The God Of All Comfort

2 Cor. 1:3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

This morning, as I was studying in my home office, I read this very familiar verse again and, as it has done before, that wonderful phrase, God of all comfort, grabbed a hold of my heart. I found myself, throughout the day today, contemplating such a wonderful insight into the identity of God. He who framed the universe by his words, he who spans the heavens with the breadth of his hand and calls the stars by their names, he relates himself to me in very personal terms. Not only as the Father of mercies – that’s a level upon which all of us can relate to God, he is the source of all mercy in our lives – but as the God of all comfort.

The idea that is expressed in Paul’s usage of the word comfort is that of an encouragement or consolation that is given to someone who is suffering. By implication Paul is sharing a wonderful truth about God and a startling but familiar revelation about His people. First of all, if God is the God of all comfort then, by implication, he is the God of the suffering because only the suffering need comfort. Secondly, and even more importantly, in order to really know God, the way Paul relates him to us, as the God of all comfort, we must, by necessity, endure suffering. Indeed, this should come as no surprise, suffering is a point of commonality across the broad spectrum of human existence.

I wish I could stand before you tonight and tell you that life is always going to be a bed of roses. However, I know from experience that it just isn’t so. Even if everything is sunshine and smiles today, somewhere over the horizon there is a storm brewing that will endeavor to destroy you. I wish I could tell you that everything is always going to work out, that you’re always going to come out on top and nothing is ever going to go wrong. But I can’t. Just as surely as I’m standing here right now, life is going to throw you a curveball from time to time. Trouble is going to come upon you unexpectedly and suffering is going to seem, at times, to be your lot in life. There are going to be moments that try your faith. There will be trials that dim your spirit. Struggles will arise and attempt to sap you of your strength. I don’t mean to be the herald of bad news and I don’t want to rain on anybody’s parade, but I want you to know that, even though revival is immanent, even though victory will be ours – there will be discouraging times ahead. However, the truth is that there is some value in discomfort.

In order to recognize the value in discomfort we first have to be reminded that we are pilgrims and strangers in this world. This world is not our home we are just passing through. Our hope is set on things eternal and our reward is found in things everlasting. We are not living for the temporal momentary pleasures of this present life. This earthly existence is likened to a vapor when compared to the eternal life that awaits us. A vapor is just a momentary, fleeting, reality. It is there, and just about the time you realize that it is there, it is gone. It dissipates, it disappears, and nothing remains of it. In light of the eternal award that awaits us, this life is absolutely temporary. But, the truth is tonight, that it is difficult for us to view it that way because, after all, this life is all we have ever known.
On Sunday mornings we are studying the book of First Peter and a prevalent theme of that book is the resounding call to believers to look at their lives from this heavenly perspective. What is particularly interesting about that book is that it was written against the backdrop of persecution. As tragic as the persecution was, it provided the perfect context to shift the perspective of the church from temporary, material blessings, to an eternal inheritance. As those first-century believers were learning, in the crucible of pain and suffering, that material blessings were corruptible, easily defiled and quickly fading away, Peter was able to lift their eyes to heaven and point out that we have an inheritance that is not of this world, and that inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled and it fades not away. Now, I understand tonight that this is very familiar territory for us and it may seem as if I’m simply rehashing a theme that you’ve heard expounded upon for the last several months on Sunday morning. But, I bring it up only as an example of a timeless truth. **Trouble and suffering in our lives tend to produce a beneficial change in perspective for us.**

