

"When God (and the Devil) Comfort You Immeasurably"

2 Corinthians 1:3-4

17 May 2020

Long ago, in 1563, a handful of German theologians got together and summarized the essentials of the Christian life and faith in a document called the *Heidelberg Catechism*. It is set in the classic question-and-answer format, and it's famous for its first question and answer. Here's how the *Heidelberg Catechism* comes out swingin':

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

That'll preach. And that'll comfort you too. And the entire answer to the first question of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is what our God is thrilled to do for us. Jesus loves to comfort sinners. As He says Isaiah 51:12 *"I, I am He who comforts you."* And that's our big idea today, straight from God's lips-

I, I AM HE WHO COMFORTS YOU.

And it's emphatic in the Hebrew language: *I, I am He who comforts you*. The emphatic personal pronoun! I love it! *"I, I am He who..."* And it's really fun to say in Hebrew! *anoki anoki who manakemkem*

With this phrase, it's as if God is saying, *"But I am as alert as ever you might require! I'm wide-awake and paying attention to all that concerns you. I'm not asleep. I'm not dozing off. I'm watching over and working for you."*

The Lord is just as concerned to answer our prayers as we are to cry out to Him! Think about that! So, God is reassuring His people through the prophet Isaiah that He Himself is the one who gets personally involved when we are suffering. He rolls up His sleeves and gets His own hands dirty. And that's what the apostle Paul will say about God in our passage today in 2 Corinthians 1.

LOOK AT VERSE 3...

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...

As we saw 2 weeks ago, Paul explodes in praise and adoration here. I mean, who wouldn't want to begin a letter to a church this way? Keep in mind that Paul is suffering in some very profound ways. We'll see it more as we go along. So this is who Paul is as he writes this letter. He is suffering. He is overwhelmed. He even says that it got so bad at one point that he wanted to die. So how can Paul be suffering so much and at such deep levels that he can praise God like this? What enables him to worship God like this? I tell you'll this. It wasn't the ease of his circumstances. It wasn't getting to a place in life that things were going well. It wasn't getting all of his questions answered.

What empowered Paul to praise to God was the worth of the God who saved him. Paul explodes in praise here in verse 3 and life is really hard for him! We tend to think that our worship will be more extravagant and over-the-top when life is generally easy, when God answers all of our prayers and gives us what we want. But Paul shows us that you can be suffering in the deepest of ways, you can be experiencing deep heart pain, and yet your worship can come up from even the deepest places of a grateful heart.

Make no mistake about it: Paul is suffering in the deepest of ways and yet he can say, *"Blessed be the God..."* And this phrase is the banner that's raised over 2 Corinthians. And this is the banner that should be stretched across every church: *"Blessed be the God..."* It's the banner that is stretched over all the Bible. So, the Bible is just page after page, verse after verse, chapter after chapter of *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..."* That's the heart of God that you see on page after page in God's word. He is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

And the deeper we drink of this good news, the more extravagant will be our praise. The more often we have deep repeated gulps of the Gospel, the more often we have deep, repeated gulps of the good news of Jesus, then the more extravagant our worship will be, just like Paul here.

That means that if we stumble in here on Sunday morning, and I assume that most of us do, we should leave here having met with the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. If we walk into church on Sunday morning saying and feeling deeply, *"My heart hurts. I feel like a bruised reed and flickering wick. I don't think I can make it. I'm weak. I feel like I can't go another day. I'm worn out. I need comfort,"* if we come into church that way, we should be able to leave saying, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..."*

That's our goal for this church. We want people to leave, no matter how deeply they are suffering, no matter what is happening in their lives, saying those words. Walking in beat up, walking in tired, walking in weary, walking in exhausted, and leaving and being able to say, *even through the pain and sorrow, "Blessed be the God..."*

That's the kind of church that I think we are and we want to remain. We want people to come here and experience this God. So, verse 3, this is the heart of God for you, Christian. Mercy. Comfort. Please understand this: His deepest desires for you are mercy and comfort, not frustration and anger. This is how God glorifies Himself: by showering you with mercy and comfort. And you don't have to twist His arm to get Him to be this way! He doesn't reluctantly shell out His gifts. This is who He is.

So, why not share this good news with someone this week? Go ask a co-worker or neighbor who they think God is and ask them what they think God is like. And then tell them. He's merciful. He comforts. Tell them that God's deepest desires for them are mercy and comfort, not frustration and anger. And then call them to repent and turn to Jesus.

