

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.⁶ If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (NIV 84)

Theme: Christ is the God of all Comfort

1. He comforts us
2. He comforts others through us

In our first lesson for today we read about Naaman. Because he was the commander of an army, it is safe to say that he enjoyed a good amount of wealth and prosperity. We are told that **he was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded.** He had won many victories. And on top of all this we are told he was a **valiant soldier.** You could say that this man had it all—God had given him many blessings. But, he had leprosy—an incurable, contagious skin disease. Eventually he was going to die from it.

We may fancy ourselves like Naaman. We may be respected, have a good amount of courage—or maybe have a great family, lots of friends, a nice house. Without a doubt, you can say that God has blessed your life. But—and there is always a “but.” It doesn’t matter who you are, and how you look at yourself, there is always a “but.” There is always some blemish, one thorn, an Achilles’ heel, that causes us grief.

And for some of us, that grief could be too much and we fall into despair. But we have comfort. For we have the God of all comfort. He comforts us and we in turn comfort others.

There are many things in our life that give us problems. As we talked about last week, each of us has to endure many hardships and difficulties. Perhaps they are health issues. Or financial woes. Maybe

things aren’t going to well with your family or at work. Or that you don’t have many friends and everyone at school is making fun of you. Perhaps it’s not you that is having problems, but someone you love. They are sick. They are getting older and soon they won’t be around that much longer. Maybe he got into legal trouble. And because your loved is suffering, it affects your life too.

No matter how great your life is, there is always that “but.” And Satan uses that as means to get your focus off of Christ. He doesn’t want you to think about all the great things God has blessed you with—especially the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in heaven. Instead he wants you focus how hard your life is—all the hardships and difficulties you face. And when you do this, you begin to blame God. If he can really do all things, then why doesn’t he take away your pain? Why is he making you suffering like he is—doesn’t he love you? And you begin to think, I don’t want to praise a god who doesn’t help me. I don’t want a god who demands that I suffer through this. And we become so focused on our problem, or whatever issue we have, that we lose sight of Christ. Our faith and trust in him wanes. We worship him less and less, stay away from his Word, and soon our faith in almost non-existent.

Some of the troubles and hardships we face is because of our faith. We will be persecuted because we are Christians. This persecution may come in many different forms—some of it will be subtle, others not so much. Jesus once said, **if the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.** And as we know, Christ wasn’t without problems as he lived on this earth. He was mocked and ridiculed, betrayed and denied. He was flogged and crucified. He knew what it is like to suffer. And we share in his sufferings. We suffer as Christ suffered, for we suffer for Christ. But we also have comfort from Christ. For the comfort he gives us is greater than what we have to suffer because of him. As Paul says in verse 5, **As we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.**

So we don’t have to worry about any of the problems we face. For we have Christ. In our text for today, Paul calls God, **the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.** God is the Father of mercies because he has mercy and compassion on us. For he does not hold our sins against us. We were born as his enemies. We could do nothing

but sin against him. And we were completely dead in our sins. So God sent his son, Jesus, who paid the price for our own sins. Through him, God no longer sees us as sinners, but pure and innocent children. God is the Father of mercies because he doesn't hold our sins against us. Instead he has mercy and compassion on us and doesn't treat us as our sins deserve.

God is also called the Father of all comfort. It is a comfort to us that God has mercy on us. It is a comfort knowing that our sins won't be counted against us and that in the end we will live with him in heaven forever. That it doesn't matter what happens us to in our lives, in the end it will turn out for our good—and not matter what we have eternal life. When Christ looks down upon us from this throne in heaven, he sees a people in need. It gives us comfort that he knows what it is like living in this world. He lived here as one of us for over 30 years. The writer to the Hebrews said this about Jesus, **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.** Last week we talked about Christ's power. He has the ability to heal diseases and sicknesses, raise people from the dead, and so on. He has complete power and control over all things. And he uses his power over the problems in our life for our benefit. It gives us comfort knowing that no matter what Christ is always with us and he will make everything work out for our good.

God is the God of all comfort. For only true comfort can be found in Christ. He alone paid for our sins. He alone takes us to heaven. He alone is the only one who has power of Satan. Whatever he says, goes. He controls sicknesses and diseases. And he promises, that as his child, he will always be with you. We know that we will live with him in heaven forever. So it doesn't matter what we suffer through—there will be a time when the pain is over and we will have a perfect life with our Savior.

