

Comfort for the Suffering

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- [0 : 00] Please take your Bibles and turn to the last book in your Bible, the book of Revelation. Be reading from Revelation chapter 2.
- Revelation chapter 2, I'm going to read the letter to the church in Smyrna, beginning at verse 8.
- To the angel of the church in Smyrna write, These are the words of him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again.
- I know your afflictions and your poverty, yet you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.
- Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.
- [1 : 18] Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.
- He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. I don't know about you, but one of the trickiest things that I ever have to do is comfort the suffering.
- There are still moments that I'm replaying in my mind. Moments from even years ago. I can't give exact examples to tell you what I'm thinking because, honestly, all the examples involve you.
- Sometimes, eventually, I figure out what I could have said or should have said. Other moments, I'm still replaying them.
- Still wondering how maybe I could have said something better or differently, regretting what I did say or what I did do, but I'm still not sure.
- [2 : 41] I think most of you can relate to that to some degree, where you sought to bring comfort to the suffering. And it's just difficult.
- Suffering is hard. And comforting the suffering is hard, too. We don't know what to say. We're afraid to say too much. We're afraid to say too little.
- Maybe they just want left alone. Maybe that would be better. Maybe they don't want me bringing it up. Maybe that should be the way I go. Maybe, and then on the other side, if I don't say anything, I feel bad about that.
- Or, or, or, or we blunder right in. And we speak without thinking. I feel like I have something to say, or I have to say something, I mean.
- It's my job, after all. I'm supposed to know what to say in any moment. And I can tell you that's just not true. But I'm supposed to know what to say. Okay, so I open my mouth, and this morning we're going to be looking at Jesus' letter to the church of Smyrna.
- [3 : 52] Because in this letter, he's comforting the suffering. There are two churches that, in Revelation 2 and 3, that Jesus doesn't have anything to say, anything bad to say about them or to them.

No correction, nothing like that, not a word. It's the church of Smyrna and the church of Philadelphia. They weren't perfect churches. None of the, none of the seven churches were perfect.

No church on earth is perfect beyond any sort of correction. They were suffering churches. And Isaiah says, a bruised reed he will not break.

Their suffering was such that if he were to even add a little bit of correction, it would have been too much for them. He knew that. So he doesn't say anything to this church.

If all you hear is Jesus criticizing you, Jesus correcting you, not satisfied, always pushing, I want to say you're probably not really hearing him.

[5 : 00] Because there are times when he doesn't have a word of correction for us. He only has a word of comfort. This is one of those times. He wrote to the church of Smyrna to comfort them, to gently love on them when they desperately needed it.

Now, I was reading a book by Michael Emlett. He works for CCEF. It's called Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners.

And that book got me thinking through this passage. And so I want to give credit where credit is due. It was very helpful. So if you're interested in reading more about this, you could go to that book.

But I want to do two things this morning with this letter. The first is, to those who are suffering, and I know you are here, to those who are suffering, you're wounded, I want you to see the comfort that Jesus gives this hurting, wounded church.

He has good words to say to them. He has comfort for them, and he has comfort for you. And so I sort of want you to overhear what he has to say to them and realize these things were written for you.

[6 : 13] They were written for you to overhear. This is a conversation that was, yes, Jesus was having directly with the church of Smyrna, but he knew you were listening in, and so what he has to say is for you.

And then as we go, I want to see how Jesus comforts the suffering, how we can learn to comfort those who are hurting, who are wounded, who are afraid, who are suffering in some way.

And so we want to learn how to do that ourselves because, as I said, suffering is hard, and comforting the suffering is hard too. So that's what we want to do.

We want to look at those two things. I have seven lessons this morning. That's a lot, but we're going to go through them really quickly, and Lord willing, we'll get done completely on time. Seven lessons, and the first is that Jesus himself talks to the suffering.

Jesus himself comes to the suffering and talks to them. That means if you're suffering this morning, Jesus has a word for you. He talks to the suffering.

[7 : 18] So Peter was talking to the Gentile centurion Cornelius in Acts chapter 10, and Cornelius was learning about Jesus for the very first time.

