

Read: 2 Corinthians 1

Song: Wonderful Merciful Savior

Wonderful, merciful Savior
Precious Redeemer and Friend
Who would have thought that a Lamb
Could rescue the souls of men
Oh, You rescue the souls of men

Counselor, Comforter, Keeper
Spirit we long to embrace
You offer hope when our hearts have
Hopelessly lost our way
Oh, we've hopelessly lost the way

You are the One that we praise
You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace

Our hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

Almighty, infinite Father
Faithfully loving Your own
Here in our weakness You find us
Falling before Your throne
Oh, we're falling before Your throne

You are the One that we praise
You are the One we adore
You give the healing and grace
Our hearts always hunger for
Oh, our hearts always hunger for

Prayer:

Lord, we bow before you in worship and adoration. You are our almighty, infinite Father. Not just mine, but ours. We are yours, collectively.

Lord we know that you are a God of comfort. Jesus tells us that His “yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). And we’re grateful for the comfort you provide in our hard times.

But we also acknowledge, Lord, that the comfort you provide is not for us alone. It is shared between us. We can comfort others out of the comfort you’ve given to us. And others comfort us out of the comfort You have given to them. It is a perfect circle. We are connected to one another because we are all connected to you. Entering into You and Your Kingdom is also entering into fellowship with the Church. We thank you for how you’ve provided for us in this way, Lord, and we pray that we would not be selfish in our enjoyment of your gifts, Lord, but that they would flow out of us towards one another.

Amen.

Reflection:

Paul opens up his second letter to the Corinthian (1:3-7) church by saying this;
“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. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.”

The word 'comfort' or a variation of it is used ten times in these five verses. There is no doubt on what this passage is about. Paul is laser-focused on the comfort that we receive from God. But when we say that phrase, 'comfort from God,' I wonder if we're not picturing something different than Paul was.

I think we can be tempted to think of God's comfort as a vague sense of isolated peace; a quieting of the soul that comes upon a person in their own head. That's nice, but the comfort Paul is describing is inherently communal. The concept of an isolated individual believer, who lives sealed away from the rest of the Body, never even occurs to him. To Paul, comfort and suffering both bind believers together. When he is suffering, he thinks of how it might be for the sake of the church's comfort (even as he knows they "share in our sufferings"). And when he is comforted, he seeks to pass it on to them too.

This is one of the positive parts of suffering for us as believer. We can't ease other's suffering per say, but we can encourage someone with the comfort that others (maybe that very believer!) have given us in the past. And when we are once again suffering ourselves, that believer can then comfort us in turn. We suffer together, we are comforted together, one comforts another who is suffering, and then the roles reverse.

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 1:8-11,

"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many."

Paul went through something very tough in Asia. We don't know what it was. But maybe as you come to the Lord today, you are in a similar place. A place of desperation, of feeling like you've received a sentence of death, of needing comfort. Paul doesn't discount any of that. He doesn't say 'oh, it's not that bad.' What he says is that we worship a God who can raise the dead! Even if we are in an experience that feels like death is approaching, God is greater.

And we are members of His body. Paul and his co-workers share in Christ's sufferings because we are still in the old age, but they share in comfort too because the new messianic age has already started. This comfort is sometimes deliverance out of hardship, but it can also be encouragement in the hardship which enables them to endure. And as we've said before, that comfort and encouragement is something shared between believers. We can be conduits, channels of God's comfort and love.

Challenge:

Paul starts the final sentence of this section by saying "you also must help us by prayer." Scripture emphasizes the power that prayer has over and over again. It's not just keeping someone in your thoughts, or hoping that they're doing ok. It's petitioning the Creator God on

their behalf, asking the Lord to work and move in their life out of His love for them (and you, the asker).

So the challenge for this week comes in two forms. One, be a channel for the comfort of God to the people you are around in person this week.

- Be the source of kindness that someone else has been for you in the past.
- Or say the loving thing that you wish someone else had told you when you were in a difficult situation.

Think of yourself as God's messenger, God's ambassador. That God is sending comfort to the people in your life through you.

And secondly, pray for others. As Paul says, 'help them in prayer.'

- Do you know someone who's going through a hard time? Set aside a few minutes each day to pray for their comfort.
- Do you know someone who is facing a hard decision? Pray that God would give them wisdom.
- Are you not sure who to pray for? Take a minute and ask God to bring someone to mind.
- Think back through your week. Who did you see? What are they facing? Who have you not seen recently? What might they be up to?
- God knows, even if we do not. Paul writes in Romans 8:26 that "we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Ask God to give you a person to pray for them, and then join Him in that ministry of intercession.

Intercede for the people in your life in prayer, just as Paul interceded for his churches in prayer, and they interceded for him, and the Spirit intercedes for us all. We should still pray for our own fears and challenges, absolutely. But the challenge this week is to spend time in prayer for others. To comfort them out of God's comfort for us, and to lift them up in prayer.

And no better way to do this than together. The church is open, and the prayer room is a wonderful place to meet and come before the Lord together, comforting and encouraging one another in real time. But we can do this anywhere, at any time, for anyone. That's the beauty of it. So lift others up in prayer this week. And trust that as you do so, others are praying for you too.