

**"Overcoming Suffering" – 2 Corinthians 1:1-11**

Shall we turn this morning to 2 Corinthians Chapter 1? We will start 2 Corinthians Chapter 2 next week – next Sunday evening, and we would encourage you to read ahead. This morning we would like to draw your attention to **2 Corinthians 1:3, 4, 8 and 11**. It says, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comfort us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."**...For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life." (2 Corinthians 1:8) "... But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead." (2 Corinthians 1:9) "...Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver [us];" (Past, present and future there.) (2 Corinthians 1:10) "...Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift [bestowed] upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf." (2 Corinthians 1:11) But, in verse 10: **"who delivered us from so great a death, does delivers us, and whom we trust that He will deliver us yet"**. And, then of course in verse 9, **"we had the sentence of death in ourselves. The key here is that we would not trust in our own self."**

Prayer: Father we ask that you would give us a new insight to why we suffer and why sometimes things just don't work out. That, God that you would remind us that Father often times we don't understand that your ways are higher than ours. And, Father that your insight is much greater and that Lord you do not always reveal to us

what you are doing. But, when it's all done, we thank you Lord for the goodness and the grace. In Jesus name. Amen.

There is a great difference between 1 Corinthians, the Book and 2 Corinthians. The difference lies very simply that in 1 Corinthians, the book was written by Paul. It was written to instruct or to encourage the Corinthians to get their life together - that they would be able to use the gifts in the proper way, and that they would discipline one another. You remember Paul tells us that there was the man living with his stepmother and the church was boasting about their gifts. Paul said, what about the discipline the Lord desires? And, so he said "cast that one out that he might be turned over to the enemy." In 2 Corinthians, we pick up the story of that same person. Paul said, "receive him back into fellowship that he is not destroyed." 1 Corinthians chapter 15 dealt with the resurrection and some of the problems they were having. Chapter 7 (if you remember) had to deal with the marriages and the problems with the marriages. Chapter 3 had to deal with carnality – some say, "I am of Paul" and some say, "I am of Apollos, of Cephas, or Peter." (Is Christ divided – God forbid.) So, the whole book of 1 Corinthians is really about disciplining and disciplining church members.

But, when we come to 2 Corinthians, it turns and looks at things in a different way. It is about a man being disciplined by God. So in 1 Corinthians, it's about (very simply) a church being instructed or disciplined. But, in 2 Corinthians (I don't know if you have ever read the book) deals with God dealing and God correcting a man. And, that man is none other than Paul, the Apostle. So I am really looking forward to jumping into this book because it will show us (really) the heart of Paul. How brutally he was beaten, shipwrecked, how he was five times whipped, how people hated him and didn't like him. And, yet – he had the ability to go on and he was pressed out. He was pushed down. He had the sentence of death within himself, but he understood the call of God. The call that came to Paul (you remember) on the Damascus road. God declared – Paul, I am going to show you all the things you are going to suffer for

My namesake. When we get into this area of suffering – we really don't know what to do because it doesn't seem fair. The cry comes from our hearts – why do the wicked prosper and why do the righteous have to suffer? If I am living my life of Christ and giving my life the very best I can, then why is it that sometimes a Christian woman will be raped? What happens, when all of a sudden a Christian missionary is killed? What happens when a child comes into the world, and we love God with all of our heart, and the child is born with leukemia? There are questions that I can't even answer. Questions I really don't know, and I wouldn't have those problems if I didn't know God. I would just go on and base them on life and take off. But, because I know the goodness of God and the grace of God and the mercy of God, and that nothing can touch me unless it goes through His hands, it really becomes a difficult thing within our lives. Because we think, God you must not like what I am doing or I have done something wrong that would have You cause these things within my life. Maybe You are trying to teach me something that I am not paying attention to. So, we begin to read into things and we don't do well when it comes to suffering, and yet, that is where the character is really built. That is where life really meets the road. That is where the scriptures become alive and that is where the Holy Spirit does His greatest work. Because in your suffering, you will be comforted. In that moment of that horrible experience, God is going to use that experience to minister to someone else. So, God uses our suffering, and then sometimes out of no reason at all – He'll say to Ezekiel, "...your wife is going to die, but do not weep..." and Ezekiel said, "are you sure?" He said "yes, your wife is going to die, but do not weep." "For, I am teaching the nation of Israel a lesson. Now if I were Ezekiel, I would say, "don't take my wife and let me cry, and let me grieve." But because he understood God, he gave God is very best and so Ezekiel had to (in a sense) sacrifice his wife to God – that the nation of Israel might come to a place that they are treating Him the very same way.

