

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Fourth Sunday after Trinity, June 23, 2013**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 18, 200:1, 296, 517, 385:7-8.

Lessons: Isaiah 40:1-11, 2 Corinthians 1:1-11, John 11:17-27.

Sermon Text: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

After his customary greeting, Paul takes several verses to talk about comfort from God. He praises *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort”*.

God’s chosen people in the Old Testament needed comfort. You heard about God’s promise of comfort in our Old Testament lesson. The great comfort they were to receive was the Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, born in Bethlehem. They were oppressed at the time of Isaiah’s words. They were about to be dragged into captivity, and would cease to exist as a separate nation. They seemed to have no hope for the future. Things would only get worse, in an earthly manner of speaking.

Let’s compare that with our times today. They were poor, with regard to earthly possessions, and they were spiritually poor. They had turned their back on the true God and followed after the gods of the pagans around them. They no longer worshiped God in truth and purity. They were physically feeling their oppression.

But what about us and our nation today? We are materially wealthy. We have possessions far beyond what the Jews in Isaiah’s day, or in the day of the birth of Jesus had. We have abundant food, shelter, clothing. We have many of our wants fulfilled. Of course, many of our wants were things we didn’t know we wanted until we were told we wanted them. Our earthly, physical needs are also fulfilled. There is almost nothing we lack when it comes to earthly needs.

But we live in spiritually poor times. All around us is spiritual poverty. People today, by and large, have turned their back on the true God and followed after the gods of the pagans around them – pagans who sometimes masquerade as Christians. People today, by and large, no longer worship God in truth and purity. Those to whom people look for spiritual food often give them nothing but what their sinful souls want. There is little preaching of God’s laws. Much of what passes for gospel is merely encouragement to share the wealth, and take care of others, and a morality that panders to the sinfulness of mankind. In fact, we could make the claim that much of religion and spirituality today feeds the sinful lusts of mankind. Churches give in and bend over backwards to not upset anyone, but to give them what they want, often in the name of “civil rights”.

It is easy to think and hopelessly conclude that Satan has us today exactly where he wants us. We have abundant earthly possessions. And many think that they have spiritual food but it is “spiritual food” which really leads only to eternal damnation. As we drive through our communities, we see many churches, many grand, beautiful buildings, into which it often seems only a few people go. And in many of those churches they do not hear about their sinfulness and about the objective fact that Jesus paid the price for their sins, so that believing, they many inherit eternal life. But most people are concerned only about this life, until they are facing death, and then some hope that they have done enough to please some god and receive some eternal reward.

But what comfort do people really have? When Paul talks about comfort here in the Word of God, he uses the word “comfort” nine times in just five verses.

**WHAT IS THIS COMFORT PAUL SPEAKS OF?**

1. **What God did for us.**
2. **What God’s comfort means for us.**

We are not just talking about being comfortable. The proverbial frog in the frying pan was comfortable when he found the pan of warm water to rest in. By the time he realized that the water was heated up to boiling, it was too late for him to escape. That little story is a good picture of mankind, comfortable in his sinful ways until he realizes he is condemned to burn in hell. Then it is too late. He is dead, and after death comes God's judgment.

Paul first describes God as the Father of mercy and compassion. He further describes God as the God of all comfort. Comfort is the key word in this section, meaning especially to admonish, to exhort, to encourage, to counsel, to comfort. The word "Comforter" is the word Jesus uses in the Gospel of John for the Holy Spirit, the "Paraclete," that is, the Comforter or Counselor. This is what God is, the Comforter.

God is the God of all comfort. All real comfort and encouragement comes from the God *"who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all"* and who will also *"along with him, graciously give us all things"* (Romans 8:32). And this comfort is there for every occasion.

Paul is going to speak about a personal experience of God's comfort in verses 8-11, the verses immediately following our sermon text, but first he wants his readers to remember that this comfort is available for them also. God comforts us, he says, in all our troubles. On his first missionary journey Paul had told the believers in Galatia, *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22). Here he assures us that in the midst of these troubles or hardships, God's comfort is present. And it is present in all our troubles.