Now, I imagine Peter could have said a lot of things to Cornelius, but he summed up Jesus' life and his whole ministry in a couple of sentences, and listen to what Peter said.

He said, God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and he went around doing good in healing all who were under the power of the devil.

And this last phrase is so precious, because God was with him. Jesus was the glove, and God was the hand.

They were both reaching out to those who were suffering. So I want you to see God's heart. Jesus goes around saving, healing, comforting, the whole gospel ministry that we see in the gospels, because God was with him.

[8 : 18] God's heart was in this. He saw suffering, hurting people, and God's heart reaches down in the form of Jesus Christ. Christ. That's who Jesus is. And that's why he's talking to this church in Smyrna, because they're hurting.

Christ was born for this. And so look at how Jesus announces himself and talks about himself. He says, These are the words of him who is the first and the last, who died and came to life again.

Jesus is the first and the last. Now, I think there's rhyme and reason for why Jesus picks out certain names to call himself in the book of Revelation. Why does he call himself the first and last?

I think there's a reason for that. It's a very practical reason. And it's this, that when you are suffering, it can feel and it can really seem that our suffering gets all sucked down into this one eternal moment.

We will never get out of it. It's always been here. It's always going to be here. It's as if we can't remember or we can't see our way out of a time when we will not be experiencing this pain.

[9 : 29] It's just going to go on and on forever as if this pain and the suffering is transcendent. But Jesus says, No, I am the first and the last.

I'm over all. I am before this pain and I will have the last word. I will have be the last. So suffering can sometimes feel like it's going to go forever.

And we get sucked down into that moment that we can't escape. How do you escape that moment is when Jesus comes in and he reminds us that, no, he is actually over all.

He's over all. He's before and he is after. And there is going to be an afterwards to this pain and he's going to be there. Suffering sometimes can feel like death.

It feels like you're just on the doorstep of death. And sometimes suffering actually means death. Jesus is going to tell them that they are going to have to be faithful unto death.

[10 : 31] That means that some of them would actually die. That was going to be the price of faithfulness. So he's calling them to be faithful unto death.

So death was in front of them. It was staring them in the face. They were in the grips. They were surely going to experience it. Some of them were. But before they do, Jesus wants them to know that they're not alone in this.

That he died. He died. He went through everything that they are going to go through. He's saying, I know your fears because I've lived them.

I know your horrors because I've experienced them myself. I was faithful all the way to death.

So a lot of people can't relate to that. But Jesus is saying, I can. I can. No matter how far this trial, this suffering takes you, I've gone there.

[11 : 36] And I will go again with you. Suffering has a way of isolating you. It has a way of making you feel alone and misunderstood and beyond understanding.

It has a way that we think, it's going to outlast all my friends. That's one reason that we have a hard time sharing our suffering with our friends. Because we're afraid if we put too much on them, they'll leave us.

And we don't want to be abandoned. But Jesus is saying, this suffering won't outlast me. I've died and I've come to life again. I've gone all the way through and I've come to the other side.

And so, if that's where you are, I want you to see that Jesus knows. Jesus is here. Jesus is there for you in that moment.

Now, what does this mean if you want to comfort someone? This is the first lesson. You need to give them comforters. You need to give the suffering Jesus, who's first and last.

[12 : 37] Who has died and who has lived. Nothing else will do. Give them Jesus. Don't whisper nonsense or sweet nonsense into their ears because they don't want it.

It's an insult to their agony. It doesn't do their pain justice. But you give them Jesus hurting. You give them Jesus in Gethsemane and Jesus at Calvary, full of trouble, full of sadness, crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Give them that Jesus who can understand, who has been exactly where they are, who has a priestly heart that is completely sympathetic with them.

Make them to understand that suffering, as transcendent and as eternal as it can feel sometimes, it is not. Jesus is over all. Give them that Jesus.

Jesus. Number two, Jesus knows your specific sufferings. So number one is Jesus talks to the suffering. Number two is Jesus knows your specific sufferings.