So His ways are not my ways. His thoughts are not my thoughts. As high as the Heavens are my thoughts from His thoughts. So I really don't understand everything. That is why it is so important that you love God with all your heart, and you fall back

on that which you do understand - that God is good, God is just, God is righteous, and God will never take you through anything that you cannot handle. There is always that way of escape and when you go through those difficult moments in life, you need to understand that it is in those moments, the Holy Spirit will become the greatest comforter of your life.

So, we see that discouragement is no respect of persons. All seem to suffer with it; young, old, and unwise. No where does Paul open his heart greater than here in the book of 2 Corinthians. It reveals his heart – that inner struggle that he went through. It relates to the very cost of the ministry – what it would cost him to serve God with all of his heart. And Paul presses out of measure. He says, “... **Blessed [be] God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;**” (2 Corinthians 1:3) (Underline the words, the God of all comfort.) Also, underline or circle the word “all.” So, no matter what you are going through God is able to catch the “all.” (Steve, you don’t understand what I’m going through.) God can bring great comfort to every situation and anything that has ever happened in your life. Who comforted us in our tribulation? You remember Jesus said, “...in this world you are going to have what? Tribulation. So don’t be afraid when these things come into your life.

Peter goes on to say, once again, “...**Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you...**” (1 Peter 4:12) At the very beginning of his book he says that we are going to be tried, but we are going to come forth as gold. James tells us “...**My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;**” (James 1:2) knowing that this is the will of God in your life. So God is going to move you. God is going to shake your life. God is going to bring those areas that are uncomfortable to us because God is molding and God is correcting, and God is leading us and guiding us and sometimes things will happen for no other reason but to make your heart tender and to give you great compassion towards other people.

When all of a sudden we find that the Lord takes Rob's Mom. For years he ministered one way. But, now he is going to minister another way because he can say to any person, God Who comforted me, as I watched my mother dying, Who helped me get through that difficult time, I want you to know, He is here right now and He is willing to take your life and comfort you. You need to open your heart to the comfort of God. It is a comfort that man cannot do, a wife cannot give it, and a friend cannot share it. It is that unique paraclete – the word comfort. It means that one who comes beside you. One who strengthens your heart. We also use the word (often times) of being comforted and we see that often times, we don't see the strength, but He is one who comes beside – He walks among us. In other words we are not to go through this by our selves. And then we read **"...for we would not brethren have you ignorant of our trouble..."** (2 Corinthians 1:8) (and Paul begins to open his heart) **"...which came to us in Asia that we were pressed out of measure above strength in as much that we despaired..."** (2 Corinthians 1:8) we wanted to die it was so painful within our life. But, the conjunction, **"...we had the sentence of death in ourselves..."** I believe, as I have said before, this is one of the great verses. Why? Why did Paul have this sentence of death in himself? That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raises the dead. I believe that every bit of suffering is to bring me to a place that I do not look to myself. That the pain is so intense that I need someone to come take it. I need someone to sit with me. I need someone to be by my side. I need someone to wipe the tears from my eyes. It is so intense. I don't know what to do. I try to share it but it doesn't come out the right way, because I need to protect the way it comes out. But, when God locks in and I lock into God then words begin to flow and attitudes begin to flow, and everything begins to happen and God is there, not like Job's three friends seeking to give him instructions with no idea of what he was going through, but in the sense that God allowed it. It's for a greater purpose, greater understanding, and we see often times that these things happen.

A couple of other things, I want to share with you: I believe that when you look at suffering there are two ways to look at it. Sometimes you look at a mirror and all you see is yourself and you spend a lot of time on yourself. Some of you really need to spend a lot of time on yourself, and when you get older, you can't see, you don't have any hair and you can't hear – it's a wonderful thing, getting old. But, when you are young (you know last night, I was in the locker room with Delirious, and he was fixing his hair "mohawk" and he was looking for Jell-O and he was screaming, "has anybody seen my Jell-O" because he had to get that thing straight up in the air. I thought, if that's the worst of his problems, he's doing pretty good. It was important that he had that thing just right – it looked good and he was jumping and bouncing, it was like a shark going through the air, it wasn't moving one bit. You might want to think about that, a little Jell-O in your hair – it might help a little bit. So, we find (very simply) the mirror, I look into it but the problem is that you see yourself, and sometimes suffering is like looking in a mirror and all you see is yourself – what you are going through; the pain, the agony, what is happening to you and you are oblivious to what is going on around you.