Today, we're just going to be looking at the last half of verse 3 and the first half of verse 4. Last week we looked at what it means that God is the Father of mercies. But, Paul also tells us that He is the *"God of all comfort."* You would expect judgment for the Corinthian church. You would expect the proverbial slap on the wrist, but that's not how Paul describes God here. Paul surprises them with comfort! Mercy and comfort for this sin-prone church! Paul is just pulling back the very heart of God and giving the Corinthians a peek at who God really is. I love that.

And God's comfort is not wimpy. His comfort is not frail. God's comfort is massive. It's dense. It's thick. It's solid. It's wide. There's comfort for every sorrow we face! That's how you're supposed to read this verse. You're supposed to come away happy and hopeful that this massive, God-sized comfort is available for you. That means then that, whatever you face in this world, you don't have to fear that somehow God's comfort will be too wimpy to take on what you are facing.

The word used here by Paul for "comfort" has the idea of coming alongside someone and consoling them and encouraging them and strengthening them and refreshing them spiritually. So, God is the God of all comfort, the God of all *"come alongside you and refresh you."* The God of all *"I'm with you, right beside you, holding your hand, with My arm around you, helping you."*

God is the God of all comfort, the God of all *"come alongside you and refresh you."* The God of all *"I'm with you, right beside you, holding your hand, with My arm around you."* He's cheering you on! Wow! What a picture of God! Cheering His kids on saying, *"Y'all can do it! I'm with you!"* He's not like a drill sergeant. God is not like Sergeant Carter on *Gomer Pyle*. Do you remember that old T.V. show?

* INSERT PIC OF GOMER PYLE

Sergeant Carter was always yelling at Gomer and all the other soldiers. Always in their face barking orders. And that's how some people view God. He just yells and barks orders. That's the way some preachers present him and those preachers just yell and bark orders in their preaching. But God's not like that at all with His children. He is the Father of mercies. God does not come alongside us and scream in our ear. He comes alongside to help us, to strengthen us. He's not like an out-of-control, fly-off-the-handle Father. He comes to strengthen, to refresh. He's on our side!

As Iain Duguid says, *"The Lord is not a harsh taskmaster, waiting for us to step out of line so that he can punish us severely for the slightest infraction. On the contrary, he confronts us with our sin so that he can forgive us and show us his mercy and grace when we repent. He is a loving Father who waits with arms outstretched all day long to welcome home the returning prodigal."*

He's not a harsh taskmaster. He comforts repentant sinners under the shelter of His wings, not with a hammer! And He comforts us in a myriad of ways because He is, after all, the God of *all* comfort, which means that we can never exhaust His supplies or His sources of comfort! He has an endless supply of comfort for you. You will never find yourself in any situation where God looks concerned and tells you, *"I'm sorry. I can't help with this one. I'm really, really sorry. I just don't have the resources for this one. I'm out of My league here."*

The Spirit of God comforts us in a myriad of ways. He uses the ordinary means of grace- preaching, the Lord's Supper, baptism, and prayer. And, the Spirit uses friends, and books, and phone calls, and text messages, and blog posts, and *Instagram* stories, etc. He uses whatever it takes to bring you comfort. He's committed to your comfort! Believe that! We'll talk more about *how* He comforts us next week.

But this is what the Holy Spirit does. His "to-do" list looks like this:

1. *Comfort.*
2. *Comfort.*
3. *Comfort.*

As John Owen said, "*The Comforter gives a sweet and plentiful evidence and persuasion of the love of God to us, such as the soul is taken, delighted, satiated withal. This is his work, and he doth it effectually. To give a poor sinful soul a comfortable persuasion, affecting it throughout, in all its faculties and affections, that God in Jesus Christ loves him, delights in him, is well pleased with him, hath thoughts of tenderness and kindness towards him; to give, I say, a soul an overflowing sense hereof, is an inexpressible mercy.*" (Works, II:240)

The Holy Spirit is ready to persuade you of God's love. He longs to comfort you and tell you that your Father in Heaven loves you, delights in you, is well-pleased with you, and has thoughts of tenderness and kindness toward you. And He wants you to feel it and sense it overwhelmingly. That's comfort straight from God's heart.

