



Relying on the Resurrecting God

No. 2

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Series: 2 Corinthians

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Text

[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:

- Arouse Interest:
 - In spite of a dismal housing market, several members of our church seem keenly interested in investing in real estate these days. Whether or not you are looking at a house within the city or without, anyone who is interested in home ownership will inevitably need to talk with a bank about a mortgage. And that means that a lot of us will need to start thinking about our credit score.
 - What is the point of a credit score? Well according to [myfico.com](https://www.myfico.com), “A credit score is a numerical representation of a person’s creditworthiness based on their credit history.” Essentially, banks will look at your history and determine based on your past performance in paying off debts how likely you will be in paying off substantial debt in the future. They will trust you according to your history of trustworthiness.¹
 - Now, I’m not an economist, but I think we can all understand the basic principle at work here. Who you have been in the past is a pretty good indicator of who you will be in the future. Of how reliable you will be when you are needed in a pinch.
- Surface Need:
 - When it comes to God, how can you and I possibly know whether the God we trust is a God who is reliable in a pinch? How can we know that God is worth trusting when things seem to be going wrong in our lives?

¹ “What Is a Credit Score? | myFICO,” n.d., <https://www.myfico.com/credit-education/credit-scores>.

- How has God handled the problems of his people in the past? And based on what he has done back then, how do you think God will respond to us and our needs in the future?
- Orient to Text:
 - As we saw last week, Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:1-7 is trying to persuade God's people that our God is a God worthy to be worshipped because he comforts us in the midst of our affliction. But there are a lot of questions that come up when we hear something like that.
 - What kind of afflictions are we talking about? What evidence do we have that God cares about us and our afflictions at all? And assuming that God does care about us and comforts us in our afflictions, how are we supposed to rely on God in the seasons of life when we really can't see what he's doing?
 - These are the kinds of questions that Paul is endeavoring to answer here in verses 8-11. Here in this next paragraph in 2 Corinthians, Paul is trying to persuade the Corinthian church of one simple truth: ***Even in the worst times, God's people have good reasons to rely on him.***
- Organizational Sentence:
 - Our study is going to break into three parts: The Pain (8-9), The Power of God (9-10), and The Prayers of God's People (11).

The Pain (8-9)

- So let's start off with a question. When Paul mentions affliction, what kind of afflictions is Paul talking about?
- Well to be honest, we don't really know for sure. Some believe that Paul is referring to the riot that occurred in Acts 19:23-41 when the silversmiths in Ephesus who built the shrines to Artemis rose up against them.
- Others believe that Paul is referring to his thorn in the flesh which he brings up later 12:7. Maybe this was some kind of physical ailment which chronically flared up and caused him immense pain.²
- The fact of the matter is that this verse could be referring to a variety of afflictions in this life. Perhaps a benefit of the ambiguity is that this passage could be applied to the particular forms of afflictions you and I are facing this very day.
- We may not know the precise details of Paul's suffering here, but we certainly feel its intensity. According to Paul, this affliction made him and his companions despair of life itself. As he says in verse 9:
 - Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death.
- This sentence of death isn't referring to an objective sentence that a court placed upon Paul. The wording in the Greek literally says that they received this sentence

² David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The Christian Standard Commentary Ser (B&H Publishing Group, 2021).

of death within themselves. This is a subjective sense that the only way for this situation to possibly end is with their death.³

Application

- I wonder if any of us here in this room have despaired of life itself. Maybe some of you, after a tragedy, have found it difficult to be optimistic about your future. Perhaps, some of you struggling with chronic health issues have found yourself in a place where it's difficult to get out of bed some days. When you realize the pain is just going to be a part of your life now.
- Whoever you are, whatever you're struggling with, in an odd way, it is somewhat comforting just to know that you're not alone in your suffering. That you're not crazy for feeling the way that you feel.
- This is one of the reasons why I find the message of Christianity so compelling. More compelling than the competing messages of the world around us. It's because the Bible is starkly realistic about the nature of sin and suffering.
- While Christians acknowledge the inherent goodness of creation in light of the goodness of the Creator, we also believe at the same time that our world is a world that is deeply distorted and marred by the effects of sin. We live in a fallen world, and one way or another, you and I are going to feel it.
- For the Christian this morning, this passage is particularly comforting. It's a reminder for those of us who do know the comforts of Christ that sometimes even the best of Christians still need time to cry. The apostle Paul was one of the founding apostles of our faith. He was arguably the greatest Christian missionary of all time. And here in this text, Paul says that there are times when he is in such distress that he kind of wishes that he wasn't alive anymore.
- Brothers and sisters, you and I need to come to terms with the fact that being a Christian doesn't exempt us from being afflicted in this life. As a matter of fact, the more that you and I seek to trust and follow Christ, the more we will find ourselves participating in both the comforts and sufferings of Christ. This is what Paul was talking about in verses 1-7. And why would we think it would be any other way?
 - Friends, it's because Jesus was righteous that he was hated by the wicked rulers of his day.
 - It's because Jesus was good that he wept when he was confronted with the realities of death.
 - It's because Jesus had mercy on the weak and weary sinners of his day, that he gave up his life so that our lives might be spared.
- Beloved, if Jesus Christ our king was afflicted during his time on earth, why would you or I think it would be any different for us?
- You're not crazy if you are a Christian today who cries yourself to sleep at night. It's not wrong to weep within a broken world. You're not crazy, but you do have a choice to make. A choice that everyone is confronted with when we are in the

