

COMFORTED AND COMFORTING.

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“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” —2 Corinthians 1:3, 4

THE apostle was a much-tried man, and he lived in an age when all believers were peculiarly tried. The persecutions of that time were excessively severe, and every man who called himself a Christian had to carry his life in his hand. In this tribulation, the apostle had the largest share, because he was the most prominent and indefatigable teacher that the Church of Christ then possessed. We have here a little insight into his inner life. He needed comfort, and he received it; and he had it in such abundance that he became a comforter of others. Although, without Christ, he would have been “of all men most miserable,” I think I may say that, with Christ, and the blessed hope of the resurrection, he was among all men one of the most happy.

In our text, there are four things of which I would speak to you, dear friends, hoping that they may bring good cheer to any who are cast down. The first is, the comforting occupation in which Paul was employing

himself; he was blessing God: "Blessed be God." Then, secondly, we have the comforting titles which he gives to God: "The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." Truly, they who know the Lord's name do put their trust in him. Paul knew the name of God right well, and he used the most appropriate name for the time of sorrow. Then, thirdly, we shall have to consider for a little while the comforting fact which the apostle here states: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation." And, lastly, we shall try to see the comforting design of it all: "That we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

I. First, then, you who mourn, and are troubled and cast down, are invited to consider THE COMFORTING OCCUPATION of the apostle.

Most of Paul's fourteen epistles begin with praise to God, and he often breaks out into a doxology when you are hardly expecting it. He lays down his pen, and bows his knee to the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and pours out a flood of thanksgiving to the Most High. Here was a man, who never knew but what he might be dead the next day, for his enemies were many, and cruel, and mighty; and yet he spent a great part of his time in praising and blessings God.

This comforting occupation *argues that his heart was not crushed and vaquished by his troubles*. Paul was sore beset in many ways, yet he could say, and he did say, "Blessed be God." Job was greatly tried and sorely bereaved, but he still said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord;" and as long as we can keep the blessing of God to the front, it is a sure sign that, whatever the adversary may have been able to take away from us, he has not taken away our confidence, which hath great recompence of reward; and, whatever he may have crushed, he has not crushed our heart. He may have surrounded it with bitterness, but the heart itself is not made bitter; it is a fountain that sends out a stream of sweet waters, such as this utterance of the apostle, "Blessed be God."

It is glorious to see how the grace of God will enable a man to endure all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil; how he will be laid aside by sickness, and his pains will be multiplied; how reproach may go far to break his heart, how he may be depressed in spirit, and lose all temporal benefits, and yet he will be able still to say, "Blessed be the name of the Lord;" "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" "Let him do what he

pleases with me, I have made no stipulation with him that I will only praise him when he does according to my will; I will praise him when he has his own way with me, even though it runs exactly contrary to mine." It is a brave heart that still, under all pressures, gives forth only this cry, "Blessed be God." O dear friends, if you want to keep up your hearts, if you desire to be established and sustained, if you wish to prevent the enemy from overcoming you, let this be your comfortable occupation, and say with the poet,—

I will praise thee every day, Now thine anger's turned away.

Nothing can keep your head above the head above the waters of trouble better than crying, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

This occupation shows that the apostle hadnot gratified Satan, for the devil's purpose, so ar as he has had to do with our trouble, is to make us "curse God and die." After all the sorrow that Satan was permitted to bring to Job, the patriarch's heart still blessed the name of the Lord; so the devil was defeated, he could not carryout his own evil purpose, and he had to slink away like a whipped cur, for Job glorified God instead of bringing dishonor upon his holy name. The tried and troubled ones who can still cry, "Blessed be the name of the Lord," are not driven to despair, for despair shuts the mouth, and makes a man sit in sullen silence, or else it opens his lips in bitter complaints andin multiplied murmurings: but, when a man can truly say, "Blessed be God," then despair has not mastered him, he still holds his own, and he has on his side far greater force than the devil and the most trying circumstances can bring to bear upon him to vanquish him. O friends, if you are afraid of being overcome, take to praising God; if you are in trouble, and do not know how to bear it, divert your thoughts by praising God; get away from the present trial by blessing and magnifying his holy name.

