

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

“Rely on God, Who Raises the Dead”

Imago Dei Church | 1/17/21 | Sunday AM

[8] 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. [9] 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. [10] 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. [11] 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.

INTRODUCTION

In our text today, Paul continues discussing the theme of affliction and suffering, which we began last week. There Paul sought to encourage the believers by reminding them of God’s purpose in our affliction—namely, that in our suffering we experience God’s unique comfort, and are thereby able to comfort others.

The text before us is a continuation of that thought—but in a more personal way. He wants them to know that he’s not simply theorizing about suffering and affliction, but reporting on his own experience. And in his experience, God seems to have a second purpose for his affliction.

The **FIRST PURPOSE** in our trials and tribulations is that we can serve others by comforting them with the comfort we have received. (And who doesn't want to do that, right?)

God's **SECOND PURPOSE** in our trials and tribulations is internal, transforming our very heart and character.

What this text does **NOT DO** is give us a comprehensive explanation of the problem of evil, why there is any suffering at all, how a good God could allow terrible things to happen, etc. This text is not nearly so philosophical as that. Instead, it's grounded in reality, in lived experience. It's earthy, personal, intimate, and vulnerable.

Perhaps that's you this morning. Perhaps you feel, deeply, intimately, personally, the pangs of trial and tribulation. You hear the words of Paul in this text expressing a despair of life itself and you think, "YES! He gets it!"

Friend, this text is for you. It doesn't answer all our "why" questions. But it peels back the curtain just a little and helps us understand what God wants for us in the midst of our suffering.

Perhaps you haven't suffered much. Perhaps the brokenness of the world has only lightly touched you, or not touched you recently. Let me beg you, don't tune out. The best time to prepare for affliction is not in the middle of it. prepare your heart now and be ready to receive what God might be doing, not just **THROUGH YOU** (last week), but **IN YOU**.

Sermon has two simple sections: vv.8-9 show us **God's purpose in our affliction**, and verses 10-11 give us **2 helps in our affliction**.

[1] GOD'S PURPOSE IN OUR AFFLICTION (8-9)

Main Idea: God uses trials/afflictions to teach us to rely on his all-sufficient power to rescue, redeem, and restore.

Paul wants the Corinthians believers to know that his reflection on Christian comfort is not theory. He's not hypothesizing. HE KNOWS AFFLICTION.

[8] For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

Now, we aren't told precisely what the nature of this trial was. It's possible that he's referring to the riots he experienced in Ephesus, which resulted from the gospel being preached and idol-makers revolting against the conversions.

He may have been talking about some physical ailment, which Paul elsewhere suggests was an ongoing problem.

He may have been talking about his inner turmoil as a result of his conflict with the Corinthian church.

But Paul doesn't quite specify. All we know is, Paul went through some stuff, and it's likely that whoever was delivering the letter would have been able to elaborate on the specifics.

What he really, wants them to get, though, is the effect of those afflictions on him.

For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. [9] Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.

He highlights at least **three characteristics** of this trial:

1. Their internal resources were maxed out ("beyond our strength")
2. They perceived that they were victims of fierce opposition ("sentence of death")
3. Which resulted in a despair of life

Do any of these sound familiar to you? Can you resonate with Paul here? Notice that Paul isn't saying that he was actually sentenced to death, but that he felt that way. This is how he perceived it, how he experienced it. And it was terrible!

But precisely here, at this point, is where Paul recognized God wanted to meet him.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God...

There's purpose here!

God' purpose in our affliction is not to harm us, but to teach us something. Or more accurately, to form something in us. Paul would elsewhere say,

Romans 5:3-4

[3] ... we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, (ESV)

Affliction has a unique ability to form in us a profound depth of faith. That's what he says God wanted to teach them: to rely on God.

Isn't that interesting? Do we not often associate suffering and trials with a LOSS of faith? And indeed, many respond to experiences of affliction, persecution, suffering, and difficulty with a heart that questions God's goodness and faithfulness. How could God do this, or allow this in my life? If God is so powerful, why would he let this happen? Perhaps he's not so good after all. Or perhaps he's not so powerful.

But Paul says that's the wrong takeaway. Suffering isn't supposed to show us God's limitations, but our own.

Affliction has a unique ability to show us our own insufficiency. And it's a good and necessary lesson for us to reckon with.

(ILL) "I can't even"

We can't, but God can. That's primary purpose here. It's not just to that we reckon with our own inadequacy, but that we marvel at God's all-sufficiency.

But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

In the face of our limitations, we are presented with God's incredible power.

(ILL) Jade tries to find boundaries as she's learning about the world. "Daddy, you're so strong! You can pick up the groceries! You can pick ME up! You can pick my bike up!

You can pick the car up!" Whoa whoa whoa. Let's not get carried away.

Paul tries to do something similar, but he can't find the limit. And that's the point. Affliction smacks us in the face with our own limitations, our own inability, and sends us looking for some kind of rescue.

So we turn to ... other people ... drugs ... money ... sex ... success ... politics

And all are found lacking.

But when we turn to God, we find a loving Father for whom there is no limit. And as proof he points us to the pivot point in all history, where Christ was raised from the dead to guarantee a future resurrection for all who are in Christ.

Imagine the worst in your trials and afflictions. What is it that you fear? What's the worst possible outcome. Now tell me, is it too great for him to bear?

God uses our afflictions to teach us to rely on his all-sufficient power to rescue, redeem, and restore.

Will you trust him?

[2] 2 HELPS IN OUR AFFLICTION (10-11)

1. GOD'S PERFECT DELIVERANCE (10)

[10] 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.

One of the great helps we have in affliction is to reflect on God's past and future deliverance.

Reflect on the past.

Anticipate the future

Set your hope

2. GOD'S PRAYERFUL PEOPLE (11)

[11] 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 says that the Corinthians can help. It seems like his trial isn't over yet, and he needs help.

But thankfully, God has given us a great resource in the community of faith.

He requests their partnership through prayer, and he anticipates when they can rejoice that God actually answers their prayer!

(APP) 3 Applications:

1. Understand the real impact of God's prayerful people.
2. Share your afflictions with those who will pray.
3. Pray for those in trial and affliction.

CONCLUSION

Paul's admission of weakness was a risky move. His opponents were using this exact point to charge that he was a fraud, and phony, an imposter.

Paul met them head on. Rather than deny his weakness and suffering, Paul wore it like a badge of honor. Because he knew that in our weakness, God is shaping us into a people who are not only theoretically interested in God's power, but desperate for it.

This is the hope and the confidence of the Christian life. It's not that we are better than others, or stronger, or more impressive. It's that we are desperate for the one true God to redeem and sustain us.

And his faithfulness to do just that is proven by being the God who raises the dead. He sent his Son to die, only to demonstrate his power over sin, death, and the Devil by raising Christ from the dead.

When afflictions come. When suffering surrounds. When trials deal body-blow after body-blow, remember...

The God how raises the dead has set his love on you in Christ. For those who are his, our confidence is rooted in him.

Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 1:26–31

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." (ESV)