And the context for the comfort that receive from God is "affliction." 2x Paul uses this word in verse 4, and then he uses it again in v. 6 and then again in v.8. So Paul is piling up this word to show us the context that God's comfort shows up in: *affliction*. But what does Paul mean by "affliction?" What exactly does that entail?

Affliction has both an outward and inward idea. Outwardly you see it with tribulations, trials, pressures, hardships, troubles, persecutions, and sufferings. Inwardly, it's all the distresses and anxieties that plague us. So it's this whole package of what we experience outwardly and inwardly, which is where we feel it when we suffer, right? There's a physical aspect and an inner aspect of affliction and suffering. There's a tangible and intangible effect. Here's how it looked for Paul:

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

...with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

That's what affliction looked like for Paul... and then some. Thrown in jail. Beaten. Near death often. Whipped on 5 different occasions for a total of 195 lashes! 3x beaten with wooden rods. Rocks thrown at him. Shipwrecked 3x. Floating in the sea for 24 hours. Danger, danger, danger from everybody and everywhere he went! Sleepless nights. Hungry. Thirsty. Often without food! Often without food! Cold and exposure to the elements. And on top of that, all the drama and cares and concerns that come with pastoral ministry were weighing on his heart. All of that, Paul is summing up here with the word *affliction*.

It looked different for Paul at different times in his life, and the same is for you and me. We all suffer affliction in many different ways, but no matter how you color it, no matter how you dress it up, affliction is affliction and it stinks and it hurts and we don't like it. And that's okay. We're not called to enjoy affliction. We're just called to enjoy the God of all comforts as we endure affliction. Whatever we suffer, Jesus comes to us and says-

I, I AM HE WHO COMFORTS YOU.

The emphatic personal pronoun! I love it! "*I, I am He who...*" That emphatic personal pronoun may be just what your heart needs today! Whatever you are going through, Jesus is fully aware and He is with you, personally comforting you. God is always ready and willing to roll up His sleeves and get His hands dirty with all of your troubles and affliction. And when He does, He comes with comfort in His back pocket.

It's why He goes by the name "Immanuel." God with us. God with us, personally comforting us. It's why He gave Abraham- *and gave us, because Abraham is our father*- it's why He gave us this promise: *"I will be your God."* I love the way Donald Macleod expresses it:

"I will be your God." What does that mean? It means that God is saying to Abraham, "I will be for you. I will exercise my God-ness for you. I will be committed to you." There is no way that can be improved upon! There is no more glorious promise: not in Romans, not in Hebrews, not in Revelation, not in the Gospel of John, not in the Upper Room: nowhere! These words of the Abrahamic covenant have never been excelled and never will. (A Faith to Live By, p.251)

When Paul talks here about the God of all comfort, He's talking about Yahweh, the God who said to Abraham, and says to us, *"I will be your God."* You could even put those 2 phrases together and I don't think Abraham, Paul, or Jesus would mind: *I will be your God of all comforts.* Isn't that wonderful! I have to read it again: *I will be your God of all comforts.* That might be enough to get you through whatever it is that you are going through right now. *I will be your God of all comforts.*

Notice, too, that Paul says that God comforts and strengthens us in all our affliction. So no matter what it is that we go through, God is always the One who comforts us, strengthens us, refreshes us. The suffering may vary, the pressures may be different, the distresses might change colors, the troubles may be big or small, it may be physical, it may be internal, but through it all there is one constant. God is the One who comforts and strengthens us. So, you may be going through something completely different from me, but we both have the same source of comfort: Jesus.

You might be beaten. You might go hungry. You might be shipwrecked. You might have sleepless nights. Or, you may just have a neighbor that irritates you. Whatever affliction you go through and suffer, the common denominator for all of us is Jesus. And you can go through a lot when Jesus is with you, comforting you. You can go through quite a lot in this life when the God of all comforts is holding your hand.

But notice how personal this is, for Paul and the Corinthians: *who comforts us*. If we take away that one word "us," then we lose the very heart of the Gospel! God comforts *us*. Plural. Real people with real hearts that are hurting, going through real problems, and just trying to make it one more day. God with *us*. This is not impersonal. When we suffer, the real Jesus comes to comfort the real us. Not the "us" that we display on *Instagram*. Not the "us" that gives people the impression that we have it all together. No. The real Jesus of the Bible comes to comfort the real us. The real us that struggles to love others. The real us that just wants to quit their job. The real us that grieves. The real us that maybe even just wants to die.

