

Receiving and Giving Comfort

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[0:00] 2 Corinthians chapter 1, and we'll read verses 1 through 7. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and we'll read verses 1 through 7.

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on with Colossians this evening, but with Ed's homegoing and with the losses that we've experienced over the last few weeks, I've decided to put Colossians aside for this evening and seek to comfort you, to comfort myself, to help us comfort those who have lost someone dear to them. And receiving comfort and giving comfort go together. We just read that in 2 Corinthians. And so we can say with Paul, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comfort, 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. Receiving comfort, and giving comfort. They go together. But I don't want us to miss the very first part of what Paul said either. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and God of all comforts. Are we hurting? Yes. Are we in pain? Yes. Are we brokenhearted? Yes. But we are not without praise. Are we? We're not without praise. For every trouble, there is praise. For every sorrow, there is worship. For every sorrow that we experience, there is a reason to adore our Father in heaven.

[3:21] But maybe that is something that you are struggling with. Maybe that is something that you have a hard time understanding, and even in your own heart. Maybe that is something that you're not experiencing.

And maybe if you wonder, is God really that God of all comfort? I can say those words with my mouth, but I don't know in my heart. Well, if that is you, Israel was wondering the same things too. They were desolate, alone, and in grief. And to those people, God says, comfort. Comfort my people. And you remember those passages from Isaiah. It wasn't so long ago that we looked at those.

And Isaiah started talking about the servant of the Lord. And this servant was going to be the way that God comforted his people. He was going to be the consolation, the comfort of Israel.

So this servant would come to bind up the brokenhearted. God's comfort for people who are suffering and sin and death would come through this servant. So that we're going to look at a passage that talks about his mission tonight. So I'm going to ask you to turn to Isaiah chapter 61.

[4:49] Isaiah chapter 61. And you can see it there for yourself. This servant's mission. Isaiah 61. And just, I'll read the first three verses.

And this is the Lord Jesus speaking. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me. Because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

So the servant, the Lord Jesus speaks in this passage, and he tells us about his mission. And you see the primary focus of his mission is to comfort those who grieve. He came to bind up the brokenhearted, to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who grieve in Zion. And so tonight I have two main, two big points. And the first is, how does Jesus do that? And the second is then, how do we join Jesus in that mission of comforting those who grieve? And so first we're going to look at how does Jesus do that? How does he carry out this mission of comforting those who

grieve? Well, the very first thing you see is that he does it in the power of the Holy Spirit. He does it in the power of the Holy Spirit. The sovereign, the spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me. So Jesus' entire mission was Holy Spirit inspired, Holy Spirit propelled, powered.

And this is something that I think we easily misunderstand or we somehow discount. Jesus as a man needed the Holy Spirit like we do. And he needed the Holy Spirit to carry out this mission of comfort.

Christ didn't use his power as God to carry out this mission. No, he became like us in every way. And so the spirit that we just sang of, he came down when Jesus was baptized. And as Jesus Christ took up his messianic mission, this mission of comforting and saving God's people, he did it with the Holy Spirit resting upon him. And so all that we read in the Gospels, all that Jesus said, all that he did, all that he carried out, even his death was done through the power of the Holy Spirit, all the mercy and the compassion that he gave. He gave in the power of the Holy Spirit. He didn't float above the grief of this world. That is probably the most common heresy that Christians believe. That somehow Jesus, was somehow immune to the dangers, the powers, the sorrow, the suffering, he sort of effortlessly lived this life. Well, he didn't sort of effortlessly float above the sorrow of this life. [8:47] His humanity cringed from death and suffering just like ours does. But God gave the Spirit to uphold him, that he would not grow faint, that he would be able to carry out this mission of comfort. So God gave him the Spirit that he might not fall and fail at this mission. And so he was and he is. And this is where we can start drawing on this.

He was and he is fully equipped to comfort his people. Even now the Holy Spirit dwells completely in Christ's humanity without measure.

And so he is able to comfort. He is able to help you to comfort those who grieve. Jesus is fully equipped to do that. He knows what it is to rely on the Spirit. He knows what it is to wrestle with fears and grief and then to overcome them with the Spirit's help.

