

2Cor 26-10-04b

We resume our study here in 2 Corinthians. We're now at verse three. We have seen the greeting, that this is an authoritative message from our heavenly father to us through his designated apostolic witness.

And this idea of Paul's identity as an apostle is going to carry through in this next section as we will see. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts 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 as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

Now, if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. Is our hope for you steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of sufferings, you will also be partakers of consolation.

The formula here, blessed be God, comes from a Hebrew term, which is familiar to some. It is the word barakah or barakah, B-R-K-H in the consonantal text. Barakah, there is a valley called barakah in the Old Testament or Barakah.

And this is an ascription of praise to God. We find this in the opening section of many epistles. I'll just give two as a reference.

One is Ephesians, to which we referred in the first session where Paul introduces himself there as here, as an apostle by the will of God. But you remember in Ephesians 1, 3, it begins very similarly. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us.

Here, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us. He begins with blessing in Ephesians and goes on to show the circumference within which those blessings are delivered, which is in Christ. Verse four of Ephesians 1, just as he chose us in him, in Christ, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to himself.

Father, sons, we are adopted children in Christ and through Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will. Paul is an apostle by the will of God. We are God's adopted children by the will of God.

The same authority, the same concern, the same goal and purpose is at work through the will of God in us, whatever our assignment and our function, our place, our time, as it was with the place and time and function and appointment of the apostle Paul. It is all according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, grace to you and peace, by which he

made us acceptable and accepted in the beloved, in Christ. That Ephesians 1 study, so powerful.

I have them circled in my Bible, all of the in him. So in him in verse four of Ephesians 1, by Jesus Christ in verse five, in him, verse six, in the beloved, in him, verse seven, in Christ, verse nine, in him, verse 11, in Christ in verse 10 and in him in verse 11, in Christ in verse 12, in him in verse 13, in whom in verse 13. So many wonderful blessings, the grace that comes to us and it's accompanying peace are in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the son of God and in him we become privileged as sons, as children of God. So to have a greeting in a letter followed by praise of the father is often the pattern. We see it in Ephesians 1, verses three through 14.

Also interestingly in first Peter. First Peter 1, three through nine. Peter, having given his introduction, says, blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy, father of mercies in our context, Peter says, according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope, begotten us, made us children, made us his sons and daughters.

The same Holy Spirit brings the same message from God the father through the Lord Jesus Christ to the apostles. So you do not find discord or disharmony or contradiction or conflict between Peter or Paul or John or James. All of them are bringing the same message from the same God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies, the God of all comfort.

So Peter points this out in his first epistle. Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again, made us his children to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We saw when we read our passage this morning that Paul is going to be referring to that resurrection power in second Corinthians.

He has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, first Peter one, four, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation. Paul is gonna use the word salvation at least five times in the upcoming context. Deliverance, salvation.

Through faith for deliverance, ready to be revealed at the last time. In this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. This is still first Peter.

It sounds like he and Paul have been talking, doesn't it? They're getting their information from the same source. We are grieved by various trials, Peter says. So that the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may redound to the praise of God.

James started the same way. Count it all joy when you fall into various trials. Peter, here's the grace of God available, though you are grieved by various trials.

It is designed to demonstrate the genuineness of your faith. James says the testing of your faith produces patience. Paul is going to talk about the response and the comfort of God and the mercy of God in trial, in hardship, in tribulation.

And all of these coverages of this subject occur in the opening of the letter. Why? I would submit to you that when we come together for fellowship, for instruction in the word, for worship, they told us in fellowship, we have worship that used the acronym WIFE for what happens at church. Worship, instruction, fellowship, and evangelism.

I would say that we don't come together for evangelism. Evangelism is what happens when we are in and among those who need the gospel of salvation to come to faith in Christ. My acronym WIFE is worship, instruction, fellowship, and encouragement.

Encourage one another while it is called today, Paul says, in another place. When you come together, let each one have a song, a hymn, a spiritual song, a thought, an encouragement. We have the chance to visit with each other briefly between our sessions and sometimes before and sometimes after, but it is a chance just by our presence, just by sharing a bit about what's going on, how God is able to work in our lives, where we have challenges, where we have blessings.

