

The God of All Comfort

2 Cor 1:3-11 (text)

23 May 2021, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 a.m.
(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹

In verse 4, our text uses the word *affliction*. The NIV has rendered it with *troubles*. The Greek word literally describes the state of being *hard-pressed* and *pressured*² from all sides – of being in a “crusher,” either physically or spiritually & emotionally!

Affliction..., troubles..., hard-pressed..., crusher!

Well, years ago when I was a fresh migrant to New Zealand (and struggling to find work), I got a job in the produce department of Woolworths! It was in that job that I got a vivid picture of what it looks like to be *hard-pressed* on all sides – yes, of being in the *crusher*! You see, after a whole day’s work in produce, what was one of my last chores? Well, it was to throw all the empty banana boxes into a big machine called, “The Crusher,” and then to turn on the switch and watch in awe how even the biggest & strongest boxes got crushed to almost one percent of their size! And, as I looked on with delight, I felt so relieved that I *myself* did not have to be in that crusher!

Well, you know what?

At times, we all go through the crusher! Yes, sooner or later in life, each one of us *will* go through some sort of “crusher” – some sort of affliction!

At the moment, quite a few dear friends in our denomination are going through the crusher!

- Yes, there’s that dear brother in Auckland who got married four months ago. Yet, now he has been diagnosed with cancer!
- There’s that dear young boy in his mid-teens who will soon need a kidney transplant!
- Then, not too far from here, there’s the couple whose two-year old daughter (their only child), had to undergo major surgery to remove a brain tumour. The other three tumours that are still in her brain are too delicately positioned to be removed! So, she’s on chemo and radiation in the hope that...!

See the “crusher”? See the *affliction* our text is talking about!?

¹ Strictly speaking, our passage was meant for pastors and evangelists – and for Christians who suffer affliction for this one reason: that they preach the Gospel of Christ on His terms and for His glory! In other words, our passage was not in the first place intended for the person/believer whose affliction is because of ill health, or because of a suffering child, or because of a marriage under strain, but firstly for those who are suffering because they have come up for Christ who also suffered and was rejected. However, having said that, it is not as if our passage is not also applicable to those believers who suffer because of ill health, or a marriage relationship under strain, or unemployment.

² *θλίψις, εως* f: literally, *pressing, pressure*, but figuratively, *oppression, affliction, tribulation*. Also cf. the verb *θλίβω*, *press upon* (like a crowd on someone); *press together, compress, make narrow* (passive: *be jammed full; become restricted*); *oppress/afflict someone* (cf. Bauer, W. 1979. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*. Chicago, IL : The University of Chicago Press. p.362).

At the moment, quite a few of our members and their loved ones find themselves in the crusher – hard-pressed from all sides!

And they may ask questions like: “Why am I afflicted (in this crusher)? When will this end? Where will I find comfort?”

Well, by the Holy Spirit’s inworking, the Apostle Paul answers these questions in our text! After all, did not Paul himself experience “crushers” of all sorts: imprisonments; near-death beatings; five times thirty-nine lashes; three times beaten with rods; once stoned; shipwrecked...!?³

The main message of our text is: **Christian, are you suffering affliction (are you sitting in the crusher)? Then, don’t forget to turn to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who will comfort you according to the exact measure of your affliction!**

Our text allows for us the following three points...

- Why Affliction? (Why the Crusher?)
- Comfort
- On What Grounds?

Why the Crusher?

My brother & sister, the man/woman – the boy/girl – who finds him/herself in the middle of the crusher, may well ask: “But why am *I* in this crusher?” “Why should *I* suffer affliction?”

Well, the Bible gives many reasons as to why, but our *text* gives two:

Here’s the first one (in v.9), “...*so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead...*”⁴

You see, is it not so that, if we never had hardships/crushers, we – sinful as we are – will forget the One who has made us and loves us, and has sent His Son to save us at great cost?