When we face problems in our lives we don't have to worry because God comforts us. When we suffer we look forward to when there we will have no more pain or sorrow in heaven. Christians have this comfort. But not everyone does. So it is our responsibility to comfort others.

Paul wrote about himself and his companions in verse 6, **If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort.** Paul didn't need to write, "if we are afflicted" for Paul certainly was. Later on this letter to the Corinthians he goes into detail about the things he has suffered through for the sake of Christ. Paul was imprisoned many times because of the gospel. He also says I was exposed to death again and again, **Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again.** And Paul goes on. He suffered through a lot. He probably suffered more than any of us will have to go through. And yet he didn't complain or grumble. He didn't complain to God that he wasn't being fair. In fact, when Paul suffered he rejoiced. For when he suffered he was comforted by the Word of Christ. He realized that his sufferings led him to see his Savior. They led him not to trust in himself, but to trust in Jesus. Paul knew by experience that when we suffer we become patient. We patiently endure in the longing hope for a better time. We look forward to heaven. And our focus is taken off of our earthly troubles, and is put on Christ who saves us.

Paul knew the comfort of Christ. So he spread the gospel. The list of things that Paul suffered through that we just read was all for the sake of the gospel. For Paul spent his life spread the gospel. He wanted others to be comforted by Christ. He wanted them to see their Savior. So that they could realize that he has paid for all their sins. That no matter what happened in their lives, God was with them. And they were going to live in heaven forever. So the gospel that Paul spread provided comfort.

Because this gave them comfort, Paul spread the gospel at all costs. He didn't care if he suffered. He didn't care if he had troubles and hardships. He realized the more he suffered the more people heard the gospel. And the more people heard the gospel, the more people were comforted. And the more people who heard the gospel, the more people were saved through that gospel. That is why Paul could say that his affliction was **for our comfort and salvation.**

The people of Paul's day are no different than the people of today. They need to be comforted because of all the hardships and difficulties they face. Because no matter how great they seem, there is always that "but." There is always that one thing—or multiple things that causes grief. So the world looks for their own comfort. They look toward shallow world philosophies. Or man-made religions. They search for comfort in all sorts of places. From T.V. to self help books. From meditation to music. They turn to fortune tellers or they will pay someone else who tells them what they want to hear. They try to find comfort in the words of friends. They try to get lost in their jobs, or hobbies, or on a vacation. They turn to drugs or alcohol to get away from their issues. But in the end they have no comfort. In the end they feel no better than they did before.

So they need to know what true comfort is. And it is our duty to tell them. Yet, there are many times when we keep our mouths shut. For various reasons when we know someone who needs comfort, we don't say a word. And they never learn about the one who gives them true comfort. Perhaps, there is that doubt the word doesn't bring any comfort. But more than likely, it is because we don't want to put ourselves out there. We want to avoid persecution. We are afraid of what people will think of us when we spread the message about Christ. So we do the exact opposite of Paul. Instead of willingly suffering for the gospel, we avoid suffering by not saying anything.

No as Christians we spread the gospel. We share the message with Christ with everyone. For he is the Savior of the everyone. We spread the gospel so all may know the comfort of forgiveness and the assurance of eternal life. Our hope and prayer is that all people share in the comfort that God gives us. That they no longer look toward man-made remedies for the solution to their problems, but to their Savior. For he is the God of all comfort. He alone gives the comfort of forgiveness. For he alone saves, he alone has power, and he alone gives eternal life. So we willingly suffer for the sake of the gospel, for when we suffer we have comfort. And when we suffer for the gospel others have the comfort of the gospel as well.

It doesn't matter who you are. You could be someone great and successful like Naaman, there is still that "but." That thorn or thorns that cause you grief and trouble. You could let your problems get the

best of you and lose you focus on Christ, you could look toward man made solutions. But those won't give you comfort. True comfort is only found in Christ, who alone forgives and saves. No matter what happens in your life, you can rest assured that God is with you and you will live in heaven forever. So the problems in this life don't matter. For God is the God of all comfort. Amen.