[13 : 46] Verse nine. I know your afflictions. He doesn't say I know about them as if I've heard about them. He's saying I know them. I know them.

I'm completely intimate with them. I know your afflictions and your poverty, yet you are rich. I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

So Jesus knows your suffering. Maybe no one else does. Poor suffering Christian. Maybe no one else can understand it. No one else can relate to it.

It doesn't feel like anyone can really get you. Jesus knows it. Maybe it's too shameful. Maybe. It's not something that you can share with anyone.

Maybe you're like Asaph saying, I can't tell anyone this because if I really revealed my true feelings and what I am really thinking, it would be ruinous to them, not just to me.

[14 : 43] So I can't say anything. Or maybe they're tired of hearing about it. Or I probably shouldn't feel this way. If that's how you feel, Jesus knows. He knew how the church of Smyrna felt.

We don't know all the details, but he did. He knows it from the inside because, remember, he's faced death, too. And so the feelings that they had, the fears that they were going through, he knew.

And he was slandered, too. Slander can be just as painful as any sort of physical wound. And he was stripped naked without anyone to defend him. He knows what it is to feel defenseless.

He knows suffering from the inside. So some people can only go so far with you in suffering. They don't have the legs. They can't swim into the waters that you are where God is calling you to do.

They haven't been there. Some of you have gone to places that I can't go. I can only imagine. And it's good to know where you haven't been and where you can just say, I understand and I can only imagine what you're going through.

[15 : 47] But Jesus doesn't have to ever imagine. He doesn't have to struggle to put himself into your shoes. He's been in your shoes before you. He knows.

Now, here's the lesson for us. If you want to comfort people, you can't hide yourself from people's pain. You cannot comfort from a distance, from an emotional distance.

I'm not talking about a physical distance. You can be as close physically as possible and not be emotionally close. I'm saying you have to be with people in their pain.

And so you can't hide yourself. That's the temptation. Because other people suffering, it is uncomfortable. It's uncomfortable to be around.

It's uncomfortable to handle and deal with. And so the great temptation is that you step back. And you have all sorts of excuses why you're stepping back, but you step back.

[16 : 46] So yes, it's uncomfortable, but they desperately need you to understand. You're not going to be Jesus to them. But you can understand where they're coming from.

Ask questions. Ask questions. There's no stupid questions. As long as you can preface it with, maybe this is a stupid question, but I'm trying to understand.

I'm not trying to be insensitive here. I'm not here to minimize or correct. I just want to understand. Isn't there comfort in knowing that just someone is trying to understand?

That they're there for you. They're leaning into that suffering with you. And so ask questions. What kind of questions should you ask? Ask questions that build relationships.

Ask questions that does what Jesus does, which is creates intimacy with this person. Not to fix them. That's the, that's, you know, that is such a temptation.

[17 : 57] But not to fix them, but to sympathize with them, to get into the suffering with them. If you're saying, well, shouldn't we have something constructed to say? Yes, we should. That's later. We're going to get into what you should positively do and say later.

But, but now ask questions to build rapport, to build intimacy, to get into that suffering with them. So Jesus moves towards them. He knew where they were and he was with them.

And that's what we can do with those who are hurting. That's number two. Number three, Jesus doesn't compare their suffering with anyone else's suffering.

This is important. Jesus doesn't, is not comparing. He's not pulling their suffering out of, out of them and saying, okay, let's see how that compares with, with someone else's.

With my suffering, with your suffering, with their suffering. He doesn't do anything of that. He doesn't say, well, look, I don't know what you guys are so afraid of. I suffered, I suffered beneath God's rage and wrath and anger.

[18 : 58] What, what are you so afraid of? There's not going to be any sting in your death. All the sting came to me. The whole curse of the law fell on me. I tasted the first death and the second death so that you don't ever have to taste the second death.

Your suffering is so little compared to mine. God's not going to leave you. He abandoned me. And we do that. We look at other people's sufferings and then we compare it to ourselves.

And we think, can't they just get over it? This is not that big of a deal. Why are they going on like this? I have this one song in my YouTube playlist.