And so, without crushers in our lives, we could become self-reliant and filled with pride! Yes, we could even boast that all our achievements in life came about by our own cleverness!

And, if we were to continue down such path, we could soon find ourselves totally without God; and... eternally lost!?

And that’s why, like a good parent, *the Lord disciplines those He loves* (Heb.12:6).

Well, that’s the first reason why we suffer affliction – so that we will not rely on ourselves, but on God!

Here’s the *second* reason: v. 4 says, “...*so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*”

Yes, often you & I go through affliction so that we will be well-trained in God’s

³ Cf. 2 Cor 11:23-28 *Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

⁴ [*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*](#). (1995). (2 Co 1:9). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

comfort-giving school – indeed, well-equipped to comfort others!

And have we not seen this?

I mean, is it not so that for a mother who lays her little child in the grave – yes, that for such a mother the hug of another mother who once also went through the same hardship, carries so much energy and comfort!?

And is it not true that the husband & wife who, by God's grace, have overcome a real tough period in their marriage, are now equipped & qualified to counsel their friends who are in the middle of a marriage crisis!?

The same with a businessman who has recovered from bankruptcy, and in the process has learned some valuable lessons!

Or the migrant who has gone through the emotional pain of missing his/her loved ones – and through the stresses of waiting to get a good job and full residency. Could not such a person bring great comfort and words of encouragement to new migrating families!?

My brother & sister, in verse 6 of our text, the Apostle Paul says as much as, “Dear Corinthians, whether I am *afflicted* or *comforted*, understand that, by what God is doing through me, He cares for it that you will be comforted either way!” “Indeed, there are spin-offs for you of what I’m going through.” “And God is using these spin-offs to uphold you in your faith and guide you towards the end-stage of your salvation which Christ has earned for you!”⁵

And *so sure* was Paul about the fact that God was blessing others through his affliction, that he says (in v.7) he had a firm hope that his Corinthian readers *would indeed be able to sustain all the pressures which arise from living the Christian faith!*⁶

My brother & sister, we want to conclude point 1...

So, again, are you perhaps at the moment asking yourself, “Why am I suffering the way I am?”

Well, could it perhaps be, as our text indicates, that God is teaching you to rely on Him?

Or is it perhaps that He is preparing you to comfort others with the same comfort you have been comforted with?

I love the way one great theologian once said it: “*Friend, reckon, then, that to acquire soul-winning power, you yourself will have to go through fire and deep water, through doubt and despair, through mental torment and soul distress... Yes, you yourself must go into the fire if you are to pull others out of it, and you yourself will have to dive into the floods if you are to draw others out of the water...*”⁷

So far, point 1: “Why Affliction?”

Here’s point 2...

Comfort

My brother & sister, normally, at the beginning of his letters, the Apostle Paul praises his readers.

⁵ 2 Cor 1:6 *If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer.*

⁶ My slight amendment to the well-said words of Kistemaker (ibid:45)

⁷ My adaptation of the following words of Spurgeon: “*Reckon, then, that to acquire soul-winning power you will have to go through fire and water, through doubt and despair, through mental torment and soul distress... You must go into the fire if you are to pull others out of it, and you will have to dive into the floods if you are to draw others out of the water...*” Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soulwinner* (1895) (apud MOORE, Phil. 2010. 1 & 2 Corinthians: 60 bite-sized insights/ Grand Rapids, MI : Monarch Books. p.179)

But have you noticed what Paul does at the start of this letter (2 Cor 1)?
Paul praises not his readers, but *God* – the God & Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
And what does Paul praise God for?
Well, for comforting his loved-ones in all their sufferings.

Let's stop here for a minute! What does v.4 mean when it says God *comforts us in all our affliction*?

Does it mean that God will without question *remove the cause* of our affliction, i.e., that God will remove the cancer; that He will remove the lack of finances; that He will instantly bring an end to our loneliness; that He will soon remove the severe troubles our children are facing?