I believe that God wants to take the mirror away and place a window in front. That as I go through difficult times, I would see through the window and see humanity, and understand that other people are going through the very same thing and I need to be more tender towards them. So maybe today, that mirror has been in front of your life for a long time. Maybe your attitude is, "I can't believe what I have to go through." "I am the only one going through this. Like Elijah, there is no one else and yet God said there were seven thousand that had not bowed their knee. (1 Kings 19:18) Steve, you don't have any idea how painful this is. No, but you do and everyday you look into that mirror – everyday, you find all the flaws about your life. Everyday all you see is yourself, and that is enough to destroy anybody. But the day that God removes the mirror and gives you a window, and you are able to look through the pain and through the suffering, and through the agony of your life and see another human being, you are going to understand that there are people around

you that are putting up with you. They are affected by your attitude and by your life, and they are in need of ministry. When you look out the mirror you see yourself, but when you look out the window you are going to see God. God is going to comfort you, and you are going to see people that are going through difficult times like you. You are going to have compassion, and God is going to lift you out of the sorrow, out of the situation, and God is going to use you as an instrument of righteousness within His Kingdom.

So it is important that I see what God is doing in my life and through my life because self-centeredness is a very dangerous thing. It shows the pain of what I am doing and what I am not doing. Therefore suffering, we experience either it involves others or involves myself. One of the great problems is when I suffer I go inside, I don't go out, or I build walls and I don't build bridges. When I go through it, I build a wall and I don't build a bridge and I don't want people into my life because this is too painful and I got an attitude with God. Every one of us goes through difficult times. All of us have suffered, and some of us are suffering now more than others. The only answer that I have is that it is common to all men. Jesus, who did nothing wrong suffered more than any other man. Yet He was able from the cross to say, **"...Father forgive them for they don't know what they are doing..."** (Luke 23:34) All the way along, He was able to see others and not Himself. Simeon was forced to carry the cross with Him and so God by the Holy Spirit took him from a looking position to a helping position. How I need God to do that. I need God to help me help others get what they need in life and I need to get out of the situation in my own life. So it means one who has come beside you. One who has become that pillar of strength. Consolation means more of a gentle exhortation, but the word is paraclete in the Greek, which means one who comes as a pillar of fire by your side. So, He will be with you through the fire. He will be with you through the storm. He will be with you when the rivers begin to overrun. He will be with you when the chariots are coming. Through your life, God is going to use you in a wonderful way.

So, we find Paul being trained how to go through this difficult time. Through those difficult times, those physical pains and what an important lesson to realize the impact I am making on people's lives around me. The price of the ministry was unbelievably strong and powerful within Paul's life. God had one purpose, and this is what I want to share; to destroy that place of self-confidence, to take away that self to bring me to His loving arms, to have me represent Him as a compassionate man or a woman to reach out to a dying world. Now, do I like suffering? No. If I were God, I would bless all of you with new cars and new homes. If I could be your God today I would heal your bodies. I would put hair on most of you. We would lose weight instantly, overnight, and you would be driving BMW's and whatever you wanted. I would help you and I would cut your bills in half, give you a little bit of shopping money. Just really be a gracious God to you. You are saying, "Well, can we take a vote on that right now." Well, let me remind you that if I did that everyone else would hop on the bandwagon, and I would never know who really loves me. Oh, you love me because of what I am giving you. You love me because of the way I have taken care of you. It is kind of like a rich man who is trying to date someone and the woman knows that he is worth \$100,000,000, and it goes through his mind – does she love me or does she love my money? The tragic thing is that you never know. With God it is the very same way; if God doesn't give me what I want, if God brings suffering into my life, if God waits and makes me wait on prayer will I love Him the same, as when He blesses me? That is the criteria of His life. You see, my love would be a mushy type of a love that I could never prove your love to me. But, when I look around and see pain and suffering, and I look around and see broken hearts, and broken dreams and broken ambitions, and when I look around and see singles and married couples going through difficult times, and children going through difficult times, I have many questions. But I do not question my love for God, and that is the difference.