It's sort of a modernization of when peace like a river attendeth my way. You know, it is well. It is well with my soul.

And this girl sings it and I really like it. And one time I saw this girl who sings this explaining why. Where this came from. Why she modernized it.

[20 : 03] Why is she saying it? Why is it so special to her or something like that? And I wish I never saw this interview. But, and she said, you know, I started singing this.

It just really meant a lot to me. Because when my husband and I, we were trying to get a new home. And we just weren't sure if we were going to get it or not. And she was all in this turmoil because of this.

So there she is, this pretty young lady. Whose suffering was, I'm not sure if I'm going to get this new house I want or not.

And I instantly rolled my eyes completely back in my head. I instantly said, oh my word, poor child. You're not sure if you're going to get your new home or not?

That's so hard. And I wrote her off. Because I felt like I was singing and listening to this song to save my life. And she's singing it because she's not sure if her California dream is going to come true.

[21 : 04] And it was in danger. And it's like, talk to me when you have real problems. I wouldn't have been much help to her.

I wouldn't have been much comfort to her. And so don't do that. Don't do what I did. You can't compare other people's sufferings to your own. And we can also do the opposite. So there's the danger of belittling them, their suffering, comparing them to our suffering and say their suffering is little and mine is big.

The opposite is just as much of a danger. We can look at someone suffering and say, that is way more than I've ever gone through. What am I going to say? How in the world could I possibly relate or understand that?

And what could I ever say to make any sort of difference to them? And so I don't say anything. You don't see anything like that happening in this letter.

There's no hierarchy of suffering in the book of Revelation where some suffer way, way more and they're just comparative things. There's no comparison. Jesus doesn't say, well, Smyrna, you think you have it tough, but look over here at the church of Philadelphia.

[22 : 14] They're really going through it. He doesn't do that. It doesn't help to do that, for one. But he doesn't do it because he actually cares about our pain, no matter how it compares to other people's pain, because he loves us.

He cares about our pain because it's our pain, and it's hurting us. And it doesn't matter if someone else's pain is hurting more or less than your pain.

He cares about us. So three, don't compare sufferings. All it will do is keep you from people who need your comfort. It's not going to help them.

It's going to just keep you away, keep you silent, and keep them suffering alone. That's number three. Don't compare sufferings.

Number four, Jesus doesn't explain their suffering. He doesn't explain their suffering. He doesn't try to give them the comprehensive reason why they're going through this and why it's them and why it's not some other church and why them in particular.

[23 : 21] He doesn't give them any sort of explanation like that. A lot of times we think explanation is comfort, as if we could say, well, this is why it's happening.

And if you understand the why of all the reasons, well, then it will all make it better. We feel like explanation puts the suffering in a box, and then we can control it, and then we can deal with it, and it's done.

I think there's some of that same motivation going on when you find out such and such has this kind of cancer, or you have this kind of cancer, or you have this kind of disease.

And you instantly go into all this research, and you're trying to understand it and explain it. And I think a lot of that motivation is obviously you want to know, but number two is there's this heart that says, if I can just understand it, then I'm sort of able to control it.

I'm able to contain it. I'm somehow gaining mastery over it. Jesus doesn't do anything like that. He says the devil's involved. He gives them a little bit.

[24 : 32] He says the devil's involved. The devil will put some of you into prison to test you for ten days. There's a little explanation, but you don't see any of all of God's reasons for it. There's no full explanation. Why the church in Ephesus is everything is going great, really, for them physically and outwardly, and yet here's Smyrna suffering.

He doesn't explain why one and not the other. The Bible gives us lots of different reasons for suffering, possibilities. Sometimes we're being disciplined, just being trained.

It doesn't have anything to do with whether we've sinned or not. Sometimes maybe it does. Generally, Romans 5 talks about suffering builds perseverance, perseverance, character, and character, hope.

That is what God is doing in it. That's his purpose, but that's not an explanation. Suffering teaches us to comfort others with the comfort with which we've been comforted.

We are better comforters after we've suffered. And when we can relate to someone, now we're ready to comfort them. And so that's a purpose. James says it makes us mature and complete, not lacking anything.

