

God of all Comfort

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[0 : 0 0] Turn back this evening to 2nd Corinthians chapter 1 and as we look at this chapter I want you first of all to imagine something I want you to imagine first of all a church plant for example in maybe Pilton in Edinburgh or in Corsetorfin or just in one of the housing areas in Edinburgh a new church and someone who's gone there to share the gospel and to build a community of believers there and there's lots of people coming to faith in that new church, maybe a house church is maybe just in a home and but many people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ there and it's mainly Edinburgh people that are coming to faith in Christ, people that maybe previously would have enjoyed celebrating the Beltane Festival or Going into betting shops or gambling in different ways going to the pubs people sometimes with broken lives people with broken marriages people with failed ambitions people that had never really thought much about Jesus Christ before but the spirit of God has worked in their lives and hearts and

They'd become Christians and a disparate group of Edinburgh folk have come together from Corsetorfin or Pilton in a house group and they're a small church and the person who has planted this church moves off and heads to Perth to do another kind of church plant there in one of the housing estates in Perth and as he does so that kind of stability of his teaching and of his focus on the word of God and of his strength and maturity in the faith is lost and these young Christians begin to struggle because they don't have direction and they don't know exactly who to turn to and there's some local Mormons that come along to that church and Begin to infiltrate that church with their own teaching and cause all kinds of problems and difficulties Because the young Christians aren't grounded in the word of God and they're quite easily misled by false teaching Okay, well, that's just a modern kind of example of Corinth and the situation that Paul

And to one degree or another was was dealing with in the church there now, obviously it's different Greece's is different From Edinburgh even though Edinburgh is called the Athens of the north. It's not the Corinth of the north, but nonetheless The cities aren't actually that dissimilar Corinth was probably a bit bigger than Edinburgh but of course the weather's better and it was 2000 years ago that Paul was dealing with Corinth but basically second Corinthians is Regarded as being either the third or the fourth letter That Paul had written to this church that he'd founded in Corinth Only two of which survive and which have become part of the canon of scripture And he spends a great deal of time in this letter Defending the importance of his apostolic gift and his apostolic authority now that's very important then because

It was being questioned. It's not dissimilar to the situation we were speaking about this morning that he was writing to Timothy about but it's also very important now as I'll go on to say hopefully and And so the whole of the letter is both very personal, but also very foundational and In this section this section that we read together. He's speaking specifically to us about how God Or what God teaches us Through suffering when it gets tough when the Christian life gets tough and this young church was having it really tough It was very difficult for them And so he wants to bring God's teaching into that situation and say look God is in this God is part of this God is using this and so We find that teaching also tremendously significant for ourselves both individually. I hope and as a congregation and

As we go on I hope we'll see one or two things Truths from God's word for ourselves. We'll believe we'll begin to see that where God works where there's Where there's people being saved where there's conversions there will also be trouble their twins conversions in trouble go together and So we will find that as God is working in our congregation and working in our lives We will always find also that trouble comes with that We will also see I believe that the church is a community of grace and forgiveness That comes across very strongly in this epistle And if we are part of this church and if we recognize what a genuine church is then it's a church of grace That is that we are recipients of and share in undeserved mercy from God and of forgiveness There are lots of reasons to be forgiving when you belong at St. Columbus

[5 : 26] Lots of reasons because a congregation full of people congregation full of failed leaders full of imperfect leaders and a congregation that is dependent on Christ's grace so it will be a place of forgiveness and grace and Also, if we allow God we will learn that tough times can also be blessed times can be really good times and That he can turn them on their head and use them in a powerful and in a blessed way So that's just a little bit of introduction to The kind of themes we'll be looking at in second Corinthians can we look at this section this evening for a few moments and By way of introduction to this section we look at Paul's introduction the first two verses Paul gives a customary introductory note in this letter to the church in Corinth as he does in all of his letters and

He lays down two important principles As he brings his word of introduction He reminds him his people it reminds the people that he is an apostle of Christ Paul an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and he introduces Timothy his brother as well but he is making clear his Apostolic his God given his Christ given authority to be the leader of that church and to be an apostle of the New Testament church He is aware that his teaching is has God's stamp of approval on it? It's not just his own ideas It's not just his own thinking it's not just false teachers over here balls over here take your pick It is that he has come with God's authority. He has been in heaven He is an apostle untimely born out of time But he has along with the other apostles this foundational role