³ Garland, *2 Corinthians*.

throes of suffering. In the midst of our suffering, you and I need to decide whether or not it is truly worth our time to rely on God or not.

The Power of God (9-10)

- Look with me again at the passage starting in verse 9:
 - 2 Corinthians 1:9
 - [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.
- Notice according to Paul, there is a divine design which is providentially guiding all of our suffering. The New American Standard Bible makes this verse a little stronger in its claims. It states:
 - “[W]e had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.”
- I wonder if you’ve ever heard the popular saying that God will never give you any more than you can handle. There’s some truth here. But here in our verse today, Paul clearly seems to be saying that God gives us more than we can handle in life. And it’s a good thing he does this.
- Now to be clear, Paul isn’t saying that the only reason Christians suffer in this life is because God is trying to teach us something. He isn’t trying to diminish the genuine horrors of suffering in a fallen world.
- But Paul is saying that in his providence God does allow us to be overwhelmed by afflictions so that we are reminded of how weak we truly are apart from him. Of how much we all need to rely on him. This is a major theme that will continue to pop up all throughout the letter.
- In our modern western culture, the dangers of self-reliance may not seem that evident to us, but according to the Bible, it was because Adam and Eve believed they could live their lives apart from God that they brought so much sin and suffering into this world in the first place. Believing that they could do a better job being their own gods, they ended up acting just as wicked as Satan himself, just like we do when we trust our own opinions above the clear teachings of God.

Application

- Friend in the midst of affliction, the temptation often arises to rely on ourselves rather than rely on God. Self reliance in the midst of suffering shows itself in the life of a believer in a number of different ways.
 - We may choose to self medicate through drugs, alcohol, sexual immorality, or even just staying busy.
 - We may isolate ourselves from the wider community, stop coming to church, refuse to talk about our pain, and go about our day without ever receiving the help we truly need from our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - Fundamentally, self-reliance in the midst of suffering shows itself in a heart posture which thinks that we can do better at being our own god than

God can. Which chooses to walk away from God in the midst of suffering as we care for ourselves rather than rely on God to care for us.

- It's understandable for any of us to act like this, but it isn't excusable.
- And according to Paul, it doesn't have to play out like this. The bitter pains of this life don't have to drag us away from Christ. If we allow God to use the afflictions of our lives the way he wants to, if we choose to rely on God especially during the times when things don't make sense, Paul says that God has a way of actually drawing us closer to him on the other side. Of giving us greater degrees of his comfort, degrees we could never have experienced without going through our peculiar seasons of affliction and pain.

Explanation

- Of course, this doesn't answer the most fundamental question for us today does it? In seasons of personal afflictions, why should we choose to personally rely on this God in particular? In the words of Paul, if we truly have the sentence of death within us, then what hope can this God possibly offer?
- Paul's answer in the latter half of verse 9 is clear. In relying on this God, we are relying on the one God who raises the dead. It's interesting the way it's worded here. The present participle here is used to show that this is simply a characteristic of who this God is. Who God has consistently demonstrated himself to be.
 - In the Old Testament, there are several instances of the Lord raising someone from the dead.
 - God raised the widow of Zarephath's son in 1 Kings 17:17–24.
 - God raised The Shunammite woman's son in 2 Kings 4:18–37.
 - And in 2 Kings 13:20-21, God raised a man who accidentally touched the bones of Elisha.
 - In Isaiah 26:19, the Lord gives an eschatological promise to his people who were faithful to rely on him. He says:
 - [19] Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise.
 - You who dwell in the dust, awake and sing for joy!
 - For your dew is a dew of light,
 - and the earth will give birth to the dead. (ESV)
 - In the New Testament, Jesus, the incarnation of God himself, picks up on these Old Testament promises and wraps them around himself. He states in John 11:25:
 - "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."
 - And then to prove that he truly is this God who is worthy of our trust, not only does Jesus himself raise others, but he himself takes on the death we deserve at the cross, and three days later, decisively overcomes death by rising from the dead. He demonstrated once and for all that he is the

resurrecting God who can be relied upon, and he has the power to give life to whomever he chooses.