It's encouraging to know that we are not alone. We're not scouts without a troop. We are not lone wolves.

We're not isolated. We're not Elijah by the brook Cherith. We have fellow believers who care about us, who pray for us, who rejoice with us, who weep with us.

Encouragement, worship, instruction, fellowship, and encouragement. Fellowship should be encouraging. Shouldn't be a downer.

Shouldn't be boring. Shouldn't be vexing. When we contribute to a fellowship, we hope to accomplish all of these areas of coming together as a group.

So Ephesians 1, 3 through 14, 1 Peter 1, 3 through 9, just two of many examples of a greeting in an epistle, followed by celebration and appreciation for our heavenly father and his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The grace and peace are explained. So here we appreciate.

Blessed be is an appreciation. Be isn't even in the text. It's blessed, our God and father.

The father of mercies and God of all comfort. Many things you can say about God. He is the one who blesses us.

He is the one who sustains us. In Peter, he is the one who has begotten us to a living hope. And

Peter focuses on the future opportunities, the future blessings and provisions that God makes.

Many ways you can celebrate God as we come together for worship. These examples here in Corinthians, gratitude for God for blessing redemption is what we see in Ephesians. But here we are going to find that this appreciation of God is focused on a recent experience that Paul has had.

What I wanted to offer you as a suggestion, as a perspective on this section, we could take this universally. God comforts us, each of us, so that we can comfort others. It's not wrong, but it's not the point in this passage.

We have seen that there can be instruction to pastors in 1 Timothy or Titus or 2 Timothy. We can see that there are things that are true of the 144,000 or of the tribulational martyrs in Revelation that are representative. The 24 elders on the throne can be representative.

Those who are protected in the wilderness during a time of judgment or a time of hardship and persecution can be representative. In the Old Testament, the 7,000 that did not bow the knee to Baal can be representative of a faithful remnant in every generation. Paul here isn't talking about all of us suffering so that we can encourage others in their time of suffering.

He's talking about himself. There is a unique sense in which Paul, as an apostle, as did Peter and James and John, enter into the sufferings of Jesus Christ in a unique way. Paul says, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

He was whipped as the Lord Jesus was whipped. And that is emblematic. It represents a great deal of suffering.

Read this section again and think of it in terms of Paul talking about himself and the close group surrounding him. Think of Acts 16, the last half of that chapter where he's in Philippi and imprisoned and they have been beaten and they are singing songs in the night. And in advance of the earthquake that would have freed them, but they stay, the Philippian jailer and his family are saved.

So when he says who comforts us in verse four, think of Paul and Timothy and the other close companions in ministry who experience what Paul experiences. He comforts us in all our tribulation so that we, Paul and his team, may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. There is unique comfort that has come to Paul.

He has been preserved. He has been delivered. He has been allowed to suffer greatly.

You could think about that and question it. If Paul is God's apostle to the Gentiles, why does he suffer so much hardship? Why isn't he miraculously preserved? The Lord Jesus, when they wanted to stone him up in Galilee, simply walked through the crowd untouched. The Lord Jesus

was never stoned.

He was never whipped until the night of his arrest, just prior to the crucifixion. But in the three and a half years of his ministry, he traveled throughout Galilee, Judea, up and down the coast of the Sea of Galilee. He was never physically abused.

Paul is imprisoned. He is beaten. He is shipwrecked.

He is stoned and left for dead. He is mistreated and abused. And God does not put a wall of protection around him.

Why? That's what Paul is explaining here. It isn't often that we, in our function, whatever our spiritual gift, whatever our role in the lives of believers in our immediate periphery, we seldom physically suffer for it. The only example I can think of is there is often sacrifice and suffering parents engage in on behalf of their children.

In some cases, children taking care of their parents. In times of hardship, there may be some suffering involved. But generally speaking, as a pastor, I don't risk arrest and imprisonment.

I don't risk being beaten or run out of town on a rail. I don't suffer for ministry at the hands of opponents and enemies. I've never been jailed.

It's unlikely that I ever will be. I've never been deprived of my possessions or my liberty. I've never had physical pain inflicted on me.

Paul has, and God allowed it. God has incorporated this into the experience of the apostle Paul. Why? He is explaining that here.