[25 : 43] So there's reasons. God's doing things. But there's not a lot of particular reasons given. There's not a lot of particular reasons why this is happening to you.

Nothing that you can say for absolutely sure. God is doing very specific things in our suffering. Our suffering is tailor-made for us.

God has an exact intention that he is working in your life and other people's lives. But exactly what that is, is sometimes completely unknowable.

And a lot of times it's nearly impossible to see when you're in it. When you're in the middle of it. Maybe later you'll start to understand some things.

Maybe later you can begin to understand, this is what God was doing in my life. He taught me this or he taught me that.

[26 : 49] But that's usually later. And let me say, in the moment, that doesn't offer a lot of comfort. I can actually know all the reasons and all the good that is going to come out of it.

And it doesn't necessarily make it better or easier to handle. And so, what's the lesson here for comforters? Don't feel like you need to come up with explanations.

Don't. You don't. If God doesn't feel like he has to explain all of our suffering, I don't think we, who have infinitely less brain power than he does, in understanding of what is going on, that we have to come up with explanations.

God doesn't give us suffering as some sort of intellectual, theological exercise. Let's see if they can figure this out. And if they can figure it out, that's extra points for them. We need to be careful with that question, what is God teaching you?

That's a fine question under many circumstances. But in suffering, that's hard to know sometimes. And honestly, again, like I said, I can know all the reasons why I'm suffering.

[28 : 00] And it won't make my suffering feel better or less painful. What I'm saying is, Jesus doesn't confuse explanation and comfort.

And we need to be careful not to do that either. We need to learn to be with them. To be with the sufferer.

Sit with them in their pain and their confusion. Because they need us with them first. Not to teach them some lesson. Not to help them get some explanation that solves all their problems.

Now, do you just sit there and you do nothing? No. No. Look what's next. Look what's next. Number five is, Jesus gives them truth to help them along the way.

Jesus does give them truth to help them along the way through their affliction. He gives them the truth that they need to see their way. To keep on the path. To stay walking through to the end of this affliction.

[29 : 04] He doesn't give them all the reasons why it's happening. He gives them the truth that they need. He gives them light for the path. That they might just continue to go. To see it to the end. He doesn't minimize their suffering.

He doesn't explain all the reasons why it's happening. He says, here's the truth to stay on the path. Here's what you need to know. Everything else really can wait.

All the explanations, we don't have to have those right now. But here's the truth. You need to stay on the path. To stay faithful as you go. He says, I know your poverty. But you are rich.

See, he's going to tell them their affliction. And then he's going to tell them the truth that they need to hear. And understand to just keep going. I know your poverty, but you're rich. Christian, you are rich.

Poor Sperna. You are rich. And he's helping them to understand their situation. And put it into a different light. He's giving them this so that they can keep going.

[30 : 08] You're rich. You have God for you. You have a bright future. You have God's promises. You have God's love that we sing about. Psalm 136.

His love endures forever. The man who has that is rich. You have the first and the last to love you. Your reward in heaven is rich. So keep going.

He's giving them truth that will strengthen them and encourage them to keep going. He's not going to take them out of the suffering. He's not going to explain it away. He's going to give them what they need to keep going.

And the Jews. This had to be a real conundrum if you're the church in Smyrna. These Jews. They aren't really Jews. They're a synagogue of Satan.

Now why does he say that? Because this church needed clarity to see what was actually going on. Because here these people are. These are God's people, right? These are the Jews.

[31 : 03] The Old Testament people of God. They're religious. They read the Old Testament. And they're slandering us. You know, maybe if this was the Gentiles, that would have been different.

If these people, they don't fear God. They don't love God. They don't know anything about God at all. And here they are. They're slandering us. Well, you can put that into a category. But this category of these Jewish people, they know, right?

They know God. They know about him. Maybe we deserve it. Maybe they're right. And we're wrong. Maybe we just need to bail on this.

But Jesus says, no. Here's the truth that you need to know to keep going. They are a synagogue of Satan. Yeah, they're all gathered in this religious ceremony.

