

Sunday 3rd September 2017.
Hackney Vineyard Church
“So we do not lose heart.”

2 Cor 1:3 - 10

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 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. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 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.

2 Cor 4:16

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

The central theme of 2nd Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the spirit in Paul's apostolic message, ministry and message.

Prayer

Introduction

I want to start today by sharing a story with you. Earlier in the summer I went for a job interview. A previous colleague of mine had got in touch about a position that was opening up and asked if I was available to interview for it. I said that I was and we quickly arranged for me to come and chat about the role. It was an exciting project, for a great company and of particular interest to me was the length of the contract. It was 5 months long. A contract of that length is extremely rare in my industry. Most of the contracts I am used to getting are much shorter so I was really interested in this role.

In the months leading up to being asked about this job I had actually been praying for a long term work opportunity. So when this role came up I felt that God was in this situation for me. I walked into the interview room feeling full of confidence. However things following the interview didn't turn out the way I had anticipated.

During the interview I was told that they would let me know after the weekend if I had got the job. Monday morning came, I powered on my computer, turned up the volume on my phone and proceeded to check my email every 5 minutes or so. Eager to make sure I didn't miss a message from them.

By the time Monday evening arrived my hope and excitement had turned into anxiety. Why hadn't I heard from them I thought? I forced myself to switch off my computer. I was tired from constantly refreshing my email and I was feeling restless.

It wasn't until Wednesday afternoon that I finally heard from them. They informed me they were hoping to make a decision the following day. Great, more waiting I thought.

By this point I was feeling increasingly nervous and had resorted to pacing around the house. I was getting grouchy and moody with others and I found it hard to communicate honestly with God during this time.

A week later I heard the news I had been dreading. 12 days after my interview they told me the role had gone to someone else in the company.

It was a massive blow to my confidence and it left me feeling really disappointed. The whole process of not knowing whether I had got the job or not had left me feeling weary. I felt like I had been on trial waiting to hear a guilty or not guilty verdict.

1. Present comfort by God.

At the beginning of our reading today we read the words of Paul as he introduces his second letter to the Corinthians. He starts by blessing God and worshipping Him writing **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our affliction”**.

He is thanking the God of all comfort for being there for him. It's a beautiful and tender picture of relationship. Like a nurse or surgeon tending to the wounds of an injured patient God attends to our pains and wounds. In blessing God Paul is extending His gratitude to the father who reaches down to attend to his physical and internal pains.

Many of us will have been comforted by a friend, relative, husband or wife. We might have also comforted our children as tears are running down their cheeks. Comfort like a listening ear and a reassuring touch that everything is going to be ok is vital when we are suffering. We weren't meant to suffer on our own or in silence. We need to be able to share what we are going through with others. It helps to break the power of what we are experiencing.

Several years ago there was a study done by The University of Wisconsin into pain. Participants had to put their feet into buckets of freezing water and researchers timed how long they could endure the cold. Their results were fascinating. Whenever a participant was allowed a companion in the room with them during the test they were able to endure the freezing cold twice as long as those who suffered alone. The researchers concluded that the presence of another person to comfort you and care for you during affliction doubles the amount of pain you can endure.

Do we have troubles and difficulties we have been holding off sharing with one another? As friends and as a church we want this to be a place where we can feel comfortable sharing our own struggles with one another. Also we want this to be a place where others can feel comfortable sharing their struggles with us. If we try to hide our struggles from others we miss out on the comfort and healing God will make available for us and them.

We have to be will to open up and say I am hurting in order to receive healing and comfort. A nurse or doctor in a hospital usually will only treat a patient if permission is given. A patient will have to book and arrange an appointment with them unless it a more serious case when they have been rushes into hospital. Likewise we need to reach out to God and make time to allow Him to comfort us. We have to ask him to comfort us and let Him know how we are hurting.

For me it took me a while to come to terms with this disappointment over not getting the job. I didn't initially want to open up to God about how I felt. As Christians even during times of pain and affliction we know we have to come back to God at some point. We know He alone can comfort and heal us. We might not be able to see it from our point of view but He has a plan and purpose for us even during challenging seasons.

2. Daily renewal

One of the most famous characteristics of the British population is the mindset of the stiff upper lip during adversity. If your lip is trembling it shows that you are afraid or shaken. It's linked to a sign of weakness. Strength from within has always been something our society has valued. In God's upside kingdom however it is always weakness that is the path to true strength.

God's grace and unmerited love is sufficient for us and His power is made perfect in weakness.

There's a beautiful artform in Japanese culture known as Kintsugi. It's a mending process used to repair broken pottery that involves using lacquered resin mixed with powdered gold, silver or platinum. The brokenness and wounds of clay vessels are embraced by craftsmen who make something more beautiful from the pieces than the original product. The flaws and imperfections of the ceramics aren't hidden away instead they are seen as a significant part of its history and are marked with gold. Some people intentionally break their own pottery items in order for them to be pieced back together this way.

So it is with God, the master craftsmen and our lives. Our original creator wants to renew and transform us using His precious Holy Spirit. This isn't a process that can be done only once but something He can do daily as we come before Him in our brokenness to be transformed each day.

