

Comforted to be comforters \* 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

April 19, 2020 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

Well folks, it's the moment you've all been waiting for – the return of everyone's favourite biblical drama – Keeping up with the Corinthians – Season 2!

Season 1 took us into 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, with all of the Kardashian level drama going on there, but Season 2 is going to take us into somewhat different territory. 2 Corinthians is written to the same people but it has a different tone I think. And that tone I think is just what we need right now. I had a sneaky suspicion about a month ago that it might be time for Season 2 and so I read 2 Corinthians devotionally and time after time, I thought – 'we need that right now, we need that right now' – and so I think that this time with 2 Corinthians will be a real help for us now in the coming days.

I'm won't publish a dated schedule because things will change depending on when we can meet again, but I anticipate that I'll have a new episode of "Keeping up with the Corinthians" for you Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday, so keep an eye out for those.

Today we're going to begin at the beginning – 2 Corinthians 1 – and Paul here opens his letter with something that's really quite relevant to us. Just like us, the Corinthians have been going through a hard time and so Paul writes to them-

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles...

Praise be to the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles.

Paul knows that the Corinthians are going through a tough time, but that's not the first thing he talks about, is it? Paul doesn't start off, 'hello, hope you're OK'; Paul doesn't say 'oh, you poor people, you're going through such a trial'; he says to them and he says to us – Praise be to the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our troubles. He lifts our eyes from our circumstances to the God who cares for us *in the midst* those circumstances. And it's not just any old God that's Paul's talking about here, is it? It's "the Father of compassion" and the "God of all comfort."

Just think about that for a minute – When we call God Father, 'the Father of all comfort(!)' applies His boundless compassion to us in our time of need. In ALL of our times of need. There is no situation where He is not able to help. He comes alongside us and wipes away the tears and gives us courage to take the next step. David Garland describes it like this - "The comfort that Paul has in mind... is not some tranquilizing dose of grace that only dulls the pain, but a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind and soul... God's comfort strengthens weak knees and sustains sagging spirits so that one faces the troubles of life with unbending resolve and unending assurance" (Garland, 60).

God comes alongside us to comfort and strengthen and encourage us no matter the situation and with His help, we find that we have the strength to carry on.

But here's the thing; God's comfort is not meant to stop with us. As John Henry Jowett once said "God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters (in Garland, 64)."

Look again at our passage – this is 2 Corinthians 3:3 & 4 -

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles... SO THAT we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

God comforts us in every trial SO THAT our experience of His grace will spill over to comfort others, whatever their circumstances. Having been comforted by God, we then extend that same compassion to others. It doesn't stop with us – like at Christmas dinner, you don't take a scoop of mashed potatoes and then just keep holding on to the bowl – you pass it on. Same with God's comfort. God comforts us SO THAT we will comfort others.

And if you think about it, it's a brilliant plan. If you've been through a trial and God's carried you through it, then you are perfectly situated to comfort another person who's going through that trial. Right? You're taking the comfort YOU received in that situation and passing it on. That's how it works. On one level, God is there, pouring out supernatural help in time of need; but on another level, that help is being expressed through people who have actually experienced it themselves.

God comforts us SO THAT we will comfort others.

So let's take a minute and think - what does that comfort look like? Remember, it is both a pillow and a brace - comfort and encouragement to carry on. What does that look like?

Well, in many ways, I think it's really just a matter of presence. Of being there for them. You don't need to go to their house and wrap them up in a blanket; they just need to know that you are caring for them. That you are willing to listen. That you are willing to 'be there.' Not to give advice and fix the problem, but to be there and acknowledge their pain and bring your experience of God's comfort to them to say 'by the grace of God, we'll get through this together.'

That's a little trickier these days because of social distancing and everything – but - our phones still work. We can send texts and messages and make phone calls to let people know that we are thinking about them and in a real way, God expresses His comfort to them, through us. I spoke to somebody from the church this week who said they've spent more time on the phone calling people these last few weeks than ever before and that's great! That's exactly how it should be. That's God pouring out comfort and confidence and assurance in your life and you letting it overflow to others. That's how it works! Keep it up! Let God comfort you in these trying times and then extend that care to be a comfort to others.

God comforts us SO THAT we will comfort others.

#### BENEDICTION

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, 17 comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word (2 Thess 2:16-17 ESV).