

“The God of all comfort.” 2 Cor. 1 v 3-7.

Readings: Psalm 23 + 2 Cor. 1 v 1-7.

Hymns: MP 560; 1024; and 473.

Introduction.

What is **your reaction** when you hear someone swear or use blasphemous language? Perhaps you, like me, have heard children or teenagers playing together or talking in a group and so often you hear one of them say **“O my God”!**

I find I am quite disturbed by such phrases, often **used repeatedly** and merely as an exclamation about something quite mundane. I feel like asking the person, what is your God like that you are calling out to? But I do not have the courage to actually go through with it. I wonder if they would have an answer.

I want to ask the question this morning, what is God like? What is your God like? Is He the God of the Bible? The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as is mentioned here in verse 3 of 2 Cor. chapter 1. As a believer I can cry out to my God without it being blasphemy because He is MY God, I have a relationship with Him, He has a relationship with me. But what is God like? God reveals Himself in the creation, through the Bible and ultimately in Christ, the Son of God. By these means we see His character or the proper theological term for this is the attributes of God. But the basic question remains – What is God like? What is your God like?

We would be here all day if we looked at all the wonderful attributes of our God but let us just come into this passage in 2 Cor. chapter 1 and major on just one glorious attribute of God. Verse 3 says that He is the “God of all comfort”.

1/. The God of all comfort.

First of all, we need to decide what we mean, or more accurately what the Bible means by “comfort”. One of the interesting things about language is that the meaning of words changes over time. I thought when I put on a bright T-shirt that my grandsons might say to me that it looks nice or even colourful or possibly smart. But, no, they comment that I look “cool” in it. Now I know I wear a t-shirt in warm weather to keep cool, but that is not the meaning of this word in modern parlance. Even a car or a game can be “real cool”, actually meaning that it is good or stylish.

The meaning of words changes over time, and that has happened to the word “comfort.” If I ask you whether you are comfortable sitting in that armchair or on your sun lounger in the garden, I am asking you whether it is giving you comfort in terms of its softness or being relaxing. You settle down or even snuggle into a soft cushion and it is such a comfort. It gives you a lovely feeling of relaxation and softness. It is just bliss!

But the word “comfort” in the Bible is not concerned with soft cushions or a warm bath. No, it is a strong, invigorating word. The Bible speaks of God coming alongside us and putting new heart or strength into us. It is strong word of encouragement and enabling. Let me illustrate. Sometimes a commentator of a football match will say that it was a game of two halves. What he means is that one team was dominant in the first half and the other very lacklustre, perhaps conceding two goals before half time. But in the second half this poor team is totally transformed, they control the game and score three goals. The commentator questions what the manager had said to his team in the dressing room at half time. Because whatever it was, it made such a tremendous difference to his team. Well, in biblical terms he “comforted” his team. He didn’t get them to rest in soft chairs but he spoke to them in such a way that they were renewed and invigorated and they came out to face their opponents with new skill and application. That is the biblical meaning of comfort – it is dynamic, it is life changing, it is enabling and encouraging. Our God gives this kind of comfort to His children, to you and me.

In this passage Paul is writing to the Corinthian Christians and he is talking about how God has comforted him in all of his troubles and trials – and Paul had many of those! **Chapter 11 v 24-27**. Just look at what he had endured during his time as an apostle! He was flogged many times, stoned, shipwrecked three times, in danger from rivers, bandits, in danger on land and on the sea. Often hungry, thirsty and cold. Paul had quite a life as a missionary, but he always knew the comfort of his God. He says in verse 4 “who comforts us in all our troubles” and in verse 5 he says that this “comfort overflows”, it is abundant and constant. Paul’s God is the God of all comfort.

I took the opportunity earlier to read that beautiful psalm numbered 23. Did you notice the mention of comfort in verse 4? Here is God, who is the God of all comfort, showing how as the good shepherd, He is with His people always. Let me read verse 4.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me.” You know how a good shepherd cares for his sheep. He is always with them in every situation, not matter how dire it may be. He has his rod, a thick stick with a heavy end, to fend off wild beasts or robbers. He protects his sheep against all comers. He also has his staff or crook to lovingly bring the wandering sheep back into the fold. Here is a picture of his care and love, an example of his kind discipline of the wandering lamb as he puts the crook of the staff around the animal’s neck and carefully guides it back to where it should be feeding. Yes, a picture of love, faithfulness, compassion and comfort shown in the day to day life of the shepherd. But remember the 23rd psalm points forward to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Good Shepherd, the One who was even willing to lay down His life for the salvation of the sheep, you and me.

Our Heavenly Father is with us at all times and in all situations. The promise is there in the OT in Deut 31 v 6 and repeated in Hebrews 13 v 5. God has said **“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”** He is the God of all comfort because He is with us all the time, in every circumstance, in every situation. He is also a God of compassion (v3), of mercy and of comfort. He will come alongside and lead us on, giving to us His strength and endurance. He will encourage us when we are low in spirit. He is with us even when death looms near, the valley of the shadow of death, whether it is our own poor health or in grieving for a loved one. His rod and His staff will comfort us.

All these blessings are ours because we are His. He is our God and we are His people, His children, part of the family of God. We receive the comfort of God all the time and in every situation.

2/. God’s comfort flows through us to others. V 4-5.

Paul goes on in this passage to make it clear that such comfort from God is not just to be enjoyed for oneself, it is to be shared with others. This is part of God’s purpose in comforting us in a particular situation in order that we in turn can be a comfort to others. The blessings of God are not to be, as it were, hugged to ourselves. We are not to own them and keep them locked up in our hearts. No, we are to share them, we are to pass them on to others in similar need.