- Friend, even if you don't fully believe this is true, you gotta admit that if God has done all that then he's demonstrated himself to be the kind of God who is worthy of our trust. A God who is worth relying on even when things are rough.
- But the beautiful aspect about our passage this morning is that Paul doesn't just leave us with the truth of who God is, but he actually takes the extra step here to explain how this perspective of who God is personally changes the way he thinks about the painful circumstances of his life. Look with me at verse 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.
- Notice this movement from past, present, to future here. It's as if Paul is saying, I know how God has delivered me out of death before, and I'm confident that he will find a way to deliver me from my present distress. And ultimately, our hope is set on the fact that one day God will deliver us from every shadow of sin, death, and destruction this world could ever throw at us.
- This is not a truth that is abstract for Paul. This is a truth that he's tried and tested himself in his own life. Remembering what Christ had done for him gives him hope for what Christ will do for him in the future.

Illustrations

- I normally don't like to give personal illustrations like this in sermons. But I asked some people, and they thought that this might be an appropriate place to share some of my testimony with you.
- I grew up in a single parent home, never knowing my biological dad. My mom, after running away from an abusive situation, raised me by herself. She did a great job. We didn't have much, but I never lacked for any need in my life. Later in life, my mom married my step dad, and he is a wonderful father figure for me.
- So I don't want to say that I had a poor childhood. But I do think that there are just certain sorts of pains and struggles that I was burdened with because I grew up in this kind of environment. I had a little bit of a breakdown when I was in college during this time, and my parents told me to talk to a counselor. So, I talked with Pastor Nathan, and he hooked me up with a biblical counselor we partner with at the church.
- And we got into it. He did a great job. But what he did was slowly dissect my heart and life until he started to notice some recurring patterns in my life. He pointed out how lonely I had always been, how much I wanted my peers to like me, how meaningful male affirmation was in my life, and how much it destroyed me when anyone ever criticized me.
- It was very painful to hear about these things. So many hurts in my life could be traced back to the absence of my Dad in the early years of my life.
- I remember there was a moment when I was working a job that wasn't making as much money as my other friends and peers may have that I started to have some dark thoughts.

- I started to put the pieces of my life together in a way that made sense but was really sad. You know, if my dad were a better man and he was around for me when I was a kid, I probably wouldn't have been as poor as I was back then. I probably wouldn't have been as insecure. I probably would have done much better at school, and ended up at a much better job, and be in a much more secure place in life than I am right now.
- And it really made me start to wonder whether or not God was really a God worth trusting or not. I remember in the midst of those hard times, God brought the choice very clearly before me. It felt like he was telling me, "You can choose to tell your story that way, or you can choose to trust me."
- I can't explain how this all worked out for me, but as I thought about the cross and I thought about the fact that Jesus really did love me, that he loved me enough to die for me even when I didn't deserve him, and that he was powerful enough to come back from the dead. If that's who God is, then that's a God that I can trust with my whole life. That's a God that I can rely on to tell my story better than I can tell it myself.
- It wasn't overnight that this happened, but things changed in my life after that moment. As I started to trust in the Lord, I started to see my life very differently. I remembered the way the Lord had protected me all throughout my childhood. I remembered how the Lord placed the right pastors or mentors at just the right moments when I needed someone like that to speak into my life. I started to be thankful to the Lord for all the ways that he had provided for me, even when I couldn't clearly see it.
- Since then the Lord has grown me and delivered me from far more precarious situations than that. And even though I still have pains in my heart that may never go away, the fact of the matter is by the grace of God, I didn't just become another number in the statistics of single parent children. And I've started to become a little more optimistic about what the Lord might do with me in the future.

Apply

- Friends, I don't want to share these parts of my story to sweep you all up in some sort of sentimental feeling. I want to make a biblical point. If this is who Jesus is, if this is how Jesus delivers us even from the darkest moments in our past, then this is a Jesus you can trust with your whole life. This is a Jesus who loves you enough to die for you, and who's powerful enough to overcome the sentence of death in your life. This is a Jesus you ought to fully rely on especially during the times when you are most tempted to rely on yourself.
 - Don't pick up the bottle. Don't run to the fleeting and vain pleasures of this life to numb the pain.
 - Run to Christ. Read your Bible and pray and ask God to speak to you. If you are here today and you're going through something really hard today, don't go through this agony alone. Let us help you. Let us serve you. Let us pray for you together. This is why God has given you the brothers and sisters in Christ that he has.