He comforts us in all our tribulation. This is Paul and his team, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble. Paul's suffering is about as severe as it gets.

He's ultimately going to lose his life for his service as an apostle. But if Paul can talk to us about comfort and grace and peace and encouragement after what he has been through, we can't argue with his message. He is a qualified messenger because he has experienced it to the maximum.

Our sufferings seldom approach that of the Lord Jesus or of the apostle Paul. So if he tells us there is comfort and there is peace and there is encouragement, he knows wherever he speaks. I can't say, well, Paul, nobody knows the trouble I've seen.

Don't talk to me about God's comfort. I'm having a hard time here. Nobody can tell that to Paul.

That's what he's explaining here, in my view. God comforts us in all our tribulation, which is manifest. You remember the list of things that he's been through so that we are able to comfort

those who are in any trouble with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

If God's grace has been sufficient for Paul with his thorn in the flesh, with his three times receiving the 40 stripes minus one in imprisonments, in shipwreck, being bit by a snake, God has comforted and sustained and encouraged Paul throughout all of these. He is able to be a trustworthy witness to the grace of God and to the comfort of God. For your interest, you can underline or at least note how many times you see the word comfort.

You have it in verse three, God of all comfort. Verse four, in the verbal form, who comforts us in our tribulation that we may be able to comfort, verb, those who are in any trouble with the comfort noun with which we ourselves are comforted, verb, by God. What do you think this theme is here? Do we need comfort? Do we need encouragement? Do we need the grace and the peace that comes from God in one or more areas of our life? It can be physical, it can be relational, it can be economic, it can be professional, can be in the realm of our work.

It can be an attack from all different quarters and it can involve genuine suffering, genuine hardship, genuine trial, the kind that wakes you up at night, eats you up inside, left to our own strength. Paul knows about that and he is able to speak of God's comfort authoritatively. He is an apostle by the will of God and he is qualified to deliver this message from God from firsthand experience.

Verse five, for as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, this is manifestly true of the apostle Paul. I'm not sure I can say that the sufferings of Christ are manifest in me. I don't think I have experienced hardship, even a fraction of what the Lord Jesus and what the apostles endured in the first generation of the church.

When they talk about strength and comfort, when they deliver the message of God about His grace and His provision, they know what they're talking about and I can trust that this message is authentic. If it wasn't authentic, these individuals would have taken a different tack and would not have endured these episodes of hardship and suffering if they did not see in it and learn through it the grace and the comfort of God. Paul the apostle is saying, this is the father of mercies and God of all comfort.

If anybody knows it, it's him. As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. We are qualified to deliver the message because we have applied it first to ourselves.

This really should be true of anyone who endeavors to communicate the word of God. It needs to have first landed in our own heart, in our own soul, in our own experience. We need to know it not just as gnosis, but as epinosis.

It is always a bit of a credibility issue if you have a single man as a pastor preaching on marriage or family, raising of children. You can rehearse what is in scripture, but there's always a bit of a

raised eyebrow to receive marriage counseling from someone who's never been married or to receive family guidance from someone who doesn't have a family. There is something to the idea that the messenger needs to be qualified to speak.

Do you wanna learn how to fly from someone who has studied all of the aeronautics in a textbook, but hasn't ever piloted an aircraft? Experience counts, and it's a biblical principle. God ensured that his apostles, like his son, the Lord Jesus, experienced human life, human testing. The Lord Jesus was tested in all points like as we are yet without sin.

His message to us of how to live a life that is enabled and empowered by the spirit of God and the word of God is authoritative, not least because he has lived it himself. He became man in order to be able to speak authoritatively to our experience. As the apostles enter into the sufferings of Christ, the experience of Christ, meeting challenge and hardship and trial and difficulty, tribulation, philipsis, same word we had in James 1, with the grace of God, we now have someone who knows wherever he speaks.

Verse six, if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation. Notice verse six begins and ends with those two things. We saw the pairing of grace and peace.

Notice that here, consolation and deliverance. Salvation is tricky because of its connotation in our English language. This is soteria.

This is from the verb sozo, which means to deliver. There's a problem, you're delivered out of it. And we're going to see that it's used of a specific situation that occurred in Asia down in verse eight.

