

Series on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul
2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Sermon #10
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PRAISE TO THE GOD OF CONSOLATION

L. Dwight Custis

Please take your Bibles and turn to 2 Corinthians 1.

It is good to have many visitors this morning.

I am presently in the Sunday morning messages going through a series on "The Prayers of the Apostle Paul" in his epistles in the New Testament. We have gone through 1 and 2 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. This morning we are looking at the 1 chapter of 2 Corinthians, thinking especially of the prayer that we find there in verses 3 and 4. Actually, verse 2 is a prayer. We have had this in Paul's other epistles, so I am not going to deal with it this morning. We have in verses 3 and 4 this wonderful doxology, because that is what it is. Sometimes in speaking I have linked this with Ephesians 1:3-4, and there is another one in 1 Peter 1:3-4. The three together form a wonderful trilogy of truth.

Here Paul says, blessing and praising God in this doxology, "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 which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

The Word comfort actually runs through this passage. I want to point out those words to you, because it is not always translated the same way in the English translation. It is found first in verse 3 where God is called "the God of all comfort." Then, if you will look at verse 4, you will see it again, "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation...by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." So we have it four times in that one verse. Then, in verse 5, we have the same root word in the original, but it is translated "consolation," where he says, "So our consolation (or our comfort), also aboundeth by Christ." Then again in verse 6, "Whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation (comfort) and salvation...or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation (comfort) and salvation." Then in verse seven we have the last one: "...as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation (comfort)." So it is translated either comfort or consolation. Actually, we use those two words the same way. When we talk about consoling someone, we are talking about comforting them.

It is very clear, when you see this emphasis in all of these verses down through verse seven, that it was Paul's object to open this epistle by speaking of the comforting work of God. I am sure most of you are familiar with 1 Corinthians, and you remember that in 1 Corinthians Paul was dealing with many problems and had to speak quite severely at times. He was dealing with severe consequences of sin. It is in the first epistle

that we are told that because of their misuse of the Lord's Supper, for example, there were people in the congregation who were sick and some who had died. So God had been dealing with this church at Corinth. We see that they just had many, many problems--more problems, really, than any church that is mentioned in the New Testament. What they needed was comfort.

The second epistle is altogether different. It leads us to believe that many of the problems that he mentioned in the first epistle had been solved as he wrote the second epistle. So he writes this message of comfort.

The Greek word for "comfort," besides including the idea of consoling people, also includes encouragement and strengthening. Whenever you see that word in the epistles, remember that. When we say that he wanted to comfort them, we mean that he wanted to encourage them. The people of God are always in need of encouragement. He wanted to strengthen them, wanted to see them strengthened so that they would not go back into many of the things, or even the other problems that would grieve the Lord and limit the Lord's blessing upon the ministry there in Corinth.

God encourages us in our trials and He strengthens us to go on in spite of our trials. If comfort and encouragement meant the He just delivered us from all trials, then, of course, we would have to admit that we do not have any comfort because there are always trials that we have, always difficulties that we are facing in our lives. Some are major. Some can be life-threatening. Others can be just the difficulties that we face from day to day, "the little foxes that spoil the vine," as the Scriptures speak of them. That is the reason that he speaks of God as "the father of mercies and the God of all comfort."

If I were to transliterate the Greek word "comfort" into English, you would quickly see, if you saw it in the Greek New Testament, that this is the word from which we get "paraclete." We talk about the Holy Spirit being our "paraclete." Here, when he says that God is the God of all comfort, he is calling God our paraclete. The Lord Jesus implied, when He was with His disciples in the upper room that He too is a paraclete, that is, someone who has come to our side to strengthen us, to encourage us, to console us and comfort us. I am referring to the words that we find in John 14:16-17 when the Lord Jesus said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth..." That is where He called the Holy Spirit the Comforter, and, of course, that is the word that is used in John 14, 15, and 16, and all of those Comforter passages that have to do with the Holy Spirit. But when the Lord said, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter," He meant another Comforter of the same kind, meaning that He was a Comforter. Then in 1 John 2:1, where the Lord says, If, we have an advocate with the Father (we have a Comforter with the Father, we have a paraclete with the Father), Jesus Christ the righteous."

When we put all of this together, we see that God is our Comforter, the Lord Jesus Christ is our Comforter, the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. For the three members of the Godhead to have this title, means that we stand in great need of comfort, daily need of comfort. In fact, moment by moment we need the comfort and the strengthening and the encouragement which can only be found in the members of the Godhead.

As we come to this doxology, which one writer has called "a thankful and adoring statement of the divine goodness and power," it is a form of worship to be able to say what God said. If we make these words our own, why we can worship the Lord with these same words. It can be a source of great blessing to us, if we understand what it means. I hope we will understand more of what it means. Then, to see the evidence of what God does in our hearts to comfort us in all of the trials and testings that we have.