Of course, God *could* do that – and you & I may even have experienced that! But, no, God's comforting of us in all our affliction, does not necessarily mean that He will instantly take us out of the “crusher;” that He will remove whatever the cause of our affliction is!

After all, the Apostle Paul knew differently! You see, often, God did not remove Paul's suffering (at least not quickly) – especially Paul's ongoing suffering for Christ!⁸

But here is what God *did* do for Paul: He *comforted* Paul to the same measure – in fact, abundantly so! You *suffer* abundantly! God *comforts* you abundantly. See how v.5 says, “*For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings,⁹ so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too*”?¹⁰

And please note: Paul says, God comforts us “in” our affliction! In other words, He does not wait till *after* our affliction! (Of course, He also comforts us after).

What does *comfort* mean?

Comfort!

Well, if it speaks better to you in your mother tongue...

- the Dutch word is “ *vertroosten* .”¹¹
- The Samoan Word is, “ *faamafanafana* .”
- The Chinese word is, “ *an wei* .”¹²
- In Indonesian it is “ *menghibur* ” (pronounced [məŋ hibur])
- In Bemba (a language of Zambia) “ *uku sansamusha* .”¹³
- and the Afrikaans word is “ *vertroos* .”

Perhaps you ask, “But *how long* does God keep us in the crusher?”

Well, my brother & sister, perhaps you have experienced it – how God often seems to wait until we feel we can't bear it any longer! Then, suddenly, His comfort comes – either by Him

⁸ Cf. Paul's thorn in the flesh (1 Cor. 12:1-9)

⁹ Yes, I agree with Kistemaker that the phrase “Christ's sufferings” does not so much mean *the things which Christ is suffering for us*, but rather *the things we are suffering for Christ*! (KISTEMAKER, S. 2004. Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (In: Hendriksen, W. & Kistemaker, S. eds. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p.43).

¹⁰ Emphasis mine

¹¹ Cf. 2 Cor 1:3-4 in the Herziene Statenvertaling: “ *Geprezen zij de God en Vader van onze Heere Jezus Christus, de Vader van de barmhartigheden en de God van alle vertroosting, die ons troost in al onze verdrukking, zodat wij hen kunnen troosten die in allerlei verdrukking zijn, met de vertroosting waarmee wij zelf door God getroost worden* .” (Emphasis mine) cf. at <https://herzienestatenvertaling.nl/teksten/2korinthe/1/3/#1:3>

¹² 安慰 (现代标点和合本 (CUVMP Simplified)) at http://cnbible.com/2_corinthians/1-4.htm

¹³ Literally: *to make* (uku) *cheerful* (sansamusha)

removing the cause of our affliction, or by Him *giving enormous strength* so that we are able to bear that heavy load!

And the Apostle Paul often experienced God's comfort right there where he felt he was at the end of his tether. Look is that not what he says in v.8, "***For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life...***"?

And then God's comfort came!

And so, whatever way God does it – whether, at the end of your tether, God totally removes the cause of your affliction, or whether He just gives you strength to the measure – as Matthew Henry has said so well, "*Our extremity is God's opportunity!*"¹⁴

What does Henry mean by that?

Well, is he not, in a concise way, saying the words of 1 Cor 10:13, "***No temptation*** (or testing)¹⁵ ***has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it***"?¹⁶

And so, He is the God of all comfort!

You might say, "But how does God do it!?"

Well, do you remember what our Lord Jesus said in the upper room on the night He was betrayed? "***And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter,***¹⁷ ***that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷ Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.***¹⁸"

You ask, "But how does this Comforter (yes, the Holy Spirit) comfort me?"

Well, mostly through God's holy word which you read – the Word which by the Holy Spirit gives you a radiant face – as the psalmist says (in Ps 34:4,5),

***"I sought the Lord, and he answered me;
he delivered me from all my fears.***

¹⁴ Henry, M. (1994). [*Matthew Henry's commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume*](#) (p. 2280). Peabody: Hendrickson.

