

# The Comfort of Christ

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We'll turn again back to our passage in two Corinthians. In 2010, 157,000 people died of cancer in the UK.

That's 430 people every day, that's one person every four minutes. There were nearly 9,000 alcohol-related deaths.

And in Scotland alone, there were 874,000 crimes reported. The question has often been put to us, if you believe in God, why does he stand by and let things happen?

Why does God not help? Last Sunday night, we looked at a man called Paul, he was a missionary, and here we're looking at one of the letters he wrote to one of the churches he planted in Corinth.

And he looks directly at this theme. And he has to say three key things. The first thing he says to us is God cares.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] When people say, what's God doing? We say God cares. Verse 3 in 2 Corinthians 1. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

Paul begins his letter by praising God. He's saying praise be, praise. It's Paul's way of saying this here, that he's saying, if everything in his life I want to praise God, because he is the Father of compassion, the God of all comfort.

Why does he call God that? What would make him write that? Well, Paul's speaking from personal experience here. The background to this letter to Corinthians is that Paul said in 1 Corinthians 16.5 that he wanted to visit them.

After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you. For I will be going through Macedonia. Perhaps I will stay with you for a while, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey wherever I go.

For I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. Yet Paul was delayed, friends.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] Because he was delayed, some people started rising up in the church and saying, oh, you know that Paul, he doesn't really care about you. He's not a man of his word, he's not coming to visit you. Don't listen to what he said.

But that's not what was going on. We read in verse 89 of this chapter that Paul says, I was facing some real trouble. He says, we do not want you to be uninformed brothers 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 had felt we received the sentence of death.

Paul was delayed because he was facing death. And despite this, he doesn't start by writing to them and saying, you guys, you need to apologise to me. You need to make up with me because you don't know what was going on.

He says, no, no, no, he says, you guys wouldn't believe it. I was facing death when I should have been with you, when I wanted to be with you. And in that time, I knew God to be the father of compassion, the God of all comfort.

- [ 3 : 45 ] Paul is painting a picture here for us of who God is. He's painting the picture that God cares. He is a caring God. He's a compassionate God. He is the one who stands beside us.
- It's like he's there. He holds our hand in all our troubles and in our problems. He is there. He cares. It's a picture of God as the one who says, in anything that you face, I am interested to know what's going on in your life.
- He is the one who brings an easing to our pain. He is the one who brings a relief to our soul. He soothes our bodies, our minds.
- Paul says, this is who my God is. He is the father of compassion, the God of all comfort. Friends, if you look around the world today, you are going to see suffering.
- Go into a hospital, you'll see suffering. Go down the street onto Princess Street, you'll see suffering. You'll see suffering wherever you go.
- [ 4 : 50 ] Paul doesn't hide from this fact. He says to the Corinthians, I don't want you to be naive about it. We can't be naive about it either. We can't put blinkers on and say, there's no suffering.
- It's okay. I can't see anything. Paul says, no, open your eyes. Get a grip of reality. There is suffering all around you. Because of that, people are arguing with us and they're saying, where is God?
- They're saying, if God is ultimately good, which He is? And why is He not doing anything? Why doesn't He stop it? Let's go right to the heart of the problem and ask the question.
- Why is so much evil allowed? Well, in the beginning, friends, God created the world. And what did God do?
- God said to us, have dominion over the world. He said, rule the world, take care of it, run it, establish yourselves within it. And He said, you have completely free will to do what you want with it.
- [ 5 : 57 ] What do we do? We create drugs. People die. We fill our minds with vengeance, with hatred. People are murdered. We neglect God and our society, our politics, and we become morally corrupt.
- We've ruled greed and lust, and we become self-centered and arrogant. We lift money to the status of success and we become poverty-stricken and greedy.
- And then when something bad happens, when something goes wrong, we have the arrogance to turn around and say to God, look what you created. We have the arrogance to turn around and say to God, you can't exist because look what I'm doing.
- We all suffer in various ways, friends, all of us. But this is the reality of the world we have built for ourselves. We ask the question, why is so much evil allowed?
- It's what we choose for ourselves. We chose it. God gave us the choice and we chose evil.
- [ 7 : 08 ] We built our world on evil. But the Bible is clear. Despite this, despite the fact that we have built this for ourselves and we are now struggling with it, despite the fact that we are pushing God away, God says, I still care.
- I care about you. You have a source of comfort in me, he says. It's not in drugs, it's not in money, it's not in relationships. It's in God.
- Friends, when you're asking where is God, what is he doing? When you're asking who hears my voice, who cares about me, God says, I care about you.
- Do you think God's forgotten about you? Do you think God's too busy with the world doing other things to care about you? Is your security and your trust in your family?

I want to tell you friends, friends come and go and family pass on as well. But the God who was, who is and who has come, he is always there and he is reliable. And he says, I care about each and every one of you.