Next, this state of mind, which made the apostle say, "Blessed be God," *prophesied that God would speedily send him something to call forth new praises.* When a man blesses God for the bitter, the Lord often sends him the sweet. If he can praise God in the night, the daylight is not far off. There never was a heart yet that waited and wanted to praise God but the Lord soon gave it opportunities of lifting up psalms and hymns and spiritual songs unto him. It shall never be said that we were ready to praise God, but that God was not ready to bless us; so, dear friends, praise God,

and he will bless you; praise God, and exalt him, and he will soon lift you up out of your troubles. I look upon a murmuring spirit as the forewarning of stormy weather in a rebellious soul, and I regard a praiseful spirit as the forecast of a happy time to come to the loyal joyous soul. God has prepared the heart to receive the joy which, otherwise, it, might not have been fit to accept at his hands. Re comforted, then, dear friends, if you find in your hearts the desire to praise God, and belief that the Lord will find in his heart the willingness speedily to bless you.

This comforting occupation *profits the believer in many ways*. One advantage of blessing God is that it takes a man's thoughts off his own trials and sorrows. We make our troubles much greater than they need be by turning them over, considering them from all points of view, weighing them, and thinking and meditating upon them. You know very well that, if you swallow a pill, you do not taste it; but if you get it between your teeth, and bite and chew it, you will get all the bitter flavour of the drug. So, it is a good thing often to let our afflictions go right down into our soul, to swallow them at once, and say no more about them. God has sent them, and therefore they are for your good; but when you keep brooding over your grief, you will probably hatch something out of it which you did not expect; it may be that you will find a young cockatrice come from it to annoy you. They that will be always ruminating upon their trials will soon find a sorrow within the sorrow which, haply, they might never have perceived if they had let it go by. While we are blessing God, we are, at least for the time, taking our thoughts off our troubles; and so far, so good.

Moreover, we shall, by God's gracious help, while we are praising him, be lifting our soul out of our sorrow. In America, for many years they kept a day of fasting; but somebody suggested that they had better keep an annual day of thanksgiving, and they have done so ever since. The change was a good one; and you and I, though sometimes we must fast, especially if the Bridegroom shall hide his face, will also find that it is a great improvement when we can turn our day of fasting into a day of thanksgiving. Do you not think, dear friends, that sometimes, when you are very heavy of heart, it would be the best possible thing if you were to say, with Martin Luther, "Come, let us sing a psalm, and startle the devil"? If you sit down, and groan, and complain against God, your groans will be music to Satan's malevolent heart; but you will vex and grieve him, if, instead of doing so, you say, "No, foul fiend, thou shalt never persuade me to rob God of his glory; he shall have his full revenue of praise from me, whether I am on my

bed sick, or able to be up, and actively engaged in the duties of my calling. Whether I stand well with my fellowmen, or my name has an ill savor to them, God's name has not an ill savor, and therefore I will praise and bless him even though nobody will praise me." O beloved, if thy heart is sad within thee, praising God will so lift it up that thou wilt even be able to forget the trouble of the present hour! What does the eagle do when the fowler is about with his net and gun? Why, the noble bird takes to his wings, and flies upwards towards the sun; and, though his bright eye can see the foe, he knows that no bullet can reach him at that great height. So, if you Christians have close communion with your God, and praise and magnify his holy name, the shots of the enemy shall not reach you,— you will have risen far beyond their range. Hence, you see the excellence of blessing and praising the Most High.

Besides, this occupation may well tend to take away the sorrows of our mortality, since, by praising God, we get a taste of the joys of immortality. What are the angels doing now? I cannot tell you what men all over the world are doing; but I can tell you what the angels are doing. The holy spirits before the throne find it is their very heaven to be ever blessing their God; so, if you want a sip of heaven's bliss, if on your leaf you would have a sparkling dew-drop which would tell you what the river of life, that flows at the right hand of God, is like, commence at once to praise and bless the Lord your God.

*I would begin the music here,
And so my soul would rise:
Oh for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies!*

And there is no better way of anticipating the joys of being there than by beginning the praises of God while here.

You may also destroy your distresses by singing praises to God; by blessing the Lord, you may set your foot upon the neck of your adversaries; you can sing yourself right up from the deeps by God's gracious help. Out of the very depths, you may cry unto the Lord till he shall lift you up, and you shall praise him *in excelsis*,— in the very highest,— and magnify his name. I give you this as one of the shortest and surest recipes for comfort, begin to praise God. The next time that a friend comes in to see you, do not tell him how long the wind has been blowing from the North, how cold the weather is for this season of the year, how

your poor bones ache, how little you have coming in, and all your troubles; probably he has heard the sad story many times before. Instead of that, tell him what the Lord has done for you, and make him feel that the Lord is good. Your griefs and your troubles speak for themselves, but your mercies are often dumb; so try henceforth to give them a tongue, and praise the Lord with all your heart.