He knows that. He knows that wrestle, that wrestling, and he's able to help us. So how does he comfort us? Well, he does it by the Spirit. But then secondly, he draws close.

He draws close. You see that in the second half of verse 1. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted.

[10:19] He has sent me. God, he has sent. God sends him. He moves from one place to another. He moves from heaven to earth.

He moves from joys of heaven to the sorrows and the misery of earth. He's sent on a mission. And so he draws close. He came from heaven to earth. And so he drew close in his incarnation.

And in his incarnation, he was standing with us in our sorrow, in our sadness, in our pain, and in our loss. So this is what the book of Hebrews says.

And listen to the reasoning. Listen to why the incarnation. Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity, so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives have been held in slavery by their fear of death.

For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason, there's those reasoning words, for this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, because he himself suffered.

[11:43] When he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. So what was the incarnation? It was the servant.

It was the Son of God drawing close to his people, drawing close to you, children of God. So they are suffering, and he must go and be with them.

They are suffering, so he must come to them. He must be like them, become like them in every way. And so Jesus can relate to our weakness.

Jesus can relate to even our fear of death. Hebrews says in another place, during the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death.

Does someone who is just unaffected by the pain pray with loud prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears?

[12:57] So go to Gethsemane. And now Jesus is now facing death with his people, for his people, and his heart is overcome, overwhelmed with sorrow.

And so, because he is where we stood, he was entering into our place, and now he is beginning to experience what it means to be separated from God, what it means to feel that the Father, God, and me, we are becoming not okay.

And he is experiencing that separation and that beginning to sense that alienation, and that facing the judgment. And his heart is overcome with sorrow, and now he is praying with loud cries and with tears.

He doesn't want to go to the cross. He doesn't want to experience and feel that death, that death separated from God. That death is terrible to him.

And so in agony, he cries, Save me! Save me from that death! Rescue me from death's gaping jaws. And you know that that our Lord Jesus drank that cup, and he died that death.

[14 : 18] But he also didn't stay dead. Because God heard him because of his reverent submission.

That's what Hebrews says. He prayed, and God heard. He walked into a nightmare. He walked into death, and God then saved him from that nightmare.

On the third day, he rose again. And that should comfort us. Because there are, I think there are many reasons why he rose again.

There's many reasons for the resurrection in the Bible. But here is one, because God was answering his prayers. God was answering his prayers. And so the powerful prayers of Jesus, they saved him from death.

He rose again because God was answering his prayers. And that Jesus still prays for us. What a comfort that is. What can his prayers do for us?

[15 : 26] Well, why is he here? Why is the Son of God in Gethsemane weeping in the night? Because that's where we were. And he came to comfort us.

He came to save us. And so he must go where we are. Jesus was always entering into people's pains. As you read through the Gospels, you see this again and again and again.

There is pain. There is suffering. There is loss. And the movement of Jesus is towards it. Not away from it, but always toward it. Even the cross.

It is this perpetual movement to the cross. So wherever there is suffering, he is moving towards it. So, on one occasion, there was a big crowd following him.

And then there was, he was coming into this little village called Nain. And there was a big crowd coming out of Nain. And so now there's these two big crowds meeting together. And they're milling around.

[16 : 25] But out of all those people, out of these two big crowds now crashing together, Jesus finds her.

A widow. A widow's only son had died. And this big crowd is going out of the city to bury him. And with all these people around, Jesus finds her.

And he came to her. And it says his heart went out to her. He came as close as he could physically. And then his heart went all the way to her.

And he said, don't cry. So what does Jesus do when he sees suffering and agony and death? He goes to the suffering one.

Another time, a man's young daughter died. And the mourners are all crying. And Jesus came right into the scene. He goes right into all this mourning.

[17 : 27] And he isn't afraid to face death. He isn't staying away. He goes right into the room where the little girl is. And he raises her from the dead. And then he gives her back to her parents.

Again and again, you read it in the Gospels, Jesus doesn't stay away from those who are sorrowful. He moves to help. He meets it. He draws close to the suffering.