Trials come in many shapes and sizes, don't they? As I have said, they can be major or they can be just the ordinary aggravations and frustrations which we meet with every day. If you look at the Scriptures in the life of the Apostle Paul, you will find that he had many different kinds of trials. It seems that uppermost in his mind, as he wrote this epistle, was the fact that he faced constant opposition in his ministry wherever he went. Unfortunately, that is a kind of opposition that we do not experience to a great degree today, because we do not have the zeal and the boldness that the Apostle Paul did. It is to our shame that we don't. Wherever he went, they opposed him in preaching the Gospel. His life was threatened. He told the Corinthian church, you remember, "I die daily." That is, he faced the prospect every day when he got up in the morning that he might not make it through the day, so serious was the opposition.

We also learn from the second epistle that he had a physical problem, a thorn in the flesh, which he speaks of in chapter 12.

He also had real trials from working with the people of God. In 2 Corinthians 11 he gives a list of the trials that he had experienced: his hunger, his shipwreck... I think you will remember that passage.

As he comes to the end of the passage he says this, "Beside those things that are without (that is, external), that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches." The NIV translates that verse this way: "Besides everything else (that is, you add all of the problems that I have), I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches."

We cannot begin to appreciate--I do not think any of us can begin to appreciate--how the Apostle Paul's heart was moved by what he had to write about in 1 Corinthians when he went from one problem to another trying to clear up these difficulties for them.

Speaking of Paul's ministry to the people of God, Charles Simeon made this interesting comment about the trials which Paul experienced in his care of the churches. He says this: "Who that has long ministered in holy things has not had occasion to deplore the fall of some, the apostasy of others, and the little progress of almost all, in so much that with many he is made to travail, as it were, in birth a second time till Christ be formed in them. Some, perhaps, would once have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him, have now become his enemies because he has told them the truth and reproved them for their reigning and besetting sins, and in himself also every minister will find abundant occasion to sigh and mourn, especially when he reflects on his great insufficiency for the work assigned him and the effects of his unprofitableness upon the souls of others."

Paul had his trials, you have your trials, and I have my trials. No life is without its trials, its tribulations, its testings. We can thank God that life is more than trials. We have abundant blessings without which we could not live. Yet we can all agree with one of Job's friends who said to him, "Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground; Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:6-7). We can be thankful that our trials are not like what Job had, but nevertheless we have our trials and they deeply affect us.

God could have ordered our lives otherwise. So it is important for us to ask the question, and I want to try to answer this question this morning, Why do we experience one trial after another? Why is it that life is like this? Often, we have trials that remain with us instead of coming and going. We like to see them go; we do not like to see them come. Of course, we are living in a world that has been ruined by sin, and that basically is the reason, but I am thinking, Why is it that God has not done something different for us? We

are His people. He loves us. He has saved us. He is going to take us to heaven, if we have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ.

I want to give you three reasons, this morning, from this doxology that will explain to us in part why we have our trials.

The first one is that trials cause us to seek God. Trials cause us to seek God.

Let me read the latter part of our Scripture reading, and you can see what Paul had to say about himself, beginning with verse 8. He said, "For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves..." And this is what I want you to see: "...that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us; Ye also helping together in prayer for us..." (1 Cor. 1:8-11). "We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead."

If we did not have trials, if we did not have troubles, it is doubtful if any of us would spend much time seeking the Lord. As it is, when we get into our troubles, don't we have to confess that it seems that we try to do everything that we can to meet our needs, and that turning to God is about the last thing that we do, when it is apparent that God is the only One Who can help us. That is what Paul said in this passage.

When we turn to God, what do we find Him to be? This is why the Bible was written. To tell us about God and to tell us about the Lord Jesus and to tell us about the Holy Spirit.

My answer is going to be very limited, this morning, when we think of that. When we are made to realize that we are turning from our vain help and the vain help that others can give to us, we are turning to the power and wisdom and sufficiency of One Who is infinitely more than any man, or infinitely more than the combined help of all men. I am not saying this morning that we do not help each other, but I am saying that we need to be looking to God as the One Who is the source of our help. He is God. Let that thought really grip our hearts. The psalmist wrote, you remember, in Psalm 100:3, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves..." We live in a day when God is degraded by so many that we are inclined to think in terms of the man upstairs, or somebody who is limited as we are. But we come to Him, we come to the Living God. There is not anyone else in all of the universe like Him.