Consider the nation of Israel in Egyptian captivity. Where they began as sojourners and visitors, they ended up as slaves and prisoners. Egypt was God’s plan to preserve and multiply his people, but it was never God’s plan for them to permanently settle in Goshen. God had made Abraham a promise, and there was a land flowing with milk and honey that was to be their reward because of his faithfulness to God. Egypt was just temporary dwelling place. But, to the Israelites who were born there and raised there, it was all they had ever known. It was all that their daddy ever knew, it was all that their granddaddy ever knew. For four hundred years, Egypt was all that they knew. And, I have no doubt that, had it not been for the discomfort of the taskmaster’s whip, Egypt is all that they ever would have known. It was the trial, it was the trouble, it was the unspeakable atrocities that caused them to remember the God of Abraham and to lift their voice in a cry of desperation. Say what you want to about suffering but you must acknowledge the fact that Israel would never have begun to cry out to God for deliverance as long as they were comfortable. It was the suffering, the oppression, the terrible tragic slavery that compelled them to leave Egypt behind and embrace the promises of God.

There is something to be said for the concept that trouble and tragedy sometimes disturbs us into our destiny. **It is the trying times that cause us to shift our focus from the temporary to the eternal.** The toil and pain of this life causes us to contemplate heaven’s reward rather than earth’s fleeting treasures. It is the hard times that seem to drive us to our knees where we reaffirm our calling in Christ. How many souls, have lost their way along the way because they simply became too content with this life and too satisfied with the momentary rewards of fleshly pursuits. There is something about pain, something about suffering, that seems to sharpen our focus and lends clarity to our vision. Many great men of God, many giants in the kingdom of God, were disturbed into their destiny by the troubles and trials of this life. The Gideon’s and the Sampson’s were catapulted into their destinies by the tragedy of their circumstances. So, before you are too quick to mourn your lot in life, stop and recognize the fact that God, in his infinite wisdom, has guided your footsteps into this valley for an eternal purpose. Perhaps its time to shift your focus a bit,
perhaps its time to lift your eyes to heaven, perhaps its time to consider the divine providence of your loving and gracious Lord.

From adversity we gain strength! In trouble we find clarity. In crisis we often discover our purpose and calling in this life. But suffering comes with a negative side as well. When everything comes crashing in upon us, when all of your plans seem to unravel, when nothing seems certain and the whole of your life is like shifting sand, it all too easy to allow yourself to get lost in despair and discouragement. Just as surely as we must acknowledge that trouble and trial build our faith and strengthen our resolve, we must also acknowledge that the spirit of discouragement stalks among the rubble of broken dreams and destroyed hopes. When you are tired and disgusted. When you are struggling with your flesh. When the bills aren't paid. When the work is exhausting. When life is demanding. When the future become uncertain, it is easy to become discouraged.

I want you to know tonight that discouragement is a thief. It steals your peace of mind and robs you of your joy. If discouragement dwells long with you it breeds hopelessness and despair, it gives way to depression and doubt, it can even lead to bitterness that poisons everything else in your life. If you allow it to, today’s discouragement will rob you of all of tomorrows blessings. Discouragement is dissatisfaction with what is happening in your life. It normally stems from a general unrest because of some negative thing in your life. Discouragement may start small, as just a general feeling of discomfort but, if its not dealt with, it will grow and as it grows it saps the joy from life. Discouragement springs from small roots of bitterness and discomfort but it matures into a general distaste for the present and an absolute distrust of the future. Discouragement discounts all of the blessings of yesterday. Completely wrapped up in the moment, it forgets how good God has been to you. All of a sudden all your past blessings, every good thing that has ever happened gets swallowed up in this bottomless pit of loathing and self pity called discouragement. It robs the joy from your testimony. Past victories lose their vibrancy, as all of your yesterdays become consumed with the despair of today.