This religious institution. But they belong to Satan. You're not on the wrong side of this. They are.

[32 : 07] So keep going. He says, you're going to be tested for 10 days. It really, really helps. If you want to understand the book of Revelation, it really, really helps to have the book of Daniel in your mind.

Remember Daniel chapter 1? Daniel and his three friends and all these Hebrew young men are taken over to Babylon. And it's the whole chapter 1 is about whether they're going to eat the king's food or not.

And Daniel and his three friends say, no, we're going to eat vegetables and water for how long? He says, test us for 10 days. You test us for 10 days and we'll see what happens.

So what is 10 days? 10 days is a short period of testing that is going to prove that God is faithful. That's what 10 days is.

When you see it here, that's what this is talking about. 10 days is a short, successful time of testing. And so Smyrna, you're going to be tested just like they are.

[33 : 18] They were. You're going to be tested just like Daniel was. Are you going to bow to the pressure, bow to the persecution, or you're going to venture on God? And that's what Smyrna is doing. They're venturing on God.

They don't have any sort of absolute guarantee except for God's word that this is going to turn out. And so here you are, you're being put into a hostile environment, but the test is brief.

And then you're going to be out of it. And at the end of it, you're going to say and see that God is faithful. That's what Daniel and his three friends found out. And Jesus is saying, church in Smyrna, in 10 days, short test.

And then there's going to be an escape. And for them, the escape is death and heaven. But your faith is going to be proven to be well-founded.

You're trusting in Jesus, and he's going to come through for you. So do you see what Jesus is doing? He isn't comforting them by taking them out of the trouble. He's not removing them from the situation.

[34 : 18] He's not taking away their pain. Not yet. He's not minimizing it. He's not explaining it. He's saying, this is going to be bad. This is going to be hard.

But here's what you need to see your way through it to the end, to be faithful to death. So here's what you need to know to stay faithful as you walk the path. Again, he doesn't hide the end.

Some of you are going to die. You're going to die because you're being faithful. You will have to die in order to stay faithful to Jesus. That was the reality in Smyrna.

That is the reality in the world, in many places in the world now. And we need to realize that doesn't mean that Jesus isn't for us, that things aren't going well. It just means that we are in a time of testing too.

He says, you're going to die. But on the other side, I'm going to give you the crown of life. Crown of life. That means a reward of a better, eternal life.

[35 : 26] A better resurrection. You know, all Christians will die and rise to glory. All will receive eternal life.

But the Bible is clear that some will rise to a better resurrection. More glory. A crown of glory. A crown of life. And that is what Jesus is saying to them.

This is what you need to know. This is what I'm holding out in front of you. You are going to die. But on the other side, I will give you the best of everything. Eternal life. And do you see then how to comfort people?

You give them the truth that they need to keep going. You give them the truth they need to keep walking the path that God has laid out for them.

Now, there's a lot of practical things that you can do to alleviate suffering as much as you can. But this is essential. Don't say you can do it. It will be all right.

[36 : 26] Or here's all the reasons for it. No, you too can say, no, this is bad. This is hard. But here's light for your path. Here's the truth that you can hold on to as you walk your way through it.

Now, Christian, you know if you've been through suffering. And this is true. Christian sufferers, we want to be faithful. We want to be faithful.

Yes, we want to be out of the suffering. That is true. But more than that, we want to see it to the end. We want to see it to the end, to the glory of God.

And that's what Jesus is doing. He's giving them the truth that they need to suffer well, to see it to the end. And that's what we should do, too.

That's number five. Six. Jesus commits to them. He commits to them. He says, do not fear. Now, this is not the same.

[37 : 29] Do not fear as when Jesus is in the boat with the disciples and the storm comes up and he says, oh, you of little faith. It's there's no sharpness to this.

There's no correction here. He's saying, this is a word of commitment, of comfort. Do not fear. So your child has a nightmare.

And they're screaming in the middle of the night. Some friends of ours, you don't know them, but some friends of ours have a son that he suffers from night terrors and he'll be screaming in the middle of the night.