Not just for the Corinthian church, but for St. Columbus church for caribers for Charlotte Chapel for every church in Edinburgh and indeed every church worldwide He is part of that foundation that we belong to that tradition that we belong to of the Orthodox Christian Church Ephesians 2 20 says that God's household built on built on the foundation of the Apostles and the prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief Cornerstone so he is making clear at this important point right the very beginning of the letter That the truth that he is sharing is God's truth. It's not just Paul's ideas. It's God's truth His credibility is vital for the New Testament church, which would be strangled and which would be choked by false teaching If it was allowed to You know, it's no less important for us

The apostolic a theorem so much of the New Testament I think I mentioned this morning comes through the apostle Paul so much of what we understand of God and of Christ comes through In the epistles in the later parts of the New Testament and it's important that we also Recognize the authority that he claims to have In our understanding of the Bible and the young people are going to be talking about the Bible tonight and asking questions about the Bible It's very important. We know these things where our authority comes from We will always be learning But we find that the truth has been revealed to us not all of the truth But the select truth that God wants us to know there's lots of things We don't know but what we do know is given by God and that is even more important for us when we're in trouble When we're struggling, you know, things are going easy for us Then it's not so we don't question God do we and we don't question the Bible But it's when there's division when things are difficult in the Christian church and in our Christian lives

When we're being given novel ideas of what I sounds great. That sounds impressive I think that must be the way that we should go then we need to know the foundations that we have and We need to be firm. Otherwise. We just get blown around all over the place It's tremendously significant for us that we know what we believe. So he is a apostle of Christ He's coming and bringing God's authority to this letter But he also reminds us of the centrality of grace and peace Grace and peace he says in verse 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a really great greeting, isn't it?

[10 : 32] And it isn't just a formality. He's not just saying, ah, grace and peace He knows that it is a greeting, but he also knows that it's a really important truth for this young struggling divided Disheartened church, he says look focus on these great two pillars in your Christian life individually and as a congregation grace and peace Love Forgiveness and that peace that isn't our own It's not just peace as opposed to warfare. It's not just a kind of soft and sentimental Idea, it's this piece that is spoken of in Philippians 4 7 the peace of God which transcends all understanding That guards our hearts and minds It's the peace the internal piece that stops just being in turmoil all the time

About what happening life and what I must do and where he must go and who I must be with and What God wants from me and what's life about? It's that peace of being founded on The person of Christ revealed to us in the gospels in the apostolic teaching So let's pray and prioritize for grace and peace in our Christian life and I don't I really don't want us just to kind of let that drift over our heads Okay, that's the introduction. Let's forget about that but I want us to when you turn around and speak to the person this evening when you Attempted to say something rotten about someone who's done something think about grace and peace as the foundation of this congregation this community together and And consider what Christ has done for us in our lives, so we find his introduction and then in verses 3 to 11 Paul does something quite unusual. He doesn't really go into theological teaching. He just

Exposes his heart. He shares his own personal experiences of suffering He knows the congregation is suffering He knows they're going through hard times, so he shares with them his own sufferings and The Holy Spirit uses that to teach us and to teach them about the character of God and how he uses trouble This is quite similar To what we've been looking at recently looked at about faith and trouble. Well, there's similarities between that I didn't know that when I either did the sermon a few weeks ago or when I started this on Friday So I just believe that the Spirit has this message for us and Rather than me just being slovenly Blame the spirit. Okay Paul shares his experiences here and He's basically saying look God will use trouble in your life and Trouble will come into your life and trouble will sometimes God forbid come into our congregational life

And he says but as we look towards God He will use that in a positive way in many ways He's saying the best question to ask is not why I'm are these things happening to me?

Why am I going through this but rather? What is God doing in these experiences and or what is God saying to me through them?

[14 : 04] You very often our natural reaction is to just look up. Why are you doing this God? Why is this trouble happening? Why am I suffering or why is there difficulty and we're where there's an accusatory tone naturally in us?