We'll get there. If we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and deliverance, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings, which we also suffer. You in Corinth are experiencing persecution, rejection, affliction, the pressure from those who are trying to tell you what you believe is not true.

There were false teachers in Corinth. We saw that in first Corinthians, and they are going to recur again here in second Corinthians. There are those who reject Paul and his message, say that he's not qualified, that he's making it up.

He's not really an apostle. His authenticity, if you will, as a representative of God and the Lord Jesus is called into question. That is happening to believers in Corinth as well.

Judaizers, such as persecuted people in the region of Galatia, that you read about in Galatians, are persecuting these people. Paul says the comfort and the deliverance that we experience, we are passing on to you. When we are afflicted, you can see in us that you're not alone.

When we are comforted, you can see in us the nature of that comfort. And I think this is really unique to the apostles. I'm not sure someone could look at me and say, I'm comforted because that Sam has really suffered a lot.

I think we can be reflections. I think there may be cases and occasions where that is true, but it is definitional for Paul. He is the definition of suffering for the cause of Christ.

And he is definitional for the grace of God being sufficient to meet that need. And the apostolic witness, we are like the Corinthians. We can look at Paul, we can look at Peter, we can look at James, we can look at John.

And when we hear from them that the grace of God is sufficient, it adds to and reinforces the truth of that message. So if we are afflicted, it's for your consolation and salvation. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

These are effective right in the middle of the verse for enduring the same sufferings, which we also suffer. Now, verse seven, our hope for you is steadfast. Our hope for you never changes.

We are always rooting for you. We are pulling for you. We are ministering on your behalf, Paul says.

Our hope for you is steadfast because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will be partakers of the consolation. Paul doesn't say, I wish these sufferings had never occurred in my case. He says, these consolations are equal to and greater than.

So as you suffer, our hope steadfastly is that you will enjoy the consolations as much as we have. Verse eight, for we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble, which came to us in Asia. We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

We often think of these burdens and afflictions in the case of Paul, but there are occasions in our own life. They may not be often, but when they occur, they are significant. They are all-consuming.

They fill the horizon and the landscape of our view of our life and our situation. Paul says, I don't want you to be ignorant. I'll tell you the extent to which we have been afflicted.

We had trouble when we came, which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Seldom, except maybe in a health issue, do we think in this life, this is gonna kill me. This hardship, this burden, this persecution, this bad turn of circumstance, I can lose my life in this.

But it happened to Paul, and this would have happened at the hands of opponents, at the hands of enemies, who want to see him not just jailed, not just silenced, but executed. Yes, verse nine, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. Remember, there were those who took an oath that they wouldn't eat any food until they had killed Paul.

Sentence of death in ourselves. These guys are gonna either kill me or starve themselves to death, one or the other. But it was allowed by God that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.

This was Peter's celebration of God in chapter one of his first epistle. The God of resurrection, the God of future hope, the God of an incorruptible and undefiled inheritance, reserved in heaven, to which we are resurrected. So what is this letter going to provide for us? This is the introduction.

This is the opening. This is setting the tone and the theme. Paul is a qualified representative by the will of God to communicate to us God's grace, God's comforting strength, God's ability to meet whatever challenge, whatever hardship faces us.

And we are unique in the world in that God is our heavenly father and is ready to deliver, ready to comfort us. We shouldn't meet our challenges the way the run-of-the-mill ungodly person would. Anybody can do that.

Anybody can hope. Anybody can pat someone on the shoulder and say it's all going to be okay on the basis of nothing. We have a basis for all things working together for good.

And it is the grace and the power of our heavenly father. That is Paul's opening remark, his introduction to what follows in this letter. And what a powerful reminder it is for us that God's grace is sufficient for every need.

If it was sufficient for Paul, it's sufficient for us. Well, it's a great start. We'll pick up here in the middle of the first chapter next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, it is such a privilege to call us by your name and to address you as our father. We're grateful for your provision for us as it is expressed here in the scriptures. We claim it.

We thank you for it. We see it fulfilled in the lives of the Lord Jesus and the apostles who present this message to us. We pray that as we move forward, that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts in a way that is effective, that does provide a full measure of your grace and the peace that accompanies it in our soul so that our lives will be a witness and a testimony just as the apostolic witness is a testimony to us.

We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.