And in the power of the Spirit, he comes. And he comes with great power to bring comfort, sometimes raising them even from the dead. And so that is what the incarnation is all about.

And I say that is all about, not was all about. It is all about that because Jesus is still a man. He is still completely God and still completely man.

And he is still God with us to comfort us in our pain. This is his heart. This is his life and ministry even now as a faithful high priest.

[18 : 25] Now what else does he do? So he comes in the power of the Holy Spirit. He draws close to those who are suffering. And thirdly, he speaks the Gospel. How is Jesus going to carry out this ministry of comfort?

Well, he speaks the Gospel. You see it there in Isaiah 61. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me because he has anointed me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. So his mission is a mission of preaching. And then later on in verse 2, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So how does Jesus, how did and how does Jesus continue to comfort those who are grieving?

He preaches the Gospel to them. Men can be right with God through Jesus Christ. He said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

He said, all you who are weary and heavy laden, come to me. He was always inviting sinners to himself, preaching himself, what he could do, his salvation.

[19:30] Hebrews calls him the apostle of our faith. Jesus Christ is the personal emissary of God to preach to us the good news. So just like Peter and just like Paul were sent to preach, Jesus was sent to preach the Gospel.

He was that first apostle to come from God with good news. And he came from God, the Father, with a message, comfort, comfort my people. And so here he is comforting them and he comes saying, for this is what the high and the lofty one says, he who lives forever and whose name is holy.

I live in a high and holy place, but I also live with him who is contrite and lowly in spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

So Jesus is always preaching this message to those who are sad, grieving over their sin and their loss. He says, to those who confess, to those who repent, to those who are crying out in anguish, there is peace for you.

There is righteousness for you. There is no condemnation. There is a hope. There is a promise.

There is a future for you. I am here to bring those things to you.

[20:51] And so Jesus came speaking the Gospel and he is still speaking the Gospel by the power of the Spirit through the Word of God even to us today.

And so the Spirit of Christ still comes. He still comes. And he says, though you have sinned, I have died.

And though you have fallen away, I have come that you might come back. There is forgiveness and there is nothing for you to do but believe. This is all I ask of you.

To leave your sin and trust yourself to me. Hold out your brokenness. Hold out your brokenness and I will heal you. So how does Christ comfort us?

By speaking the Gospel to us. Well then, how else does he comfort us? Fourth, he promises to provide. He promises to provide.

[21:51] Look at verse 3. Isaiah 61.3. Why has he come? Verse 3 says, to provide. To comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion.

That word provide, I think that's the key word of this next section. What does Jesus provide his grieving people with?

Well, he says, I will provide three things. A crown of beauty instead of ashes. Oil of gladness instead of mourning.

A garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. And so do you understand what Christ is promising to do for those who grieve in Zion? He says, I'm going to provide so well for you that at the end you will know nothing but praise.

Nothing but joy. The first set of things, ashes. And mourning. And despair. That's the first. That's how Jesus meets us.

[22:52] We're here at this funeral. We're sad. We're in despair. We don't think it will ever get better. And he comes and he says, I will provide so well for you that I will move you from that state to a state of joy and worship and praise.

You'll know nothing but gladness when I am done providing for you. So the grief, the ashes, the mourning, the despair, yes, those are the clothes we wear now.

But Jesus says, I'm going to take those clothes off of you and I am going to give you a robe of praise. So to all who are grieving in Zion and pain, he is going to so meet your needs.

He is going to so provide for you that instead of despair, you will give him praise. He will so meet all of your needs. Physically, spiritually, relationally, he will meet all of those needs so that by the end, when he is done giving to you, all of your sorrow will be turned to joy.

That's his promise. And that's why Jesus could say, blessed are you who mourn, for you will be comforted. You will be comforted. Jesus was always saying that.

[24 : 14] Don't cry. Don't be afraid. He comes to people with these words. Why? Not to belittle those feelings. Not to say you shouldn't be feeling that way, but to say you don't need to feel that way any longer because I am here and I am going to help you.

He was going to do something about those things. And so sorrow and sadness and fear won't have the final word. And so we sing, Satan, I defy thee.