[ 8 : 31 ] He's got our second point. Not only does God care, but God comforts. Going back to 2 Corinthians 1 here in verse 4, he says, who comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Notice that he says God comforts us in all our troubles, in our affliction, our pain, our sorrow, our distress. When life seems to be just getting on top of us, when we're tired and we just don't want to go on anymore, when we feel we are completely broken.

Are you sick? Are you dying? Are you bereaved? Are you troubled by life? This is the totality of our suffering here.

Everything you can think of is dealt with. You know, if anybody had the right to talk about suffering, it was Paul. You know, he faced imprisonment, he faced starvation, he faced ill health with his body, heartache for the church, he was shipwrecked, he faced death so many times.

He knew what was to suffer in this world at the hands of others and suffer because he's own ill health. And in chapter 12 of this letter, he says to us that in these weaknesses, in these difficulties, he has known God's comfort.

[ 9 : 58 ] 2 Corinthians 12, 9 to 10. But he said to me, that is God said to Paul, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore I, that's Paul, will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Paul says, in my suffering, God's power has been made known to me.

God's power has brought, come out when I have been in the worst places of my life. I have known his grace and his comfort at these times when I needed it most. Friends, it would be easy to stand here and say to you, you're afflicted, you're suffering.

Well come on, chin up, it'll be okay, think positive, it'll be fine. Well let's be honest, that's a lot of rubbish isn't it? That's not what the Bible says.

[ 11 : 07 ] The Bible says, in your trouble, in your depression, in your anxiety, know and experience God's comfort for yourselves.

When you are hard pressed on every side, Paul is saying, don't just think, I'll just forget about it. Don't just think somebody else will deal with it, it's okay, I'll just brush it off.

To be honest with yourself, life isn't easy is it? Sometimes it's great, but sometimes the saying goes, life sucks, that's what they say. It gets hard.

Paul says here, go to God, be honest with yourself. When you're told you've got cancer, when you're told your child's unwell, when you're told you're bankrupt, when you're told you've got a situation in front of you and you just don't know how you're going to get past it, the Bible says God cares about you, God will comfort you.

Friends, God is not a distant God, he's not far away, he's not some other thing we can't get near. When you look around the world and you think God has left it all alone, you're wrong.

[ 12 : 22 ] What does God say? Jesus said for us in Matthew 11, 28, when you are down and when you are discouraged, come to me, come to me all who are wearied and burdened and I will give you rest.

And if that's not enough, how about a promise from the Word of God again, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God is the God of compassion and he will comfort you in all of your troubles.

Maybe you're saying though today, where is God? Maybe you're saying, okay, he will comfort me, but maybe you're saying, I can't see him. Where is he?

Well, to answer that, I have to ask you the question, where are you with God? Are you saved? Do you believe Jesus came to this world and died on the cross for your sins?

If you don't believe that, then know this, when you ask where is God, God is right there saying to you, come to me, come to me and I'll give you my comfort. He's saying, don't try to do it on your own, come to me, I will save you from your sin and I will be close to you.

[ 13 : 40 ] But are you a Christian in your sin? Where is he? And he's right in here. When you became a Christian, you received God's Spirit, didn't you?

The Holy Spirit dwells within you. You have access to the fullness of God. You have full access to His power, His grace, His comfort in your life. Have you forgotten that? Did you fail to live that bit out in your life, to put trust in God in His Word?

He says, my spirit's in you, so start relying on it. Start trusting in the Holy Spirit.

Yet we know here, we've got God's comfort, Paul says this has a purpose. Verse 4 says, God comforts us in our trials, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. We being comforted can comfort others.

We can testify to God's work in our life. When we experience God, we see other people in the same position we are and we can go to them and say, hey, look up, God cares.

[ 14 : 51 ] This is the Christian principle laid down for us friends. Faith isn't a selfish thing. If you've got selfish faith, then you've got a problem, because you're going against what the Bible says. The Bible says faith isn't a selfish thing. We've got to give. We've got to show people who God is.

Jesus spoke of this in Luke 11.33 when he said, no one likes a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden or under a bowl. Instead, he puts it on a stand so that those who come in may see the light.

Friends, no one has faith in God and then hides it. When God comforts you, he builds you up. And he says, the comfort you are given by me is the comfort you have to give to others.

Everybody's suffering around you. Then go and help them. We are channels for each other. This is what makes us a body. This is what unifies us. We are there for each other.

This is how we engage with society. This is how we become a community. Those who have suffered know what it's like. And those who have been comforted can give so much to those who are in need.

[ 16 : 08 ] Does that not fill you with hope that God says, not only when you are down, I will help you. But he says, look around you at the people beside you in this room. Look at each other. You are here for each other.