Notice the way Paul described Him here in this text. He says, "He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Do not miss the "our," o-u-r. "He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Paul could have said that He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit never misuses words, or uses words without any purpose. So, instead, he said, "He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." You see, it is because of the Lord Jesus Christ, because the Lord Jesus Christ is "our Lord Jesus Christ" that we not only have access to God, because we can only come to God through Christ, but we have a special claim on God. There is nobody who is more precious to God than the Lord Jesus Christ. God spoke from heaven when the Lord was here on earth and said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). The Greek would bear the translation: "This is my beloved Son in whom I find all my delight." You and I could never calculate the love that the Father has for the Son. There is no one more precious to God than He is. If His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, is "our Lord Jesus Christ," then we can be reassured that God's love is upon us because of our relationship to Him. We have a special claim upon God and His blessing because the Lord Jesus

Christ is "our Lord Jesus Christ."

In addition to that, Paul describes Him as "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

This means that whatever mercies we receive--and the Bible tells us that He daily loads us with His benefits, loads us with His blessing--whatever mercies we receive and however they may come to us--they may come directly from Him or they may come through somebody else--but they always have their origin in God. You and I have never experienced the mercy of God or the grace of God, mercy and grace, except it has come from God.

Mercies mean compassion. We do not have to spend time trying to convince God that we need His help. He is already on our side working in our trials and using our trials to make us conscious of our need of Him. He is the Father of mercies. He always has been and He always will be. He dispenses His mercy in a wonderful way upon all people, but special mercies upon His own people.

Not only that, He is the God of all comfort. By this Paul meant that there is comfort, encouragement, strength, help to be found in God regardless of what the need may be, how big or how little, or how brief or how long enduring, whatever your need might be this morning, you can insert it there, He is the God of all comfort. Whatever your need might be, God is sufficient to meet that need.

So, the consolation, the blessing which we need from day to day, which is to be found in God, can never be exhausted. From the beginning of time God's people have been looking to the Lord for His provision and blessing. People talk about the world being used up. As long as God lives, the world is going to continue to exist and we are going to see His mercy upon all humanity. But we are thinking this morning of His blessing upon us as the people of God. He takes care of us every day in giving us life. The sun rises on the just and the unjust. Rain comes on the just and the unjust. He gives us all these wonderful things to enjoy. Think what God feels like when He hears us talking about mother nature and all these other ridiculous statements that we make. He supplies our need. He protects us. He guides us, when we do not even ask Him for help many times. You see, our trials reveal how weak we are. They do not make us weak. They show us that we are weak. They show us that we have a special need for God, how helpless and needy we are. These are designed to make us look to the only One Who can really help us: The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. The God of all consolation and help. He is a wonderful, wonderful God. You and I ought to praise Him daily that in His wonderful grace He has made Himself known unto us.

There is a second reason. This is closely tied in with it, but, you know, God can be the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, and yet it does not seem to make a great deal of difference in the lives of some of the Lord's people. We do not any of us feel the full impact of it.

The second reason for our trials is that our trials open the way for us to partake of God's consolation. You see, it is one thing to know that He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, and to know that we are the recipients of His compassion and His consolation day after day, but it is another thing for us, especially in special times of need, to actually participate more and more in the mercies and comfort of God.

Verse 4 says, "He comforteth us in all our tribulation," in all of our trials. This means that Paul was aware as he wrote these words that God at that very moment had a comforting work going on in his heart. It is not something that was future. It was something that was present. He comforts and He continues to comfort. More than that, he meant that God's comforting work was going to continue. Life would be intolerable for

us, if it were not true. How often have we found when we got to some situation that we really dreaded that it was not as bad as we thought it was going to be. The reason for that is that it is God at work. That is God meeting our needs, perhaps even before we sought Him and His help.

Job said, you remember, in the terrible trials that he was going through, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him" (Job 13:15). When you read those words, don't say what a great person Job was. He was a great person. God said that he was the most godly man on the face of the earth. But when we read a statement like that, we need to say, "What a great God Job had," because Job could not say anything like that if it were not for the mercy and the comfort of God Himself. Only God could enable him to make a statement like that.

Do you remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, when they were told that if they did not fall down and worship the image of Nebuchadnezzar that they would be cast into the fiery furnace? That is a trial. That is a very, very severe trial. What did they say? They said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter." That is, we are not slow. We have our answer already made. We know what we are going to do. "If it be so (if we are cast into the furnace of fire), our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." Imagine talking to the greatest monarch on the face of the earth at that time. Then they say, "But if not (that is, if He does not deliver us), be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Daniel 3:16-18). "He can deliver us, but if He does not, we are still not going to worship the golden image. We are willing to take the consequences." Don't give them credit for those words. They were just as weak and cowardly as you and I are, if God leaves us alone. This is evidence that God was at work. God was comforting them. God was strengthening them. God was encouraging them. God loomed so large in their thoughts and in their hearts that Nebuchadnezzar appeared to them as nothing in view of all the grandeur and glory of God. They were thrown into the fiery furnace. The men who threw them in were consumed by the flames, it was so hot; but not a hair was singed from their body. When they came out of the furnace, they were not burned. Their clothes were not destroyed. They did not even have the smell of the fire on them. That was God. God saw fit to manifest His power and to deliver them in a most wonderful way.