We find often times in the life of Job – He said, **"...though you slay me, I will trust you."** (Job 13:15) **"I came naked into the world and naked I will go out of the world..."** (Job 1:21) In all these things, he did not foolishly charge his God.

So, I see suffering sometimes as an avenue to destroy the power of Satan. When God allowed Satan to come after Job, God said to Satan, "Have you seen my servant Job? He is righteous. Satan said yes, but you have blessed him, and God said to Satan, **"Go and take anything you want, but don't take his life."** (Job 1:8; Job 2:3) So God removed the hedge and in one day 10 of his children were killed, his house was destroyed and his wife was saying to him, curse God and die. And, all of a sudden, Job said, "naked I came in, naked I go out and all of a sudden Jesus Christ told Satan, come here, I want to brag a little bit. My servant loves me.

Sometimes I think that we suffer just to glorify God in a way to destroy the power of Satan. Because when I suffer and I begin to say all that I am going through – you can't believe this car, you can't believe how horrible this car is, you can't believe where I am living – it's everything that is not pleasing to God. No, I don't like where I am living. But yes, I love God and there is a purpose in my life. So I find that sometimes suffering can be none other than just the ability to silence Satan's life. I also find (very simply) that suffering can become a time where I began to be strengthened, a time where God begins to work in and through my life, and I begin to realize why God allows suffering. He allows the suffering also to let me glorify God.

Let me give you four other reasons why God allows suffering: Remember in John chapter 11 where Martha and Mary were crying because Jesus Christ did not come and they said if you would have been here, my brother would have never died and Jesus said "this death is not unto death but for the glory of God, I am going to raise him from the dead." (John 11) And, so God allowed Mary and Martha to suffer, and God allowed Lazarus to die because it was part of God's plan to resurrect Lazarus and to give Mary and Martha tremendous hope. So sometimes, even the suffering will teach me to glorify God in my life.

Thirdly, I think another reason why God allows suffering is it makes me more like Christ. There is nothing like a good old dose of sorrow to make you cry out to the

Lord. There is nothing that will drive you quicker to God than depression and overwhelmed situations and broken relationships, and it is in those horrible moments that God is able to hold you, and God is able to caress you, and God is able to change your heart because your heart is open and God goes through those doors and God does a tremendous work – because I am broken. In those broken moments God is able to change my life. And, then I find the fourth reason why God allows suffering is that it makes me more appreciative - it just makes me more appreciative. Some things I take for granted. I take friends for granted – then someone dies, and it rattles my cage. I begin to say boy, I want to spend more time with my family.

Every time I bury a two-year-old girl or boy – it rattles my cage, and I can't wait to get home and call my kids because relationship is now more important than ministry. Family is now more important than the church or material things, and through the suffering I appreciate God's work in my life. Lastly, I think the fifth reason why God allows suffering, I find it here. It makes me totally depend upon God. We had the sentence of death in our self that we would not trust in our self. So you see from God's perspective, He is working in your life. From your perspective, it is not fair, it's too long, why doesn't he go pick on John, Jim or Jill. Why is He always picking on you? I don't know. Maybe He likes you. Couldn't he go pick on someone else once in a while? No, because through the pain God is growing you up and when that comfort comes and you walk down this road of life, and someone is standing in front of you with absolute pain in their eyes, you can take them and you can tell them about your God. How He comforted you. How He walked with you. How He helped you, and this is a lucky day for that person because today you are going to share about a God that loves to come by peoples' lives.

**Closing Prayer:** Father we ask that You would help us not to look into the mirror, but God to look through the window. That we would see the pain and the agony in other people's lives. Lord, we find that Paul said that he had the sentence of death in himself. He was pressed down and Lord he was pushed aside, and God You had

come to deliver him from the past, the present and the future. And, isn't that the way it really is? Lord, we complain and whine. We don't think that You are fair. But, we get so tired looking in the mirror. Lord it is time that we look beyond the mirror and into the lives of others, and that God that You would heal our lives. That we might be an instrument to be a blessing to other people with the same comfort that You have comforted us. So, we bless Your name. We thank You Lord that Your ways or not our ways. That Your thoughts are not our thoughts. That God that You have that perfect plan, and Your thoughts for us are not evil, but good to an expected end. Lord, may we never question Your decisions. May we know that You are fair and just, and we will thank You, and we will praise You in Jesus name. Amen.