But Paul's turning that round a bit and say you recognize the grace and peace you've received now ask When these things come what is it that God's doing through them?

Why is he teaching us? And Paul in sharing his experiences gives four principles at least four principles about trouble or difficulties and our Christian faith The first is that he brings us his comfort in verse four he says What he to for praise be to the God and Father or Lord Jesus Christ the father of compassion the God of all comfort Who comforts us in all our troubles?

There's a presumption here. There's a presumption that we're going to him for comfort and That's maybe often a difficult thing for us to do in all our sufferings, but he's saying as we will do so He will comfort us he will comfort me in our troubles Now he's not talking about us being engaged in things that are sinful and wrong and we've gotten to trouble that way necessarily He's talking about his own situation. He's an apostle of Christ and yet he's still in all kinds of trouble He's a believer and he's not doing anything sort of openly wild and rebellious, but he's still being Find that hard time in the church in Corinth with relationships and elsewhere He will bring us his comfort and there's bad times And someone hurts you

And things happen that you have no control over that cause suffering. There's bad times in the church. He can't understand He will come near as We cry out to him the word here for comfort is a very famous word, you know the Paraclete It's the word that's used of the Holy Spirit who is sent as the comforter And he comes close and you know There's no one in the Trinity that comes closer than the Holy Spirit because he and dwells us God Jesus says I'm going to the Father, but I'm going to give you the spirit and he will come and dwell you And he can't get any closer than that It's not just that Jesus is my pal and he stands beside me, but he's the Holy Spirit is given to me He comes close The word means literally strong together Paraclete strong together and we're given strength as we draw on the spirit of God to comfort us in our times of trouble and

[17 : 05] Well, it's not always the case For a variety of reasons It is true that we can sense him closest to us and if we can't then maybe it's sometimes other people can see it in us in our deepest needs Now that simply reflects genuine friendship doesn't it?

Someone who's a genuine friend of yours your closest friend Well that friendship will reveal its true colors when you need him most or need her most in your times of trouble What kind of friend is it that leaves you when you need them most when you're struggling most?

Well, it's a kind of fair weather friend, isn't it? Oh Jesus, isn't that? He is he is the great divine friends who brings us his comfort He will come and bring us his comfort Paul is saying and teaching us but also he's saying we will see our Savior better in our sufferings In verse 5 he says for just the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives to also Christ our our comfort overflows and Also speaks about the God of compassion So Paul saying here that as we suffer we begin to associate more with the Savior Who from maybe from our mother's knee?

We've said a gentle Jesus meek and mild who's died in the cross for our sins, but we've never truly understood even begun to understand the depth of that suffering until maybe we ourselves suffer unjustly and Suffering away we think is not fair And we see Christ in that situation and he chose not to rebel He chose not to reject, but he chose to say not my will but yours be done That's what he chose to say and he wants us to Associate with that and recognize that and see him better. It helps us to identify with our Savior More closely doesn't it the suffering Savior we share in his sufferings only of course to an absolutely Minimal degree, but nonetheless we see that we understand his pain That it was for us he suffered Injustice and death and separation and rejection in our place

So we see him better as a suffering Savior, but we also see God better in his compassion. Don't we the father of compassion and the God of all comfort? Compassion is a great word. But I think very often for us. That's all it is. It's just a great word. But it's a great experience to receive compassion and spiritual compassion and I want here just to quote from the Backlew newsletter, sorry, I'm stealing my neighbor church's newsletter and Alex latest Offering at the beginning and he's speaking about the whole case with Al McGrathie that has been in the news recently. But he's talking about compassion and obviously he speaks about I think there's 18 references to compassion in the New Testament. 15 of them are used of Jesus, but he speaks about the three Times it's mentioned in the New Testament that it's not attributed to Jesus and can I just quote. It's used of the compassion of the king to his servant in massive debt. It's used of the compassion of the Samaritan to the dying traveler.

[20 : 37] And it's used of the compassion of the father to the prodigal son. In each case, it's counterintuitive. The action seems the opposite of what we would expect in the circumstances. It is compassion to the undeserving. Jesus is teaching that compassion for the undeserving is at the very heart of the Christian message. We can all understand compassion for those who love us and haven't hurt us. But Jesus taught and lived a different compassion for those who didn't deserve it. It involved the overcoming and removing of some kind of offense, debt, hurt or prejudice. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant and that is the compassion that we see in God that he wants us to share with one another and. It is often as we have been comforted in our own struggles and been overwhelmed by his compassion that we see other people differently.