Paul writes of this renewal process and the strengthening of his inner spirit as the way he is able to avoid losing heart despite the circumstances he is experiencing. He describes his affliction as a burden he is carrying that weighed him down beyond his own strength. Yet he never lost hope in God. Daily God was mending and transforming him so that he could say that he was afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in his body and ours.

The power and strength in Paul that enabled him to endure ongoing affliction and adversity wasn't something that he generated or mustered up inside himself. He instead drew upon the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. The power that conquered and triumphed over

all death, suffering and brokenness. Paul died to doing things in his own strength and acknowledged that the power belongs to God.

As believers and followers of Jesus we can't live off yesterday's encounter with God. Situations and circumstances take our strength away and we need to draw from God power each day. Like a plant that begins to wither when it hasn't been watered recently we need to receive the living water of God each day so that we never go thirsty again.

How do we do this? We make a daily appointment with God and ask for Him to enable and empower us for His glory each morning. We receive His transforming power that renews our minds and strengthens our spirit.

3. Future glory

When we are in the midst of a season of disappointment and affliction it can often feel like we are back standing with the disciples 2000 years ago on Holy Saturday. The day after Jesus' death when His broken body lay wrapped in a freshly cut tomb. The hope the disciples had previously held in the promised messiah had all but gone. Doubts, darkness and discouragement now plagued them instead.

But then, as the dawn appeared on Sunday morning, the stone was rolled away and up from the grave Jesus rose again. Hope burst forth and darkness hid and covered its face. The perishable body of Jesus who was pierced for our transgressions and was crushed for our iniquities and disobedience was raised back to life. Never would He taste death again. His body was lifted up imperishable.

Death the last enemy has been beaten. No longer could the fear of it chain us in its grip or have any controlling power over us. Eternity beckons us. Absolute certainty of a future life spent with forever with Him was our new destiny.

Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ **“O death, where is your victory?**

O death, where is your sting?”

⁵⁶ **The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

God in His glory, that Paul writes as being beyond all comparison showed the whole world the greatest act of power and love that has even been seen or will even be seen. There is nothing that will ever come close to matching the glory and greatness of our God.

There are many men and women living in our lifetime that society esteems of worthy of praise and glory. Michael Jordan, Serena Williams, Tiger Woods, Wayne Rooney to name but a few. Even their collective accomplishments pale in comparison to the glory God. Our creator and life giver is infinitely more worthy of praise than any person and triumph we will ever see with our own eyes on this earth.

The heavens declare it to us, mountains, trees and blazing red skies proclaim it - Great is He they say. All of creation is made by Him and therefore His glory and greatness is everywhere. Look out the window, look around Hackney and Dalston. Look at one another in this room. His glory is unmissable. Open your eyes and you see it.

When the day comes when our eyes see Him face to face God will immediately become everything to us. His holiness will be tangible and so clearly visible our hearts will instantly be stirred and our lips will bring forth praise.

Jonathan Edwards, the protest revivalist, theologian and preacher writes this:

If we can learn anything of the state of heaven from the Scripture, the love and joy that the saints have there, is exceeding great and vigorous; impressing the heart with the strongest and most lively sensation, of inexpressible sweetness, mightily moving, animating, and engaging them, making them like to a flame of fire. And if such love and joy be not affections, then the word "affection" is of no use in language. Will any say, that the saints in heaven, in beholding the face of their Father, and the glory of their Redeemer, and contemplating his wonderful works, and particularly his laying down his life for them, have their hearts nothing moved and affected, by all which they behold or consider?

The cries of today's affliction in the future will be replaced with vigorous and sweet joy that is unbreakable. All our tears will be wiped away never again to touch our cheeks. Our perishable bodies muddied by sin, suffering, affliction, decay and eventually death will be raised imperishable. Our trials, tribulations, infirmities and discouragement can never harm us permanently. They are doing something in our lives. There is a divine meaning behind it. It's a work of preparation that is moving our deepest hearts desires to gaze upon the glory of the Lord. How much more beautiful does the appearing of daylight seem to us after a even a short journey through a dark underground tunnel, forest or cave?

So much of the destruction we read about in this city and in the wider world can cause us to fear and to lose heart. Paul tells us to be fix our eyes on what is unseen. There's a future encounter of glory that is coming. We taste it in part in this life but when we behold Him face to face our sweet suffering saviour will fully transforms our whole being as we encounter the full technicolour radiance of His eternal glory.

PRAYER OF THANKS

Lord life brings so many challenges. At times we feel afraid, disappointed, frustrated and angry during our afflictions. Without your comfort and light in this world we would feel hopeless and lost. Lord show us more of your face and glory. We want to see and know you more. Shine your light into our lives and situation that we might know your closeness and radiant glory in all your fullness. Transform and renew us each day and time that we encounter you. Bind up our brokenness, make your power perfect in our weakness. That we might never lose heart and be able to be your hands and feet as we comfort those around us who suffer. In Jesus name, Amen.