

## Preacher's Pen points

### COMFORT FOR THE DEPRESSED



In 2 Corinthians one, Paul discusses what must have been one of the lowest points in his life, a time filled with deep feelings of anxiety and despair. He reports that in Asia he was *"burdened excessively, beyond...strength"* so that he *"despaired even of life"*, having the *"sentence of death"* within himself (v. 8-9). He spoke of how he had *"no rest"* for his spirit, how he was *"afflicted on every side"*, *"conflicts without, fears within"* (7:5). Have you ever felt this way? Have you known this kind of pressure? As Paul reflected upon his sufferings he made several observations that will help each of us when we go through similar times of suffering.

**Suffering causes us to trust in God rather than ourselves.** *"For indeed we have the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead"* (2 Cor. 1:9). How powerfully suffering reminds us of our human weakness! Our inability to remove suffering points to the need to trust in God. How hard it is for us to learn that lesson! Often we have to be put flat of our back before we start looking up!

**Suffering prompts us to pray.** Paul had learned what a great help prayer was in suffering. He reminded the Corinthians that deliverance from his afflictions could be found through their prayers (v. 11). In chapter 12, when he spoke of his thorn in the flesh he mentions how he prayed repeatedly to the Lord. And so we are encouraged to do: *"Is any among you suffering? Let him pray!"* (Jas. 5:13)

**God has the power to deliver us from suffering.** In contrast to man's weakness Paul describes God as one who can *"raise the dead"* (1:9). He who can raise one from death can also deliver one from it. In

this assurance Paul affirmed that God had not only delivered him in the past but would do so in the future in keeping with his will (1:10-11)!

**God has the power to strengthen us while suffering!** Not all God's comfort comes through the removal of that which makes us suffer. When Paul prayed for relief from his "thorn" (2 Cor. 12) God said, *"My grace is sufficient for you"* (v. 9). To know that we are Christians, that we have the hope of heaven, that we live in his favor provides sufficient strength to endure for Christ's sake whatever may be our lot in life. *"For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison..."* (2 Cor. 4:17).

**Our sufferings make it possible for us to comfort others in their afflictions.** Paul hoped to comfort others in their afflictions just God had comforted him (1:4). What a great attitude he had! Rather than complain about his problems, he rejoiced that they provided him with the power and compassion to help others who faced similar circumstances. Who can be a better comforter to the suffering than the one who has experienced suffering and overcome it?

From the day Paul rose from baptism to serve Christ, he learned as Jesus had foretold *"how many things he must suffer for my name's sake"*. And yet in them all, Paul kept the faith. Throughout his life, he demonstrated unswerving commitment to Christ and patient hope of living with him someday. All of us can have that same hope--that whatever life may bring, God will be there to help us remain faithful and to deliver us to world where pain does not exist. Be comforted by this promise. --Johnny Felker