Stand in their shoes. So that the third principle is we can comfort others when he speaks about that. Again in verse 4. 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 and he says that again in verse 6 and 7. So that we can comfort other people. Second Corinthians 4 just a bit further on in verse 10 in the letter. He says we always carry around in our body the death of Jesus Christ. So that the life of Christ may be revealed in our body so that we can then share the love of Christ with others. So suffering comes very often and has this. What's the most amazing thing about suffering the most terrible thing is that we it is personal. We think no one else understands it and we have this it was terrible. Reality and that of course is absolutely the case, but the amazing thing in Christ is that he can take that most person of all experiences and use it to deepen the sense of grace in the community as we take what naturally will cause us to just look in at ourselves and be inverted to look out and have eyes of compassion for other people.

See Paul here, he probably could have just been bristling with self-justification and he might have said I'm a wretched bunch I'm going off to Galatia. Because I'm sick and fed up with the way you do things and the moment I turn my back you've scrambled away from me. You're turning along to false teaching and I'm giving up. I've written three or four letters my hands are getting sore and it's a struggle. And he could have said that suffering suffering and he could have walked away. But he opens his heart and and says to them listen I've suffered as your leader as your teacher as the apostle. I've been grieved by you. That's the underlying words that he's speaking here, but he's saying listen God use that God has used that to comfort me and I see his purpose in it for you and for me. And I've learned from it and grown from it and he's opened his heart because he wants them to learn and grow from it as well. And what's he teaching us there?

Well, he's teaching us surely that we deal each other deal with each other when things go wrong. Paul had every opportunity not to go back to Corinth or not to write to Corinth. He could have taken a huff. He could have easily done that. No one would have noticed but he faced up to the hurt and the problems within the Christian community which were very personally attacking him and he Allowed God to heal him and then God is in it. And when things go wrong with us as Christians the easy thing to just walk away, isn't it?

[24 : 55] That's what the that's what we're taught to do get our own back Walk away starts with someone else but we'll never know growth and development and maturity and healing and hugging of That goes with that if we don't deal with that hurt and deal with that wrong If we don't allow God into it to comfort us and as a result to make us look at the hurt differently That's where there'll be real unity in a church Not the kind of superficial unity of ever loves each other. It's a great church things go lovely But it's when we've been wronged It's when people have hurt us and we've not walked away. I'm going to another church now. I'm going to another community I'll start a fresh there. They must be nicer along the road Could do that marriage Could do that in friendships Could do that anyway, can't we but we're asked and Paul reminds us that we will as we deal with these things

We will comfort one another and we will grow with one another If we bear grudges if we gossip If we leave if we take the huff then we are simply feeding our sinful nature As we crucify ourselves and allow healing and healing is never cheap Healing is never easy Healing is always the best but the hardest road to take But then we will know comfort and then we will know God not only Do we come for ourselves as we face up to Maybe The differences and difficulties we face But a much wider level as we are suffering as we have been wronged And as we deal with that and have been comforted by God then we can comfort others Who may be completely randomly or separate from us are also going through troubles in other words empathy You know Empathy great thing in the church great thing in a Christian

Party time Christians probably don't have much empathy but those Christians who have come through suffering and trial and Faced God and questioned God and learn from God and being comforted by God Will be empathetic to other Christians the best type of Christian I Think of someone the most one of the most empathetic Christians I know is Kenny McDonald who some of you know here who lost his daughter 18 18981 a lot more than 18 years ago now And that has been with them all his life What empathy is a pastor?