Not only is God saying, I will comfort you. God is saying, I've got all these people there. And they're for you. They're going to help you. You are not alone in this world. You're not by yourself.

Let's go on to our last point. God's compassion. You've seen God cares. God comforts. And God has compassion. Pick up in verse 5.

For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. Here we're told the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives. Paul's now focusing on a specific thing here.

And he's saying, not only do we suffer because we are in a sinful world, but know this, you suffer because you love Jesus. Does that surprise you? Does it shock you? Well, we shouldn't be surprised at this. Jesus said, John 15, 18 to 20, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own.

[ 17 : 39 ] As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. This is why the world hates you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. That's because the Prince of this world, sin is against you.

They hate God, are against you. That's a bleak picture, isn't it? You would think it was almost going to be the other way round, don't you? You think, well, now that I'm saved, I've got God on my side, so nothing's going to go wrong in my life.

We'd think no suffering will come to me, no troubles will come my way. We would think, well, when I become a Christian, I'm going to be wealthy, I'm going to be comfortable, I'm not going to experience ill health, I'm not going to face persecution, and I'm certainly not going to feel embarrassed when I want to testify about my faith. That's what we think the perfect life is, don't we?

We think the perfect life, the best life is a way of ease, no problems, no barriers, no difficulties. Friends, that's not what the Word of God says the best life is.

We would like to think that we don't have to rely on God for anything. At the heart of this problem is the fact that we like to think we do not need to rely on anyone but ourselves.

[ 18 : 48 ] That's not what the Bible says. The Bible says if you love Jesus, you're going to experience even more sufferings than the average person.

You might think that's a bleak picture, but let's read the whole verse. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ, her comfort overflows.

It is through Christ that our comfort is given. It's because of Jesus that we can have comfort from God, because Christ is the ultimate sign of compassion.

If you want to see what compassion is, just look at what Jesus did for you on the cross. He saw us in sin. He saw us create the world that we wanted to push God away, to push Him away and neglect Him.

He said, I am going to come and I am going to die for your sin, so that you are no longer at war with me. Friends, without Christ we cannot experience the comfort of God, because we are at war with Him.

[ 19 : 54 ] But if you are in Christ, you can experience all His comfort, because you're at peace with Him. Friends, we have a messed up view of this world. We have a distorted view of our friends, our family.

We have a distorted view of God. But when you come to the cross, the truth is revealed. And you can begin to see things from God's side. You begin to see things from God's point of view.

The difference between believers and unbelievers is that we have access to all the comfort and grace and care of God, for all our troubles and all our pain. Friends, we suffer in this world and Christians are given additional sufferings.

That's the truth. And Paul doesn't want us to be uninformed about it. But friends, in the service of Christ there may be disappointments, but there is not despair.

There may be ill health, but not without a final remedy. There may be grief, but never without hope. There may be times of sin, but never without a saviour. And there will be times of suffering, and especially suffering if you love Jesus, but never, ever without the comfort and compassion of a caring God.

[ 21 : 17 ] Friends, God did not die on the cross to purchase your redemption, to save you from your sin, to stand back and let the world eat you up. God died on a cross, and he said, I'm not only going to work then, I'm going to work in your life now, I'm going to work in your life tomorrow, and I'm going to bring you to be with me in heaven when you all experience no more pain.

But let's get our thoughts right here. We won't be suffering in heaven, but in this world, yeah, we suffer. In this world, we face problems, we face affliction, we face temptation, we face sin.

And God says, I will comfort you, I will help you. Friends, God cares about you, he's compassionate to you.

In 2 Corinthians 4, 7a Paul writes, We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.

[ 22 : 30 ] We focus on the suffering, Paul says, focus on the Savior, focus on the comfort, focus on the compassion. Friends, you have to decide which side of it you want to be on.

You want to be on God's side? You want to have access to His fullness? To live a life worthy? Or do you want to be by yourself?

Do you want to have a life which has no hope for the future? That's a life without Christ. Paul is holding out his hand and he says, I will rescue you from the pit.

I will rescue you from the grave. You have to go to Him. You have to call out to Him, yeah, help me. Help me because I can't do it by myself.

When people say to us, God doesn't do anything in this world, we're going to turn around and we're going to say that's rubbish. God cares, God comforts and God has compassion.

[ 23 : 39 ] Our prayer today for anyone who is suffering here is Romans 15, 13. If you are suffering, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Friends, let's just pray together. Our Heavenly Father, help us to know you as our caring God. Help us to know you as the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

Help us in our lives to experience your love by coming to you through your Son Jesus. Help us to comfort others with the comfort you have given to us. Father, let our faith be a beacon to all we know.

Lord, if we are down and discouraged and disheartened today and in trouble, we call out to you and ask that you would comfort us and that we would feel your love surround us more and more.

We thank you so much for your word and for what you have taught us through. In Jesus' name, Amen.