Read v 4-6. Paul has known much tribulation, persecution and hatred from opponents of the gospel but he has been comforted by the God of all comforts. Now he wants to tell these believers that they too will know persecution and many troubles, but he assures them that they too can experience this comfort from on high. God comforted Paul in all his troubles, so that he could comfort those in any trouble (v4). The apostle says be assured of the same comfort from God coming to you, and of course they too were to share those comforts with others.

Has the Lord brought you through a particular trying time in some way? Have you known His keeping, His love, His comfort in a special way that enabled you to keep trusting in Him and living to His glory? Then it was not just for your benefit but in order that you can help other people in similar circumstances. Because God has kept you through the dark days, you are now able to draw alongside with empathy and words of comfort and encouragement. This is life in the church of God. God caring for us and, in turn, us caring for each other. We receive the mercy and compassion of God and we pass it on to our brothers and sisters in need.

2 Cor. 1 v 3-7. page 3.

Do you sometimes wonder why God takes you through difficult times in your Christian experience?

You would not have chosen it for yourself but He brought those challenges to you and He brought you through them by His grace and love. God does not take our troubles away, which is probably what we have been asking Him to do.

The Christian life is no bed of roses, do not let anyone tell you that it is. No, the Lord re-energises us, He strengthens and helps us through the troubles. For Paul here, receiving the comfort of God was like having a transfusion of encouragement. You know when your blood count is low, you sometimes need a blood transfusion, to top up the blood supply in your body. It gives to you life and strength and perhaps helps you to fight off some disease. Here Paul is saying this is comfort is like God re-filling us with faith and love and strength. God's comfort is a wonderful, ongoing gift from our Heavenly Father who loves His children.

Why did you have to endure such times? Well it may be in order that you can be a comfort to someone else in similar circumstances sometime later in your life. The good shepherd looks after His people in wonderful ways and sometimes He graciously uses us to be the means of bringing His comfort and help to others in need. Are you able to look back and see that in your life? Are you willing to see God's perfect plan for you being worked out for your good and for the good of others in due course? God comfort flows through us to others.

So, we have seen that God is the God of all comfort. We have seen that when we receive this comfort we should not keep it to ourselves but share it with others in the church. Thirdly, we need to remember that the greatest comfort of all from our God is our salvation.

3/. God's ultimate comfort in salvation. V6.

Paul speaks in this verse of comfort alongside salvation. He speaks of the sufferings of Christ and the blessings that overflow from that suffering. Our greatest need as human beings is to be forgiven of our sins and brought into a living relationship with a holy God. We read in John's gospel of the love of God that sent His Son into this world to be our Saviour, by being our substitute on the cross. Here is God's ultimate act of comfort. Here is the Good Shepherd loving His sheep and even laying down His life for them. John 10 v 11 gives us the words of Jesus, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. I know my sheep and my sheep know me."**

Here is the compassion, the love, the mercy and the comfort of our Lord for you and me. Jesus has laid down His life in order that we might have eternal life. He has done a strong and invigorating act in bringing us from death to life, from darkness to light. He has made us His own and now He keeps and sustains us. We know His comfort every day as we come again and again to confess our sin and have our sins washed away by the precious blood of Christ.

Wonderfully, we also know His presence because He has sent His spirit, the Holy Spirit, into our lives to help us and direct us every day. In John 14 v 16, Jesus says **"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever – the Spirit of truth."** Other versions of the Bible use the word Comforter or Helper instead of Counsellor. The meaning is all the same.

God's plan of salvation is so wonderful, it is full of grace and power. The God of all comforts has given to every believer the ultimate comfort, salvation in Christ. Paul says here how the Christian life is to be a life of suffering because we are like our Master. He suffered and his suffering overflows into our lives, v 5. The world and the devil hate us and they hate our Lord. Therefore, we also see the opposition of sinful man and an evil world. But in all the suffering and trouble, we have a God who provides us with all the comfort we need. Just as He gave us salvation in Christ, now as His people, He cares for us and meets our every need. After all, it is our Heavenly Father who is the God of all comfort and it is our Lord, the Good Shepherd, who is our Saviour and the giver of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter, our Counsellor and our Helper. What rich blessings we enjoy!

Conclusion.

As believers, we have so much to thank God for, so much to praise God for, so many reasons to trust Him each and every day. But do YOU have this kind of loving relationship with God? Is your life based on the things of this world – wealth, fame and your own abilities and strength? Are you trusting in yourself or in God?

The living God can be your Heavenly Father. Jesus can be your Saviour and Good Shepherd. The Holy Spirit can be your Comforter and Helper. Someone has said “The readiness of God to pardon helpless sinners is not in short supply”. That is so, so true!

Are you willing to stop trying to run your own life and instead put your trust in Jesus? Are you willing to confess that you are a helpless sinner? God is so willing and ready to accept you into His family.

Perhaps there is someone here this morning, or listening online, who thinks God could never forgive what you have done in your life. So many mistakes, so many sins to be forgiven. Well, think about Paul who wrote this letter. He hated Jesus and he hated all who believed in Jesus. He persecuted Christians, putting them into prison and even killing them. Paul called himself the chief of sinners. But when he met Jesus on the Damascus road, he was utterly changed and he was forgiven for each and every sin he had committed or would commit. He was born again, a new start as he became a follower of Christ, a Christian, one of the people of God.

Do not hesitate because you fear God could not forgive you, Christ died on the cross bearing all the sins of all his people of all time. He did it all. He died that you can live. That is the ultimate comfort, that is the life changing glorious good news of salvation from the God of all comfort.

So, let us thank God for His daily comfort and strength. Let us praise God for His grace and mercy and compassion that He shows to us every day.

What is God like? He is the God of all comfort and many other wonderful attributes as well. As believers we can say with much feeling and gratitude, “O my God!”

Let us pray.

2845 words.