But, it doesn’t stop there. Discouragement doesn’t just discount the blessings of yesterday. It shows indifference to the opportunities of today. In supreme self-centeredness, it refuses to acknowledge any good that may come from suffering, it refuses to shift its perspective to heaven, and instead it becomes more and more wrapped up in self. There’s something about discouragement that refuses to recognize the possibility of blessing. Discouragement spoils yesterday, it poisons today, and then it becomes consumed with insecurity about tomorrow. Discouragement causes you to feel cut off, as if you’ve been forsaken. It fosters an unawareness of the presence of God and unbelief in the promises of His Word. The spirit of discouragement is the enemy of your soul. It lurks in the bad times. It hides itself in the shadows of the storms. All it needs is a moment of self-pity to inflict itself upon your spirit. But I come to you this evening with a message of hope and peace. I want you to know that even when you are uncomfortable you still have a comforter! When discouragement tries to rear its ugly head, I want you to know that you have an encourager. He is the God of all comfort!
This, really, is where Paul’s description of God becomes so personal to us. In those times of trouble, in the moments of discomfort, God is the God of all comfort! He is our comforter! The same word that Paul uses for comforter here is the word that was used in the book of John when Jesus described the Holy Ghost. You have a comforter; He lives inside of you. The key to overcoming despair, the key to stopping the poisoning spirit of discouragement in your life is to allow the comforter to work within you. When dark clouds cover your blue skies and troubles press in on every side, in your day of despair, when you are uncomfortable, your comfort comes from God and springs up from the Holy Ghost that is within you. Your comfort in those trying times isn’t going to come from some pill or psychotherapy or seven self-help steps, it comes from the Holy Ghost within you.

In those uncomfortable moments in your life, when everything turns out wrong, your comfort will come from God. When there are no easy answers to life I want you to know that you aren’t alone in the fight. God has given you a comforter that will be with you thru trial and tribulation. **This is why it matters so much that you keep the Holy Ghost fresh in your life. This why it matters that you keep your spirit stirred and stay in tune with God.** Because, in that moment when life overcomes you and some trial or tribulation overtakes you by surprise, it is that Holy Ghost within you that will comfort you. Sometimes we coast along through the good times and fail to maintain personal devotion and keep ourselves freshly filled with the Holy Ghost. When you let yourself get into that condition, and tragedy strikes or some trouble overtakes you by surprise, you are wholly unprepared for it. If you will keep the Holy Ghost fresh in your life you can rest assured that God will come alongside you in times of trial to strengthen, encourage and lift you up. When life becomes uncomfortable, you have a comforter!

Don’t give way to despair, don’t fall under the sway of discouragement. Encouragement is something that belongs to you as a child of God. One of the definitions of the word comforter is encourager. You have an encourager living inside of you. Behind every great boxer there is a great cornerman. He’s the guy who lives in the shadow of the great boxer and is always seen standing in his corner during a fight. In between rounds, it is the corner man that encourages the boxer. As he mends the cuts, and rehydrates the champ, he tells him, “You can make it. You can go one more round. You may be beat up, but the other guy is worse off than you. You can do it!” If I may use a rather limited example, the Holy Ghost in your life is, among other things, your cornerman. If you would listen to that still small voice of the spirit, when you are in the midst of the fight and thinking about tossing in the towel, you would hear the voice of your encourager, “You can make it! You can go one more round. You can face one more battle, you can climb one more mountain, you are almost through this old valley. Hang on! Weeping may endure for a season, but joy comes in the morning.” You have a comforter in your life! You my walk through some uncomfortable times but you do not have to live in a world of hurt and doubt. You don’t have to face your storms alone. You don't have to weep in solitude. You have the promise of a comforter. You won't face the valleys alone. You won’t struggle through the storms by yourself. The God of all comfort will be right there with you. The Holy Ghost inside of you will strengthen and encourage you.
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My friend, you can mark my words, sooner or later the devil is going to try to destroy your walk with God with discouragement. He will attempt to steal your joy, to rob you of every victory and destroy any hope you may have in the future. But Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." I want everyone here tonight to know that the comforter is in the house. If you are weary and burdened, if you are struggling with fears and doubts, if discouragement has been trying to rob you of your joy I have a word for you: The God of all comfort is here tonight to comfort you, and to encourage you. He is here tonight to give rest to those that are weary. I want to give you a chance tonight, if you need to be encouraged in the Lord these altars are open...