II. Time would fail me if I dwelt, as I should like to dwell, upon the first point; so we must advance to the second, which is, THE COMFORTING TITLES which the apostle gives to God in our text.

The first title we may call *a name of affinity*: “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh, how near that brings God to us,— that he is the Father of Jesus, the Father of Christ, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” — because Jesus has espoused our nature, and become a man. Though he is “Light of light,” and “very God of very God,” yet is he also our brother. “Father of Jesus”— what a delightful title that is for the good and glorious God! The great Jehovah hath become very near of kin to thee, my sorrowing brother, for his Son is thy Brother, thy Husband, thy Head; and, now, the Father of Jesus is the Father of every believer, so he is thy Father if thou art one of those who trust his Son. A child may not have a penny in his pocket; yet he feels quite rich enough if he has a wealthy father. You may be very, very poor; but, oh! what a rich Father you have! Jesus Christ’s Father is your Father; and as he has exalted his own dear Son, he will do the same for you in due time. Our Lord Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren; and the Father means to treat the other brethren even as he treats him; your Father has made you one of his heirs,— yea, a joint heir with Jesus Christ,— what more would you have? Wherefore, comfort yourself with this blessed truth. If you are distressed and troubled, this fact — that God is Christ’s Father, and your Father,— ought to be quite sufficient, by the blessing of the Holy Spirit, to fill you with intense joy.

In addition to this name of affinity, Paul gives to God a title which is *a name of gratitude*: “The Father of mercies.” Then every mercy I have ever had has been begotten of God, who is “the Father of mercies.” All temporal mercies come to God’s people from their Father; it is he who gives us bread to eat, and raiment to put on. We are happy to be able to see in these common mercies a peculiar touch of the benign hand; but as for the high and heavenly mercies, the everlasting mercies, the satisfying

mercies, the soul-filling mercies, — these all come from God. As every beam of light comes from the father of lights, so do all mercies come from God. As all the rivers would be dried up if the sea were dry,— for that is the ultimate source of the earth’s moisture,— so would all our mercies be dried-up mercies, barren mercies, no mercies at all, if they did not come from that great ocean of mercies, the God and Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Well, now, beloved, as your Father is “the Father of mercies,” can you not go to him for all the mercy you need! If your mercies seem just now to be very few, can you not go to the All merciful, and ask him to deal out to you from his abundant store, for “his mercy endureth for ever”?

The third title, which Paul applies to God, ought to afford the deepest possible consolation to your soul; I venture to call it *a name of hope*: “The God of all comfort.” All sorts of comforts are stored up in God. No matter what you may require to bear you up under your affliction, God hath just the kind of comfort which you need, and he is ready to bestow it upon you. Rest you sure of that; and believe also that he will bestow it upon you if you ask it at his hands. Oh, I think this is a name full of good cheer to everyone who has grown weary because of the trials of the way through this great and terrible wilderness! God is the God of all comfort; — not merely of some comfort, but of all comfort. If you need every kind of comfort that was ever given to men, God has it in reserve, and he will give it to you. If there are any comforts to be found by God’s people in sickness, in prison, in want, in depression, the God of all comfort will deal them out to you according as you have need of them.

This title is also *a name of discrimination*. It applies both to the persons and to the comfort: “who comforteth us... by the comfort wherewith we are comforted of God.” There are some things which are called comforts of which God is not the dispenser. Alas! alas! how many persons there are who fly to the bottle when they are in distress! That is their comfort; they drink, and, for a while, forget their misery; but the process only leads to still greater misery and degradation. We cannot say that God is the God of such comfort as that; indeed, we do not reckon it to be comfort. Some there are who turn to dissipation that they may forget, their grief. God is not the God of dissipation, and therefore that is not a comfort to a child of God, it would only increase his misery; if he were to be dragged to it, it would not relieve his pains in the least. Whatever there is in the world,— and there are many such things,— which men call comforts, if you cannot

be sure that they are such as God sends, let them be no source of consolation to you, but rather regard them with horror. May every child of God be able to make this discrimination, and say, "If God does not give me what I look upon as a comfort, it will not prove to be really a comfort." It is not a creature who supplies the comfort, it is only the Creator; the comfort may be brought to us by a creature, and brought in God's name, but it must come from him. The reason why bread feeds us is because God chooses to make it do so. When medicine heals us, it is because Jehovah makes it the means of healing; but if God does not work with the means, no cure will be wrought. You who have the Creator himself as your comforter are like the man who has a well in his garden; he may not have a tap to turn off and on when he wants a supply of water to run through the pipe, but he has the well itself, from which he may draw as much as he needs. Remember what we sang just now,—

*Why should the soul a drop bemoan,
Who has a fountain near;
A fountain which will ever run
With waters sweet and clear?*

So much, then, upon the comforting titles which Paul uses in relation to God. I pray you to act like the bees when they dive into the petals of the flowers, and suck out their honey,— dive into these titles, and extract the delicious honey which the Holy Spirit has there stored for you.