Paul doesn't go into detail in these verses about how God comforts us. But Scripture makes it clear that God may rescue us directly from our troubles. Or he may give us the strength to bear up under them. Or he will point us to such promises as the one in Romans 8, that *"in all things God works for the good of those who love him"* (Romans 8:28). This comfort comes, and must come from God and his Word.

Paul speaks of another significant way in which God's comfort gets applied to God's children. God *"comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."* God comforts his children in all their troubles so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. With these words Paul is moving from the vertical dimension of fellowship to the horizontal dimension. That is, he moves from God's comforting us (vertically – from heaven down to earth) to our comforting one another (horizontal).

It is important for the Christian to remember that when the Holy Spirit brings a person into the Holy Christian Church, when he attaches a person to Christ, the Head, he is also attaching that individual to the rest of Christ's Body. God comforts us with the forgiveness of sins and with all his other promises, not only so we can be comforted, but also so we can now be comforters of others.

In the next few verses Paul demonstrates this truth from his own ministry. *"For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."* In speaking of the sufferings of Christ, Paul is talking about the Christian's cross, the suffering that a Christian endures for the sake of Christ. In his letter to the Philippians Paul calls it *"sharing in his [Christ's] sufferings"* (Philippians 3:10). Paul had tasted more than the normal share of such suffering. He had experienced an overflowing amount of suffering, some of it in connection with his ministry to the Corinthians. But the comfort he had received from Christ in the midst of his suffering was also overflowing. Whatever the suffering, the comfort and strength which Christ gave always more than matched it.

That was a great blessing and not just for Paul. He goes on: *"If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer."* Notice the two "ifs," If we are distressed, and if we are comforted. These things were actually occurring in Paul's life. He was experiencing both affliction and distress as well as God's comfort in that affliction and distress.

While Paul was enduring all sorts of distress in his ministry among the Corinthians (he gives some examples later in the letter), they were receiving the comforting good news of forgiveness of sins and salvation. If he had changed his message for any reason, such as to escape affliction, or if he had given up altogether, the Corinthians would have been the losers.

When Paul personally experienced God's comfort in the midst of his affliction and was given the strength to endure patiently, this equipped him to be a comforter of the Corinthians when they had difficult days so that patient endurance might also be effectively at work in them. So, whether Paul was distressed or comforted, the outcome was always the same: It was for the Corinthians' benefit, for their comfort.

***“And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.”*** Throughout this whole section Paul has not been saying that God's people will never have to go through suffering and tribulation. Rather, his point has been that the comfort God gives, especially by way of one Christian to another, will carry them through. This had been true in Paul's own life and is a truth the Corinthians could also count on. He says that his hope for them is firm and solid. How can he be so confident? We, he says, have been brought through times of suffering and have experienced God's comfort so that when you now face suffering, we can share with you the comfort God has given us.

This serves as a good reminder to Christians today that, as the saying goes, "No man is an island." What God permits to come into our lives — both times of suffering and times of experiencing God's comfort and strengthening — is not meant simply to be a private experience for the individual. Whatever God leads us through, whatever he has given us, is meant also to benefit and bless others.

Do we always realize what the chief comfort from God is? The most precious gift of the Holy Ghost is the forgiveness of sins. This is just one of God's gifts to us. Additional gifts of God to help comfort us are:

The knowledge that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

The assurance of faith that I am justified before God through Christ.

Peace with God.

The hope of heaven.

The witness that I am a child of God.

Comfort in all tribulation.

Confidence to pray.

And all blessedness which Jesus Christ, My Lord, obtained for me.

The Scriptures are filled with comfort for the believer in Jesus Christ as Savior from sin. Here is just a smattering.

We read in John 3:16: ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."***

Psalm 144:15 tells us: ***"Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the LORD."***

Near the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount we read in Matthew 5:4: ***"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."***

And, of course, we have that beautiful Psalm 23: ***"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*** (Psalm 23)

Search the Scriptures so that you may add to this list! Amen.