Understanding of people's needs What sensitivity and grace and gentleness and I want to read another quote tonight Really fast you'll be thinking he's quoting all these things because he hasn't prepared properly But it's not the case honestly, but Spurgeon and his is autobiography fool harvest service Spurgeon was one of the greatest preachers in the 19th century and then But he didn't have an easy life, you know, we read all these Biographies of these guys and you know, we think what a great life are conversions every week thousands coming to church He was absolutely went into the deepest pit of depression in his life he suffered chronic depression and he Had a terrible episode of depression Was hardly physically able to get into the pulpit and had chosen the text my god my god by the forsaken and he He reckons there was never a person in the universe that was more able to preach from that text that night than him and

Someone came into his vestry after that sermon who had been suicidal and been suffering from mental illness and Deep depression and spoke to him and Then there's a sequel five years later and I want to read this and it's in great Spurgeonian language Now here the sequel last night when all the times when of all the times of the year strange to say I was preaching From the words the Almighty have vexed my soul After the service in walk this self-same brother who had called in me five years before This time he looked as different as noonday from midnight or as alive from dead I said to him I'm glad to see you for I've often thought about you and wondered whether you were brought into perfect peace To my enquiries this brother replied yes You said five years ago that I was a hopeful patient And I am sure that you'll be glad to know that I have walked in the sunlight from that day till now Everything has changed and altered with me dear friends

[29 : 46] Spengencies as soon as I saw my poor despairing patient the first time I bless God that my fearful experiences Had prepared me to sympathize with him But last night when I saw him perfectly restored my heart overflowed with gratitude I would go into the depths a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might know how to speak a word in season to one who is weary These are great words great words of comfort and strength and power as We allow God to deal with us in our own weaknesses and struggles and sufferings Paul is opening his heart and He concludes the fourth principle being it gives us new reasons to trust God and verses 8 to 12 he Broadens the the troubles that he's been facing not just to Interchurcher within the church, but the sufferings in the province of Asia where

He was under great pressure and be far beyond his ability to endure so he disappeared even of life And he thought he was going to die but this was To bring him to rely on God because God delivered him from such deadly peril He was given new reasons to trust God through what he had experienced Paul is no theorist and His experiences have been given to the church of Christ from the first day to the last Not only was he able to call out to God and know God's comfort But also he experienced God's delivering power in a different circumstance From deadly peril and from the self-reliance that goes with deadly peril God He says he didn't want me to rely on myself, but he wanted me to rely on God and So he's saying he's given us a really big principle here is which is that trouble often closes the door on our self-reliance closes the door on relying on our beauty on relying on our intelligence on

Relying on our humor on our income on our powerful ambitions It closes the door on these very often trouble and brings us to the point where we recognize there's one door left and It's open and it's open all the time and The arms of Christ are there waiting for us to come to him for deliverance because that is what he will often teach us Because we choose not to trust in him very often when we rely on our beauty and our talents and our humor and our intelligence and our income But it gives us a glimpse of how great he is and How much he loves us and how much he wants us to rely on him Gives us a right appreciation of who we are that he is a trustworthy saving God so that We become a praying people And that's prayer isn't it? It's praying because he's worth

He's worthy. He's a delivering God. He's an answering God. He delivers He holds his promises. He doesn't let go the amazing power of prayer Then many will give thanks Not only as we pray for deliverance, but as we give thanks to him in looking back and very often it takes time these these are not instant these are these truths are wrestled from our experiences are hard and tearful and unbelievable and Wanted but as we look back as we look with God's perspective as we matured in our understanding we can see these realities this intimate truth of a personal God who is It just loves us and has given himself for us and who has suffered on our behalf and who will redeem us one day from every pain and from every separation and from every hurt praise God

For the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's bow our heads and pray Heavenly Father we give thanks to you for your word we give thanks to you for the Epistles that you have given to us the letters written not just to the early churches, but With the apostolic authority of God for us all and heavenly Father may we learn from the cauldron of life's difficulties from the Sower heat of trial from the burning heat of oppression and from the difficulties that sometimes torment us internally or the experiences that we would not wish on our Greatest enemy or the hurts from our closest friends and who of us Haven't experienced these things, but Lord may we not Take them to God in accusation

[35 : 22] But give us the grace and the wisdom and the peace to take them to God for comfort and to ask God to reveal What he is doing and saying in our lives knowing his great love Bless us as we sing may our singing be wrought from personal experience may come from our souls may it be offered with Thanksgiving and joy and may it be expressive and powerful and Wonderful opportunity to Express to God Thanksgiving in response to his own truth that we have shared this evening for Jesus's sake. Amen