- Friend, I cannot promise that I know when and how God will deliver you from the particular afflictions you yourself are going through at the moment. But I can tell you this. There is no pain that is too deep for God cannot meet you there to comfort you. There is no sorrow too heavy for God himself to carry with you and for you.
- One way or another God has delivered his people from the afflictions of death in the past time and time again, and if he's done it before he will do it again. According to Paul, that's what it means for God to just be exactly who he is.

The Prayers of God's People (11)

- So we've seen the realities of the pain that God's people go through. We've seen the Power of God displayed in the resurrection of Christ. Now as we close up our time, Paul is going to come at this whole discussion from another angle in verse 11. Here Paul is going to talk about the Prayers of God's People and the role prayer plays in caring for one another during seasons of afflictions.
- Paul writes in verse 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.
- The Greek verb for help here literally means join us or work with us by your prayers. It's interesting that after stating that the sufferings of this life are intended to teach us not to rely on ourselves but on God, one of the ways Paul himself relies on God is by asking the church in Corinth to pray for him during the time of his affliction. This is a normal way for Paul to talk. In Philippians 1:19, Paul makes a similar statement when he writes:
 - [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.
- This is important for us to understand. According to Paul, while God is sovereign over all things, God chooses to use the prayers of his peoples as the normal means whereby he accomplishes his purposes in history.
- The New Testament scholar Philip Hughes writes:
 - "Prayer is indeed a mystery, but it is stressed over and over again in the New Testament as a vital prerequisite for the release and experience of God's power. It is true that it is *God* who delivers, and that God stands in no need of human prayers before He can act on behalf of His afflicted servants. Yet there is the manward as well as the Godward aspect of such deliverance, and the manward side is summed up in the duty of Christians to intercede in prayer for their fellow-believers who are enduring affliction. . . . In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. Thus the duty of prayer is not a modification of God's power, but a glorification of it."⁴

⁴ Cited in R. Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness*, Preaching the Word (Crossway Books, 2006).

Application

- Brothers and sisters, do you believe that God listens to us when we pray? That God acts on our behalf when we take the time to go to him? We ought to believe this, but do we pray like this?
- According to Paul, one of the fundamental ways that you and I are to rely on God is by praying not only for ourselves but for our fellow members in our church who are going through difficult seasons of life. Praying for our missionaries who are suffering for the sake of proclaiming the gospel.
- Friends, if we truly believe that we are weak in ourselves, we would value prayer far more, not just as an asset to ourselves but as the most important means whereby you and I can love and care for the afflicted among us today.
- Over the years in pastoral ministry, one of the lessons you tend to learn is just how useless you really are to truly help those in your congregation. You get into this thing, thinking you're the kind of minister who is going to solve everyone's problems.
- But then complicated pastoral cases come your way, and you realize you don't always have all the answers to life's difficult questions. Some of the members of your church are struggling with such a weight of grief that there really are no words that you can say which would be of much use. And you yourself start to wrestle with burdens in life that not even you know what to do with.
- Sometimes, the best thing that any pastor or any Christian can do is simply admit to others that we are not Jesus. Because then in that place of weakness, we can go to Jesus together and plead with him to do what only he can do for his wounded flock. Friend, only Jesus can heal the wounds that no earthly physician can touch.
- Brothers and sisters, pray regularly for your fellow members in our church. Pray regularly over our membership list. Pray regularly for the pastors and deacons who serve here. And your missionaries who serve afar. The Lord knows we need all the help we can get.
- Maybe some of you today are listening to this and you're wondering, why doesn't God seem to answer some of our prayers in the manner or timeline we want? If God really loved us, why does it seem like he so often says no to our prayers?
- These are hard questions. And I can't answer them completely. But look back again at verse 11. Notice what Paul expects to happen when the Lord finally answers to prayers of the Corinthians on behalf of Paul. When the Lord finally answers his people's prayers, he answers them in such a manner that many people will see and praise him for all that he's done.
- Friends, I don't know when God will answer our prayers or how God will answer our prayers. But I can tell you this, according to Paul, when God does answer our prayers, he's gonna do a good job of it. It may not be how we expect. But we can be confident that when we see the hand of God move on our behalf, we will have to agree that the Lord our God does all things well.
- Friends, be confident in your petitions to the Lord today. Be confident that God has given you good reasons to rely on his power today. If you've been praying for something or someone which hasn't all panned out yet don't give up. Plan to see how the Lord will answer your prayer requests. Write down the date and specifics of your requests, so you can remember to give thanks to God when he finally

chooses to answer you. And then turn around and testify to others to encourage them to continue to rely on God as well.

- If you have turned from your sins and trusted in Christ for your salvation, then you know that he has already spectacularly answered your prayers to him once, and one way or another he will answer your prayers once again. That's what it means to rely on the resurrecting God.