What do you do? You know what you do? You have to go in there. They have to go in. They have to wake him up.

They have to be with him. They have to lay down with him. They have to say, it's OK. Don't be afraid. I'm here. And that's what Jesus does for you, poor sufferer.

[38 : 30] Fear not. I am with you. Be not dismayed, for I am your God. And I'm going to be with you all the way to the other side.

So don't be afraid. When you go down into the valley of the shadow of death, fear not, for I am with you. This commitment of I am with you.

So Jesus is literally God with us. He is the literal embodiment, the incarnation of don't be afraid. I am with you.

So do you want to comfort them? Then commit to them. Understand that they need more than just immediate comfort.

They need a commitment that no matter what tomorrow holds in the next day and the next day, that you're going to still be there with them. So I can't take your suffering away, but I'll be here with you.

[39 : 29] If your fears come true, if your nightmares come true, you're not going to face them alone. You're not going to face them without me. That's what most people, that's what people most want.

They're afraid that they're going to be left alone. They're afraid that they're going to be abandoned. And so is your sister suffering, is your brother suffering? Well, tell them, don't be afraid.

And even more than that, say, you know what? I'm going to be here with you no matter what. And then be there for them. And then show up for them. The next day and the next day and the next day.

Commit to them. You're going to go through this, but I'm going to be here with you. I don't know what tomorrow holds, but I'll be with you in it. That's what Jesus does. That's how he brings comfort to us. And that's what the body of Christ, that's what we need to be doing and learning to do for each other.

That's number six. Number seven. This is our last point. Jesus points them to heaven. He points them to heaven. Verse 11. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

[40 : 36] So we have two deaths. We need to understand this. There's two deaths. The first death is the death that all men are appointed to die. All men live and all men are appointed to die.

And so. You will die. The only caveat. Is if your name is Enoch or Elisha or Elijah.

Or if you're alive when Jesus comes back. Otherwise. You will die. Are you ready? I just remembered a sermon I preached.

I don't know. A couple years ago. It hardly matters when you're going to die. The question is, are you ready to die? The Christians in Smyrna were ready.

What a way to live. What a way to be a Christian. Jesus can tell them you're going to die. And it doesn't overwhelm them.

[41 : 40] It doesn't overthrow them. He gives it to them because they need to know. And I'm sure they embraced it. Because they were ready. They were going to be faithful all to the way to the end.

They were going to die. We're going to meet them someday. These blessed martyrs of Smyrna that has no name that history doesn't record.

But we're going to meet them who are faithful to the end. That's the first death. But here's the second death. And Jesus says, this won't touch you. This won't hurt you at all.

Judgment and hell is the second death. And Jesus says, you will not be hurt at all.

After you die, heaven. After I return, new heaven and a new earth. Brothers and sisters, the very fact that we will never taste or be touched or hurt by the second death.

[42 : 46] Shouldn't that be encouraging to us? No matter how bad it gets. No matter how hard it is. Hell has nothing with us to do. It cannot touch us.

It will not. There is a hell. But we've hidden ourselves in Christ. And he tasted that first death and that second death in order that that second death would never hurt us.

It fell upon him so that it will never fall upon us. And so we aren't guaranteed at all that it's going to get better here and now in this life.

But it will get better. And that's the importance of heaven. Because we can't in good faith and all honesty say, you know what, it's going to get better here.

Maybe it will. Maybe it won't. We aren't guaranteed that at all. But it will get better. We are going through our 10 days of testing. But at the end of the 10 days, it's over.

[43 : 46] It's like we are in the last 10 days of our senior year in high school. You are down to your last 10 days. And then summer vacation.

Summer vacation begins. So who drops out of high school with 10 days left in their senior year? Who does that? No, no matter what happens, you're going to see it through to the end.

And so there we are. We're on the final lap. But at the end of the line, when we cross the line, is eternal life. It's heaven. I found great comfort in thinking about our brother Bob.

Suffering. Growing older. Tired. Losing his wife. Shutting his home. He'll never know a single sad feeling in his heart ever again.