¹⁵ Yes, the Greek word, *peirasmos* (πειρασμός) does indeed mean both testing and temptation. See, e.g., "① **an attempt to learn the nature or character of someth., test, trial** (Sir 6:7; 27:5, 7) πρὸς πειρασμόν *to test you* **1 Pt 4:12**. διὰ πειρασμόν τινα *because you are being tried in some way* Hm 9:7. Perh. **Js 1:2** and **1 Pt 1:6** belong here..." and "② **an attempt to make one do someth. wrong, temptation, enticement to sin...**" (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). [*A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature*](#) (3rd ed., p. 793). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁶ 1 Cor 10:13, ***No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it*** (NIV 1984).

¹⁷ παράκλητος, ου m: (a title for the Holy Spirit) one who helps, by consoling, encouraging, or mediating on behalf of—"Helper, Encourager, Mediator" (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [*Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 141). New York: United Bible Societies).

Please also note that the Greek verb for "comforting/comforts" as it appears in 2 Cor 1:4, is from the same Greek root as the word for "Comforter" (KJV) or "Counsellor" (NIV) or Helper (NASB) in Jn 14:16. The Greek verb in 2 Cor 1:4 is parakalēō (παρακαλέω – to comfort, appeal to, encourage), and the Greek word for "Comforter/Counsellor/Helper" in Jn 14:16 is paraklētos (παράκλητος).

¹⁸ [*The Holy Bible: King James Version*](#). (2009). (Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version., Jn 14:16–17). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

*Those who look to him are radiant;
their faces are never covered with shame.”¹⁹*

My brother & sister, do you know what’s beautiful about being at that stage – that stage where, at the end of your tether, you suddenly experience God’s comfort?
It’s the awe-inspiring realisation that you belong, body & soul, to your Saviour Jesus Christ!

So far, point 2 “Comfort.”
Here is the last point...

On What Grounds?

On what grounds can you & I be so sure that God will comfort us?

Well, is the answer not given in the last few words of v.9, “...***we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God*** (who does what? In God) ***who raises the dead***²⁰...”?

Again, may I remind you at what hopeless stage Christ comforted the widow of Nain, and Jairus, and Lazarus’ sisters – when their loved ones had already died! Yet, every time at such “hopeless” stage, God who raises the dead (*present tense!*) brought enormous comfort!

But, look! God who raises the dead is also the One who raised His Son from the dead!
And what’s so significant about that?

Well, that through the pain and God-forsakenness of Christ – as well as through Christ’s resurrection – God has shown that is busy making an end to all suffering, and that He is committed and powerful enough to do that!

Now, with what body was Christ raised from the dead?

With an *imperishable* body!

And what is Christ imperishable body a guarantee of?

Well, is not His raised & glorified body the firstfruits and guarantee of all who will be raised with imperishable bodies to eternal life!?²¹

Do you see the grounds/foundation for your/my comfort in times of sore affliction!?

Surely, if He can raise the dead (and He *can/did*), then does not your/my comfort rest on solid ground!?

And, as Paul effectively says (v.10), “He delivered us in the past!” “So, He will do it again!”²²

Well, here’s a last word (which) our text gives us (in v.11) – a word for all those who are currently *not* suffering affliction!

What can *you* do to help someone else in affliction?

¹⁹ NIV 1984

²⁰ NASB (Emphasis mine)

²¹ Cf 1 Cor 15:20 *But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*

²² 2 Cor 1:10 “*He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.*”

Well, if nothing tangible, then you can pray – pray for a brother/sister in affliction; pray also for that brother/sister's *comfort* in affliction!

And you know what? Don't we live in the age of messaging? Well, why not send him/her a message to say, "Dear brother/sister, I know you're greatly afflicted!" "I just wanted to let you know I've just brought you before the throne of our Heavenly Father – yes, before Him who raises the dead!"

My brother & sister, I pray that you will look to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who comforts us in all our afflictions!

AMEN (2,408 words excluding footnotes)