III. Now, thirdly, I am to speak of THE COMFORTING FACT which Paul here mentions: "The God of all comfort .. comforteth us in all our tribulation."

This was Paul's declaration, and I also may speak in the name of many here present, and say, "That is not only true of Paul, and the Christians in his day, but it is true also of us." *The God of all comfort has comforted us in our tribulation.* Look back now on the pages of your diary that bear the record of your sorrow; do they not also bear the record of the Lord's help in the sorrow, and his deliverance from the sorrow? If I cannot speak for all of you, I will speak for myself; I must do so, or else surely the very timber on which I stand might cry out against me. The Lord has been very gracious to me in many an hour of affliction; blessed be his name, he has never failed to bring the solace when he has made the smart; and if there has been the stroke with the rod, there has very soon been the caress of his love to follow the blow of his hand It has been so with many of us.

But Paul speaks in the present tense: “Who comforteth us in all our tribulation;” and we also can declare that *God is now comforting us who believe in Jesus*. Did you, beloved, come into this building somewhat heavy in spirit? You are not half so heavy now as you were; and if you will take the good advice I am trying to give, you will go away quite relieved. Rutherford used to say that the cross of Christ was no more a burden to the man who knew how to carry it than wings are to a bird or sails are to a ship. An addiction is a help to us, not a hindrance, when grace comes with it to sanctify it. Remember what David said, long ago: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suer the righteous to be moved.” But if you cast your burden upon the Lord, do not go looking after it when I have pronounced the benediction; leave it altogether. The fault with many of us is that when we have cast our burden upon the Lord, we beg him to let us have it back again; and if he grants our foolish request, it comes back twice as heavy as it was before. Oh, that we were wise enough to leave our troubles with our Father who is in heaven as little children leave things with their father! Then we shall find that he comforts us in all our tribulation.

Ay, but our text is tree of the future as well as the present. Here, if we cannot speak by experience, we can speak by faith. A little child, who loves his father, has no doubt about his father’s comforting him next year as well as this; and you must have no doubt about what God will do for you, dear friends, especially you aged ones. When the veterans begin to waver and doubt, I do not know what excuse to make for them. I remember the story of one who said she was afraid. she would be starved. Someone asked her, “How old are you?” “Seventy-five,” she replied. “How long have you been a Christian?” “Fifty years.” “Your Heavenly Father has fed you these fifty years, and yet you fear that he will let you starve during the last few years you are likely to be here!” It was very wrong of the poor old soul; mind that you do not imitate her. It is due to every honest man that we should speak of him as we have found him; much more is it dueto our faithful God. He has comforted, he is comforting, and he will comfort; and Paul puts it in such a way as to make us feel that *he will never leave off comforting us even for e single moment*: “who comforteth us in all our tribulation,” not in some of it, but in all of it. Our tribulations sometimes change; and a new cross is generally a very heavy one. The old crosses get at last to fit the back, and we can carry them better than we could at the first; but a new cross galls the shoulders that have not yet grown used to it;

but. the Lord your God will help you in your new tribulations as well as in your old ones; and if they come thick and threefold,— tribulation upon tribulation, trouble upon trouble,— still, as your days, so shall your strength be, and he who has comforted, and is comforting, will continue to comfort you even to the last.

IV. Now I must close with just a few remarks upon THE COMFORTING DESIGN of which our text speaks.

Why does God lay trouble upon his people, and comfort them in it? *It is that he may make them comforters of others:* “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” A man who has never had any trouble is very awkward when he tries to comfort troubled hearts. Hence, the minister of Christ, if he is to be of much use in God’s service, must have great trouble. “Prayer, meditation, and affliction,” says Melancthon, “are the three things that make the minister of God.” There must be prayer; there must be meditation; and there must be affliction. You cannot pronounce the promise aright in the ear of the afflicted, unless you yourself have known its preciousness in your own hour of trial. It is God’s will that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, should work by men full often, according to that ancient word of his, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.” These comforting men are to be made; they are not born so; and they have to be made by passing through the furnace themselves. They cannot comfort others unless they have had trouble, and have been comforted in it.