He's in heaven. So comforters talk seriously. Talk soberly about heaven. Not glibly. Not like offhandedly.

[44 : 52] If you're going to do it that way, just don't even bother. Please. If you do it in a way that minimizes their suffering now, that doesn't take into account how it hurts now, then just forget it.

Just don't bother. But if you do it in a way that doesn't minimize their suffering, they need that hope. They, again, just like Jesus is going to, he's overall, they need to see that there is a finish line that is good for them.

That is the end of their troubles. And so talk soberly and seriously about heaven. And there is hope. Earth has no sorrow.

Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal. No matter what tears are running down our face when we cross that line, Jesus will wipe away every tear. No matter what emotional or painful scar that we bring across that finish line, Jesus is going to bring complete healing.

Earth has no sorrow that heaven can't heal. So in Christ, hidden in Christ, there is good hope and we need it. And so give it to people.

- [45 : 56] Talk to them about it. Talk to them seriously about it in a way that you understand their pain, but you are holding out to them hope. And we need that.
- That's how we comfort. That's what Jesus is doing. Christine Rossetti was a Christian poet.
- She wrote the Christmas Carol or the poem that became the Christmas Carol in the bleak midwinter. Frosty winds made moon. You know that song. She wrote it as a poem.
- We sang one of her poems that is turned into a hymn a couple of weeks ago. I think it's 115 in our hymnal. None other lamb. None other dame. None besides thee.
- She wrote a poem called Uphill. Uphill. And I want to end with it because it sums up what we've heard today. And it's a conversation between the sufferer and I guess God, someone else.
- [47 : 11] Here it goes. Does the road wind uphill all the way? Yes. To the very end. Will the day's journey take the whole long day?
- From morn to night, my friend. But is there for the night a resting place? A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
- May not the darkness hide it from my face? You cannot miss that end. Shall I meet other wayfarers at night? Those who have gone before.
- Then must I knock or call when just in sight? They will not keep you standing at that door. Shall I find comfort?
- Travel sore and weak. Of labor you shall find the sum. That means you'll find the end. It'll be over. Will there be beds for me and all who seek?
- [48 : 16] Yea, beds for all who come. Rest and peace are coming.
- You're going to go uphill the whole way. Uphill the whole way. And it's going to take the whole day. I think we all fantasize about this life that we are never going to live.
- That is all good and all right here and now. And that we get to this place in our life when there's no more suffering. And it's not a struggle. And it's not uphill. But it's going to be uphill the whole way. And it's going to take the whole day.
- But Jesus has opened his house to us. He's opened his house to us. And that's where we're going. And so let's help each other get there.
- Let's help each other get there. Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you sent your son.
- [49 : 21] You equipped your son. You empowered him to bring help and comfort to those who are suffering. Thank you that he is full and complete salvation.
- Forgiveness of our sins and comfort for our suffering. And we need both. And we find both in him. So I pray for those who are hurting, suffering, afraid in some way.
- I pray that the words of Jesus to this church as they overheard it would find their way into their heart. And that those words and that truth would comfort them.
- That Jesus himself would come and by the Holy Spirit speak into their hearts. And give them comfort. And for those of us who are called in different circumstances to comfort those who are hurting.
- Give us wisdom. Help us to follow Jesus' example as he shows us in this letter. Help us to be wise and sensitive and kind.
- [50 : 28] To be full of hope and of good cheer. To know what to say and when to say it and how to say it. But most of all, help us to love each other.

Help us to love each other and be with each other and commit to each other. That no matter what will happen, we will be able to say to each other, I'll be here with you. I'll be with you.

Help us to be like Jesus in that way. For those who aren't ready for the first death. And are not ready for the second death.

Jesus, remind them that they need a Savior. The death is certain. Suffering is certain in this life. And death is the sure end of every man.

And so, prepare them for that day. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Well, we're going to close with a hymn from the overhead.

[51 : 28] A few more years shall roll. We are going to have storms and rocky shores and winds and waves.

But it's only for a few more years. Let's stand and sing. Amen. Amen.