Death, I now decry thee. Fear, I bid thee cease. World, thou shalt not harm me nor thy threats alarm me while I sing of peace. We can sing of peace because of Jesus and his promise to us.

And so here is this promise for those who grieve in Zion. For God's people who are sad. You have nothing to be afraid of. Your needs will all be met.

And they will not be met halfway, but completely. God does not do things second best. He does not do things halfway.

[25 : 26] That's how men do things. And he is not a man. He is God. And so joy will have the last word.

But someone can say, how can I be sure? How can I be sure? What will give you faith to believe that promise that I am going to provide for you? What will give you faith? Well, especially what will give me faith when I'm looking at my sin and my unworthiness?

When I'm looking at all that I have that's wrong with me, what will give me faith that he will really do that for me? Look at the end of verse 3. He shows you why you can count on this promise.

They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. Why can you trust this promise? Why can you trust that Jesus Christ will carry out this mission completely?

It's because for this very good reason, this is for God's glory. This is for his glory. Jesus has set his heart, his mind, his will on glorifying his Father.

[26 : 30] He's going to glorify God. And so this is tied Jesus' mission to comfort us to God's glory.

So here we are in our grief and our sorrow and it all gets picked up. It gets all carried away, swept away in Jesus' mission to honor the Father.

So he has tied your comforts to his worship. He has tied your comfort and your provision to his name. He has not tied it to your actions.

He has not tied it to your worthiness. He has not tied, he's tied it to his name, to his splendor. So if he fails, then he loses.

If he does not deliver, his worship will fail. And I want you to think about this because this is meant for your comfort. This is meant to encourage your faith. Think about it. If God doesn't keep his promise, if Jesus fails in this mission because he grows careless, he grows, well, I'm not going to do it, I've lost interest.

[27 : 35] if God doesn't keep this promise to provide for those who suffer in Zion, angels will not worship him. Men will not worship him.

God has an audience. He has an audience. And he's intent on bringing praise and glory to his name. He will glorify himself and Jesus will glorify his Father.

He can't do any less. So how does Jesus comfort those who are grieving? Well, he does it in the power of the Spirit. He draws close to them. He speaks the gospel to them.

He provides for those who are grieving. And he does it all for the glory of God. Now, isn't that a wonderful example, a beautiful paradigm of what we can do to help those who need our comfort to comfort those who are grieving?

And so that's our second big question. How do we join Jesus in comforting those who grieve? Well, we join Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 41] In Christ, we've been given the same spirit as Jesus Christ had. So it is not easy. I will tell you personally, and I'm sure you know this, it is not easy to comfort those who grieve.

we feel our inadequacy. We know our fear. We know how stupid we can be.

We know how weak and limp we can feel. But we aren't alone. We aren't alone. We have the Spirit of God, and he's a real person, and he's really interested, and he is really able to help you.

He is just as available to you as he was to Jesus Christ, because you are one with Jesus Christ.

You're united to him. And so he lives in us, and we live in him, and in Christ, the fullness of the Spirit dwells.

And so, because we're united to him, we, too, have access to the Holy Spirit to help us do this hard, difficult work of grieving those who comfort.

[29:52] And so we can comfort the grieving in the power of the Holy Spirit. And again, I'm not talking about some invisible power or force. He's a person, and he's eager.

He has an agenda. He wants to help. He is able to help. So we can rely on him. Christ did, and we can, too.

Now, second, how do we comfort like Jesus? We do what Jesus did. Instead of moving away from the pain, we move toward the pain.

And this is one of the biggest problems. This is one of the biggest hang-ups and difficulties that we have. We always feel like, well, maybe they don't want me to talk to them.

Maybe they don't have time for me. Maybe they're too tired. Maybe they're overwhelmed or something like that. And let me say, there is a degree of gentleness and thoughtfulness that we need.

[30:52] That is true. But more often than not, the hurting don't need time and space so much as people coming to them and comforting them. And if we're going to error, if we're going to go astray in any way, let's go, let's error on the side of being too generous with our comfort.

So don't be shy. Draw close. Psalm 34 says, the Lord is near to the brokenhearted. What does it mean to be godly? Think about that.