More than this, *the intent of God is to make us able comforters:* “that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble.” Some have the will to comfort the troubled, but they have not the power to do it. “Miserable comforters are ye all,” said Job to his friends; and the same has been said to many of those who have really tried to comfort the sorrowing; but who, in the process, have put their fingers into the open wounds, and so made them worse instead of better. Brethren, the able comforter must be a man who knows both the trial and the promise that is suited to meet it.

Beside that, we are to be ready comforters, for we are “to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” Experimental knowledge helps a man to speak with power to the addicted soul. He who has taken a certain medicine, and proved the benefit of it, is the man to recommend it to another. Hence, the Lord often passes his ministers through trials which they would never have

to endure if it were not for their people. Even as upon the Chief Shepherd of all the wanderings of the flock had to be laid, so, in a very minor sense, the wanderings of the flock must be borne by the under-shepherd, or else he cannot be a comforter to them. Dear friends, the next time you get into any trouble, I would recommend you to take notes of it, and to ask yourself, when it is over, "How did God comfort me!" Lay that cordial up in store, because, one of these days, you will want that comfort again; or, if not, you will meet with somebody who is in just the same fix as you were in, and you will be able to say, "I know what will help you, for I have it down in black and white at home, how God helped me in a trouble exactly like yours." As I was reading a book, this afternoon, this sentence struck me: "whenever thou comest into the mouth of the furnace, say to thyself, 'God has some great work for me to do, and he is preparing me for it.'" I thought to myself, "I have not often said that in the time of trial; my thoughts have been too much taken up with the furnace to think of the good which was to result from the fire." But I am sure that what that writer said is true; God means to do something more by us, which, speaking after the manner of men, he cannot yet do by us. We are not qualified for it; but he is going to put us through a hotter furnace still, the heat is to be more intense than any we have yet borne; and when we come out, we shall be more fit for the Master's use.

Welcome your trials, then, beloved; open wide your doors, and say to tribulations, "Come in, come in; this is the pin,co where you are to lodge, for my Master said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.'" Welcome even that black trouble that has a mask on its face; it is no adversary coming to kill you; when the mask is taken off, you will see that, underneath it, there is a bright, smiling face. Some of us can say to addiction, "Come in, and welcome, for the costliest jewels we ever possessed were brought by you; you have done us more good than all our joys put together." We should have had no harvest if God had left us like the hard road outside the field; but the soil has been cut up by the sharp plough, and often our very soul has been grievously tried as the harrow and the scarifier have gone over us again and again; but all these processes have caused us to bring forth fruit to the praise and glory of God. Therefore, again I say, welcome your troubles. Do not be sorry if they travel with you for a while, for they are good guests; many a time, by entertaining trouble, we have "entertained angels unawares." God bless

you, brethren and sisters, by making you a comfort to others; and probably it will be through the very trials which greatly vex you!

Now to close, there may be some poor soul here broken down under a sense of sin, some seeker who cannot find the Savior. He may speak to some of you who were brought to Christ without any very strong emotion. He will begin telling you about his despair, and you will look at him, and say, "Dear me, where has this man got to?" Then do not you try to help him, for you cannot, you have not had the experience through which he is passing; find out the brother who had a liard time of it in getting to the Wicket Gate, that poor fellow who tumbled into the Slough of Despond with his big burden on his back, and nearly got choked in the mire. Say to him, "Brother Christian, here is another soul floundering about just as you were once." Hand him over to such a person, because he will be the most likely to help him. Any of you who had great difficulty in laying hold of Christ at the first ought to be on the watch to find others who are as you were; stretch out the helping hand to them, and say, "We would not have you suffer as we did if we can help it. We wish to show you the way to Jesus Christ, and to get you to see it more quickly than we did; we even hope that you will this very night find joy and peace in believing." Do look after the broken-hearted ones, dear friends; watch for Mr. Feeble-mind; find out poor Mr. Fearing, do not let him lie outside long; help him over the stile; and, as you have yourself found mercy, administer it, in the name of God, to all who are longing to find it. May God bless you all, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION

2 CORINTHIANS 1:1-20.

Verse 1. *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,—*

Paul is very careful to remind the Corinthians of that fact, since some of them had gone the length of denying his apostleship altogether.

1. *And Timothy our brother,—*

Whom, in all humility, he associates with himself, although he was a younger man, of far less consequence; but Paul loved him very much, and