Let me give you an illustration from the life of the Apostle Paul, and there are many there.

When he was meeting with the Ephesian elders, as he made his way back to Jerusalem, everybody knew that if Paul showed his face in Jerusalem he was going to be arrested and he would be in trouble. They pled with him not to go back. Nobody wanted him to go. They knew that it was just going to mean more trouble. This was his response: "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). He wrote and told the Philippian church, you remember, that he wanted Christ to be magnified in his body whether it be by life or by death (Philippians 1:20). It would be difficult enough to say by life, knowing what that means, but to say "by death," that takes the mercy of God. That takes the grace of God. That takes the comfort of God. Paul would not want us to glorify him. In fact, he himself said, "When I am weak, then I am strong." Only the Father of mercies and God of comfort could enable Paul to make statements like he made.

You and I may not see spectacular deliverances like those often seen in the past, or we may, we never can tell how God is going to work, but we can depend upon God to be our Comforter and to enable us to be

partakers of His consolation because this means for us growth. This means progress in holiness. When we turn from our own insufficient resources to cast ourselves upon the faithfulness of God, then we find out what it means that He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Let me give you a third reason for our trials. Our trials enable us to be instruments of comfort to others, to other believers in their needs.

I want you to note how I have stated this, because I have said "instruments of comfort." When you and I go through trials and testings and God comforts us, this does not mean that we become the source of comfort and help to others. That is never the case. We are instruments, God's instruments. He can work through us and does work through us. We rejoice when He enables us to be a blessing to somebody else, but even the blessings that come from us come from Him or there would be no blessing. This is what the Apostle Paul says at the end of our verse, "...That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

I could not begin to remember all the times that I have received mercy and comfort from others through whom God has ministered to me. Sometimes the people have known how the Lord has used them in my life. Sometimes they haven't. Sometimes it has been in a classroom, seminary classroom. Sometimes it has been in a church service. Sometimes it has been in the reading of a book. Sometimes it has been in casual conversation. Sometimes it has been through my family. Sometimes it has been through different ones of you who are here this morning. God has used many, many people to be a source of comfort to me. Sometimes God uses us with people who do not know the Lord. Sometimes that ministry of mercy and comfort has been used by God to bring people to Christ. God is working in many, many ways. There is no question but that the way God comforts us enables us to comfort others, but it is always God Who is at work and it is always to God that the glory belongs.

Let me close this message by calling attention to the character of this prayer. This is a doxology. It is praise to the God of consolation. We worship God because He is the God that He is, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

We worship Him for His mercy and comfort which He has given to us in the past. You know, when you begin to realize what is really going on in our lives, then you can look back and see how wonderfully the Lord has blessed in the past. We worship Him as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort not only for what He has done for us in the past, but what He is doing for us right now. I trust that God is using His Word this morning as a means of comfort and encouragement and strengthening to us in this service as you face your needs and as I face my needs. We are all the recipients of His blessing. I may be doing the speaking, but God is the One Who is doing the working.

Then, finally, we worship Him because sometimes He uses us as instruments of encouragement and strength to others. We worship Him because of the way He has used other people in our lives to be an encouragement. We could all sing, couldn't we:

Come thou fount of ev'ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
Sung by flaming tongues above;

Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
Mount of God's unchanging love.

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be;
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
Bind my wand'ring heart to thee.

The hymn reads, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love." Dr. Chafer used to have us sing it this way:

Prone to worship, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to serve the God I love;
Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for thy courts above.

So let's not just look at this as a prayer in which the Apostle Paul was lifting up his heart in thanksgiving and praise to God for what He had done in Corinth and what He continued to do; but let's take this as our doxology to God, offering Him the worship and the praise for which He is so worthy because even today He continues to be the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort in a very special way to all of His people.

Shall we pray.

Father,
Thank You for Your precious Word. Thank You for what You have been pleased to reveal to us of Yourself. We pray that each one of us this morning, facing the trials that we all face in our lives, may have our confidence fixed upon You and may trust You as the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort to meet our needs that we might be what You want us to be, and that You would make us, then, instruments by which Your mercies and Your comfort and Your blessing would be passed through us to others. In the precious Name of our Saviour we pray, Amen.