

The Comfort of Faith

Intro: Life presents us many painful things to cope with during the course of our journey through life. Someone once said that whenever we preach there is a hurting heart in every pew! Rarely a week goes by that we do not have to announce that someone is sick, that someone has passed away, that someone has experienced a loss. We live in a world of pain and suffering. It is in such times of hurt and distress that we become vividly aware of our need for comfort or consolation. The Bible shows us that there is consolation for all those who truly believe in God.

The apostle Paul described a painful time during his ministry in Ephesus.

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;” (2 Corinthians 1:8)

Yet in spite of all these difficulties Paul found comfort from God and he opens his wonderful second letter to the Corinthians acknowledging it:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

Paul in this passage describes what was for him and for all other disciples who believe, the comfort of faith in God. Let’s think about the comfort of faith. As believers we have...

The Comfort of God’s Concern

There will surely be times when we may question our circumstances and even wonder if God knows our affliction or care about our pain. Peter answers:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)

As we go through trial we must keep believing this statement. As Vance Havner put it, “The Unseen Hand may be obscured at times by the fogs of circumstance but just because we can’t see the sun on a cloudy day doesn’t mean that it isn’t there.

God has always cared for His people. There was a time when God’s people, because of their sins were delivered over to Babylonian captivity. Yet even then God wanted to assure His people that He cared about their condition and intended to bring comfort to them again.

But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me.” Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have

inscribed you on the palms of My hands; Your walls are continually before Me. (Isaiah 49:14–16)

So too in our times of affliction, we can in faith experience the comfort of God’s concern. And again, our faith comforts us because we know we have:

The Comfort of God’s Presence

The faithful poet Asaph spoke of a time when he felt as if God was not fair in how He treated the faithful. He saw the prosperity of the wicked; yet when he looked at his own life he said, “I am chastened every morning.” Yet realizing the error his feelings, he reaffirmed his faith in God’s presence:

Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast taken hold of my right hand. With Thy counsel Thou wilt guide me, and afterward receive me to glory. (Psalm 73:23–24)

David during his life experienced many troubles, many of which came at the hands of King Saul. David was forced to flee from place to place to avoid His wrath. Yet he enjoyed the comfort of faith. He sang:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)

In another song he sang:

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him for the help of His presence. (Psalm 42:5)

Indeed he offered his experience to encourage others when they felt lonely like he had:

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18)

The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth. (Psalm 145:18)

You may be by yourself; but you are never alone! If we are people of faith we can enjoy the comfort of His presence.

The Comfort of God’s Promises

It would be comforting to all people of faith to know God cares about them and that He is with them in their time of trouble. But God has done even more. He has given us His word to comfort us.

In that great psalm of praise to God for His word, the psalmist writes:

This is my comfort in my affliction, that Thy word has revived me. (Psalm 119:50)

Sometimes just at the time we need it, God speaks to us in the Scriptures what we need to relieve our pain and give us hope.

O may Thy lovingkindness comfort me, according to Thy word to Thy servant. (Psalm 119:76)

The apostle Paul experienced many afflictions in his life; yet there was one thing that got him through—the promise of God’s eternal reward.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

People of faith can experience that great comfort of God's promises.

The Comfort of God's Provision

Could we say that God's comfort only comes in the form of words to assure us? We have also the comfort of God's provision. Whatever we may need in our time of affliction God is able to provide.

God urged his people not give in to despair. He would give them strength to endure their trials:

'Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you. Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' (Isaiah 41:10)

Later he enlarged upon that promise:

Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth Does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary. (Isaiah 40:28–31).

This is the victory that overcomes the world when we are shipwrecked on God and stranded on Omnipotence!—Vance Havner¹

Jeremiah wrote in his lamentations:

Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The LORD's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:20–23)

Paul knew that strength personally and affirmed its value to him in times of suffering:

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12–13)

The Comfort of God's Purpose

Somehow in all of our afflictions, we miss that God is doing something with all this. He is working out a plan that includes us and that blesses us.

Our trials make us better.

¹ Morgan, R. J. (2000). *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (electronic ed., pp. 355–356). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Thou, who hast shown me many troubles and distresses, wilt revive me again, and wilt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Mayest Thou increase my greatness, and turn to comfort me. (Psalm 71:20–21)

Sometimes in the moment it is hard to see how God is using a painful circumstance; but later we'll see it. "Life must be lived forward; it can only be understood backwards.—Søren Kierkegaard²"

And God's plan will at last be fulfilled when He afflicts the wicked and comforts the righteous. Everything moves toward that day when the righteous will be rewarded for their steadfastness.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)

With the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, the wisdom of God to plan it, and the power of God to achieve it, what do we lack?—A. W.

Tozer

Yet there is one more comfort of faith:

The Comfort of God's People.

Sadly there are people who in their moments of distress have no one to turn to and no one to comfort them; but we should never have to say that. We can experience the comfort of God's people. Paul rejoiced in his afflictions because they gave him the wisdom and power to help others:

For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort. (2 Corinthians 1:5–7)

And Paul urged God's people to share the hope that they had of the Lord's coming and the resurrection of the righteous dead to be with him forever saying:

"Therefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thes. 4:18).

Conclusion: All that we are saying today is summarized in the words of the apostle Paul as he sought to encourage God's people to face whatever sufferings they must endure for the sake of faith in Jesus:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called;

² Morgan, R. J. (2000). *Nelson's complete book of stories, illustrations, and quotes* (electronic ed., p. 648). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. (God's purpose)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?(God's concern) Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (God's provision) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR THY SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. (God's promise) For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:28–39) (God's presence)

**What a great reason to be a believer--to simply experience the comfort of faith!
Do you have that comfort?**

If not come to the one Isaiah saw in prophecy with the words:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Or hear His own words:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and YOU SHALL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." (Mt. 11:28-30)