Think about what we normally think of what it means to be godly. And none of those things are wrong, I'm sure, but one of the things that it means to be godly is it means to come near to the brokenhearted. What does it mean to be Christ-like?

It means you go near to those who are suffering. So measure your religion with this yardstick.

Measure your Christ-likeness with this ruler.

So what is pure and faultless religion that is acceptable in your father's eyes to visit the widows and the orphans in their need? And we need grace for that.

[32:03] And there is grace for us in Jesus Christ. I'm not piling this on and saying, now go do it in your own strength, obviously. But there is everything that you need in Jesus Christ to do this hard work.

You know what? There's nothing in you and that's okay because you have Jesus Christ. He knows how to do this. He has done it. He has wisdom. He has courage. He has grace.

He has mercy. He has everything you need. So go and go with him. Melody Green lost her husband Keith and two of her children in a plane crash.

Melody actually wrote the song that we're going to sing at the end of the service tonight. Some years after the accident, she wrote an article entitled Binding Up the Brokenhearted.

And I'm going to read some of this because I think it gives us a good perspective of a person on the other side who is suffering, who is lost. After she's gone through this experience of losing two children and her husband in one day, what does she have to say to those who want to comfort the grieving?

[33:13] Listen to what she says. After Keith and the children died, many reached out to me. But I often had, listen to this, but I often had a false idea that I was really a bother to them.

I felt awkward being on the receiving end of so much sympathy and attention. But if my friends hadn't pursued me, I would have ended up lonely and isolated, depressed, overthinking nobody cared.

While they sat at home wishing there was something they could do. When someone's going through trials, they may be so upset they're not thinking straight. They don't know what they need.

Because we don't want to invade their privacy. We think if they wanted to talk or pray or have company, they'd ask. They usually don't. They usually don't ask.

Be sensitive. But don't be shy. So draw close. Well, how can we draw close? Well, those two things that we saw that Jesus did.

[34:15] He did it in word and he did it in his actions. And that corresponds to what Jesus did and that needs to correspond to what we do.

So you can draw close in words. What did Jesus come to do? How did he comfort those who are grieving? He preached the gospel. Now, obviously, most of us aren't called to preach and when you're dealing with one person who is grieving, you're not going to be preaching.

But to say, don't be afraid. Let me just say that. Don't be afraid to speak the gospel to them. If you have nothing else that you can think of to say, you can say the gospel. Encourage them with that. So don't be afraid to say very little except this is what I find in scripture. This is what I find here. Your faith in God's word will encourage their faith. So you don't have to be their great comfort. And I think that's an idea that we somehow carry into these situations that somehow I've got to do this. You don't have to be their great comfort. [35 : 18] Use the scripture. Take them to their greatest source of comfort, Jesus Christ. So we don't have to be smart. We can just be simple lovers of Jesus Christ and encourage them with the truth.

And then coming near practically and physically, listen again to what Melody Green said. Just phoning to tell someone you were thinking of them or asking if you can visit means a lot. Or you can just drop by for a few minutes. If they're not in the mood for the company, you can always go back later. Depending on the situation, there are many little things that you can do. Usually the more practical, the better. Things like cooking, cleaning, or shopping are great ways to express concern. Flowers or cards are always appreciated. And maybe just doing something fun together for a few hours would bring some needed relief from the intensity of the situation. Just see what the needs are and meet them. If you aren't sure, ask. [36 : 24] Just your presence makes a statement of caring. Broken people usually need some solitude, but a steady diet of loneliness is unhealthy for anyone.

Just be natural and express yourself simply. God may give you an encouraging word or scripture, but just saying you're sorry they're sick or you're sorry about the death in the family is sufficient when it's sincere.

Big speeches aren't necessary. Let them set the tone and the limits of the conversation and be careful not to pry. Be a thoughtful and sympathetic listener.

Maybe they just need a shoulder to cry on. Well, that's where we're going to end. That's how Jesus comforts us and that's how we can comfort others.

Let's not just be hearers of the word, but let's be believers and let's be doers of it. We're going to sing from the overhead, There is a Redeemer. Let's stand as we sing.