one by one He is gathering us into His presence and we have no cause for anything but to call Him "blessed" and to rejoice in His faithfulness and to encourage others

page 12

with all of the fervor and desire of our hearts to put our lives completely in His hands.

Let me give you one more "blessed" before we are dismissed. Will you turn to 1 Peter, chapter one. The same word - a different writer - the same kind of praise. Paul tells us, you remember, in 1 Corinthians 15 that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied." And thank God, death doesn't end it for a Christian, and we have glorious things ahead of us. As our loved ones are taken to heaven, it just gives us that much more reason to look forward to the time when we are going to be there too. But this is the way Peter expresses it in 1 Peter, chapter one. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy, hath begotten us unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be ^{revealed} in the last time." You know one thing that this has brought very vividly to my own heart is that it is so easy for us to get earth bound, isn't it? It is so easy for us to get occupied even with the Lord's work in an earthly sense, thinking of what we are going to see in the way of blessing, what we need to be doing. It is at times like this when the Lord turns our eyes from earth to heaven and we begin to look forward with greater anticipation to that time that He is looking forward to, and that is when the Lord Jesus will come, the dead in Christ will rise first, and then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. We have a living hope. And for this, we can speak well of God. In fact, when you see what the Lord has done for us you find out that He hasn't left out a single thing. He has made full and adequate provision for us in His wonderful Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I am so thankful, as I think of our circumstances--you know when you talk about all of the things that can be said about one you love, and you know you could just go on and on and on, but the one thing that I am most thankful for, in connection with my own brother, is that when he was a child in our home in Tacoma, that wonderful day came in his life when he realized that he needed a Savior and God in His infinite grace called M.L. to Himself

page 13

, and I know where he is today, not because of the greatness of his life or his faithfulness to the Lord, but because of the grace of God and the way the Lord so wonderfully saved him. May I say as I close this morning, I know that these times are times when we as believers are drawn closer together, and they can be times of great encouragement, times when we can praise the Lord and rejoice in His sufficiency, but may I say to any of you who might be here this morning without the Lord Jesus, oh let me plead with you to trust Him. Life is so uncertain. We know that the Scriptures say that we don't know what a day will bring forth, and we never knew as a family that we were going to be faced with circumstances like this. You and I never know what a day may bring to us, therefore, it is important, as Jim Elliott said that when the time comes to die, that is all we have to do. Let me plead with you to trust Him this morning, to put your faith in Him, because when the end comes, this is the only thing that is important --whether or not you are ready to meet the Lord--because you have trusted Him as your personal Savior. Again let me say how very, very dear you all are to me and how much you have meant to me and my family during this time, and I give the Lord all of the glory for the strength that He has given us. I trust that we will be just as faithful in remembering and standing with you in your times of need as you have been in standing with us.

Shall we pray:

Father, we do bless Thee this morning. Our hearts are so full of praise and thanksgiving because of all that you have done for us and continue to do for us in infinite grace. We just pray, oh Father, that the Word that we have seen this morning will be used in each one of our lives. We pray that those of us who know Thee may learn to know Thee better and to trust Thee more completely, and to live each day doing Thy will for Thy glory. And Father, we do pray that if there are those here this morning without Christ, that before they leave this service this morning they may open their hearts to trust Him and be saved. In His dear name we pray. Amen.