Jesus comes to that "us." And He comforts us. He doesn't come with a bunch of "I told you so's." He doesn't come with a list of cheesy Christian memes that are fake and divorced from real life. No. The One who comforts the real us goes by the name "Man of Sorrows." Who better to comfort us when we suffer? Jesus comes and He knows in even deeper ways than we could ever imagine just what it means to suffer. This is who you want comforting you and this is who does, Christian!

If we take out the word "us" from verse 4, then we lose the theological punch and power of this verse. It just becomes so generic: *Who comforts in all our affliction*. See the difference it makes! *Who comforts us! Us!* That little 2-letter word is so full of hope. We could re-word it this way:

who comforts Grace Baptist Church in all our affliction...

Isn't that great? Doesn't that drive it home? I love that! He comforts us. He comforts Grace Baptist Church. From the nursery with little, tiny humans crawling on the ground, to energetic 3rd grade kids running in the gym, to socially-awkward teenagers, to starving college students, to singles, to newly marrieds, to married for a long time, to widowed, to on their death bed, Grace Baptist Church. All of us. He comforts all of us. He comforts us individually and corporately. And as we'll see next week, it's often through our own church family that He comforts us.

This is what Jesus does best. He comforts. He comes to His people, to dwell with His people, and He unleashes all His power and glory and grace and goodness on them. In fact, not to get all "geeky Greeky" on you, but I will. This is qualitative genitive in the Greek. That means that God is "characterized by comfort of every kind." So, when Paul calls God the "God of all comforts," he means that this is who He is in His nature, His essence. In other words, if you cut Jesus, He bleeds comfort. He is characterized by comfort of every kind. You name the affliction, and Jesus has a comfort to match it. He has all kinds of comfort for all kinds of affliction.

And when you are suffering, it is imperative that you preach to yourself this good news. You must preach to your own heart the presence of God with you in your suffering. You must preach to yourself over and

over again that Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. Because if you don't, your circumstances and your suffering will roar loudly that God is not good and that He doesn't care. So, it is vital that you preach "God with us" to your heart. It will remind that Jesus is present with you and with you through the body of Christ. God with us. Immanuel.

That's what your heart needs when you suffer. To be reminded that God is with you.

This is where our hope lies, that God is with us and comforts us. Our hope, as we suffer, does not lie in figuring things out. Our hope does not lie in getting all of our questions answered. Our hope does not lie in explanations from God. Our hope does not lie in Jesus pulling up a chair right next to us and telling us all that He's up to. Our hope lies in the fact that Jesus just simply pulls a chair up next to us! That's enough! Jesus in a chair next to us is enough! Our hope is that He is with us, right next to us, holding our hand as we suffer. Our hope lies in the fact that we really are never alone. Jesus pulls up a chair next to us and says, *"Answers won't comfort you. Explanations as to why you are suffering won't comfort you. Getting it all figured out won't comfort you."* Instead, He says-

I, I AM HE WHO COMFORTS YOU.

But we may also get comfort from an unlikely source. Martin Luther said that the Devil may comfort us too! Really? Yep! Listen to what Luther says in his commentary on Galatians 1:4, which says, *"...the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins..."* Luther said:

"When the devil accuses us and says, 'You are a sinner and therefore condemned,' we should answer, 'Because you say I am a sinner, I will be righteous and saved.' 'No,' says the devil, 'you will be condemned.' And I reply, 'No, for I fly to Christ, who gave himself for my sins. Satan, you will not prevail against me when you try to terrify me by setting forth the greatness of my sins and try to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt and blasphemy against God. On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and tread you under my feet, for Christ died for sinners... As often as you object that I am a sinner, so often you remind me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, on whose shoulders, and not on mine, lie all my sins. So when you say I am a sinner, you do not terrify me but comfort me immeasurably.'"

When the Devil throws our sins in our face, he's really just comforting us immeasurably! When the Devil tries to heap condemnation on us, we can just tell him, *"Thank you, Satan! Thank you for reminding me that I am sinner because that's who Jesus came for! That's who He lived and died for! Thank you for reminding me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, on whose shoulders, and not on mine, lie all my sins. So when you say that I am a sinner, Satan, you do not terrify me but comfort me immeasurably."*

We began with comfort from the *Heidelberg Catechism*, why not end with it? This time, say it with me wherever you are:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

May you the Spirit enable you to be wholeheartedly willing and ready to live for Him.

P.S. Jesus can't remember your sins!

