

God's Purposes in Suffering

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

I. God's purpose is that we might receive comfort through suffering.

- A. Paul uses some version of the word comfort ten times in vs. 3-7. He uses the words affliction and sufferings three times each in vs. 4-8. God is merciful and kind to His people and brings comfort to them in their suffering. Paul expected to suffer for Jesus. He writes in vs. 5 that we apostles share abundantly in Christ's sufferings. We too will suffer today in some ways simply because we are Christians.
- B. God "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (vs. 4). Your suffering is not meaningless. God has a purpose for your suffering. His purpose is that you might use the comfort that you have gained from God and God's people when you have gone through suffering to encourage others as they go through a similar type of suffering.

II. God's purpose is that we might receive strength from weakness.

- A. Paul's suffering in Asia, probably in the city of Ephesus, was so great that it was completely beyond his strength to handle it (vs. 8). He didn't have the resources within himself to handle his suffering. How is weakness in suffering good news for us? "To make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (vs. 9). God allows suffering to bring us to the end of our strength so that we stop trusting in ourselves and put our trust in God.
- B. Paul makes the same point about receiving God's strength through our weakness in 2 Corinthians 4:7-8: "**But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair.**" We have this treasure of Jesus and the Gospel in us. We are a fragile jar of clay. But when we make it through our suffering, God is glorified.

III. God's purpose is that we might receive life from death.

- A. When Paul mentions the resurrection in vs. 9, the Corinthians were reminded that the death and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. The fact that Jesus died on the cross makes me realistic about suffering in this world. If even Jesus suffered and died, then I should not be surprised by suffering as I follow Jesus in this world. But the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead means that we who are united to Jesus will also be raised with him. Suffering has an expiration date. We will have life after whatever death we face.

Application:

Receive God's comfort for yourself so that you can give it to others.

Sources:

The Bible

Commentaries by Trent Casto, Gary Millar, Colin Kruse, and David Garland.

Sermon Outline Questions

- 1) Do you usually see suffering as pointless? What does God want us to do with our suffering? Who does God especially want us to comfort when we see suffering?
- 2) What does God want us to learn from suffering about His strength and our weakness? Who is glorified when fragile people like us endure suffering?
- 3) What confidence can Christians have when facing death? How important is prayer for delivering other Christians from death?