If we stumble in here on Sunday morning, and I assume that most of us do, we should leave here having met with the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. If we walk into church on Sunday morning saying and feeling deeply, *"My heart hurts. I feel like a bruised reed and flickering wick. I don't think I can make it. I'm weak. I feel like I can't go another day. I'm worn out. I need comfort,"* if we come into church that way, we should be able to leave saying, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort..."*

That's our goal for this church. We want people to leave here- *leave our livestreams*- no matter how deeply they are suffering, no matter what is happening in their lives, saying those words. Walking in beat up, walking in tired, walking in weary, walking in exhausted, and leaving and being able to say, *even through the pain and sorrow, "Blessed be the God..."*

That's the kind of church we want to be. Why be this kind of church? Because people have been beaten up all week long, right? We live in a society in which we never measure up- especially on social media. We are soaked in constant criticism and constant comparison- especially on social media. And sadly, it just feels normal now, doesn't it?

We swim in an ocean of criticism and cut-downs all week long and then we walk into church. And that moment is the most important moment of our week. What are we going to hear at church? What kind of environment are we going to walk into?

We want to say to weary people, what the last James Boice used to say to his church:

*To all who are weary and need rest;
To all who mourn and long for comfort;
To all who feel worthless and wonder if God even cares;
To all who are weak and fail and desire strength;
To all who sin and need a Savior—
This church opens wide her doors with a welcome from Jesus,
the mighty friend of sinners,
the ally of his enemies,
the defender of the indefensible,
the justifier of those who have no excuses left.*

Or, to say it the way the apostle Paul would-

This church opens wide her doors with a welcome from the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.

Listen, we want you to know that things will be different with this church. When you walk into Grace, you walk into grace. You can relax here. You can be honest about your sin, honest about your struggles, honest about your pain, honest about your sorrow. You can meet the Father of mercies and God of all comfort here and you can be re-oxygenated by His Gospel, so that you can walk out of the service and feel very much alive again. All for His glory.

"When God (and the Devil) Comfort You Immeasurably"
2 Corinthians 1:3-4
Sermon Study Questions

1. Read and discuss Question 1 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and in death?

A. That I am not my own, but belong— body and soul, in life and in death— to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven; in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

2. Discuss this quote by Donald Macleod:

"I will be your God." What does that mean? It means that God is saying to Abraham, "I will be for you. I will exercise my God-ness for you. I will be committed to you." There is no way that can be improved upon! There is no more glorious promise: not in Romans, not in Hebrews, not in Revelation, not in the Gospel of John, not in the Upper Room: nowhere! These words of the Abrahamic covenant have never been excelled and never will. (A Faith to Live By, p.251)

Where do you need God to exercise His "God-ness" for you in your life? Read Romans 8:31 and discuss.

3. Discuss this thought from the sermon:

Our hope, as we suffer, does not lie in figuring things out. Our hope does not lie in getting all of our questions answered. Our hope does not lie in explanations from God. Our hope does not lie in Jesus

pulling up a chair right next to us and telling us all that He's up to. Our hope lies in the fact that Jesus just simply pulls a chair up next to us! That's enough! Jesus in a chair next to us is enough! Our hope is that He is with us, right next to us, holding our hand as we suffer. Our hope lies in the fact that we really are never alone. Jesus pulls up a chair next to us and says, "Answers won't comfort you. Explanations as to why you are suffering won't comfort you. Getting it all figured out won't comfort you." Instead, He says, "I, I am He who comforts you."

Where in your life have you thought, *"If I only had some answers and explanations from Jesus, then I'd have some peace about this"*? Where do you need to trust in Jesus and not in explanations?

4. Discuss what Martin Luther said about the Devil comforting us:

"When the devil accuses us and says, 'You are a sinner and therefore condemned,' we should answer, 'Because you say I am a sinner, I will be righteous and saved.' 'No,' says the devil, 'you will be condemned.' And I reply, 'No, for I fly to Christ, who gave himself for my sins. Satan, you will not prevail against me when you try to terrify me by setting forth the greatness of my sins and try to bring me into heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt and blasphemy against God. On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that with your own sword I may cut your throat and tread you under my feet, for Christ died for sinners... As often as you object that I am a sinner, so often you remind me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer, on whose shoulders, and not on mine, lie all my sins. So when you say I am a sinner, you do not terrify me but comfort me immeasurably.'"