

11th July 2015

IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING

2 Corinthians 1

Of all the letters Paul wrote, Second Corinthians is the most autobiographical. He spells out the details of his persecution, loneliness, imprisonments, beatings, feelings of despair, hunger, shipwrecks, sleepless nights. How close it makes us feel to him when we see him as a man with real, honest-to-goodness problems, just like ours!

It is not surprising, then, that he begins the letter with words of comfort, especially verses 3 through 11. Ten times in five verses (vv. 3-7) Paul uses the same root word, *Parakaleo*, meaning literally, "to call alongside." This word involves genuine, in-depth understanding . . . deep-down compassion and sympathy. This seems especially appropriate since it says that God, our Father, is the "God of all comfort" who "comforts us in all our affliction." Our loving Father is never preoccupied or removed when we are enduring sadness and affliction!

There is another observation worth noting in 2 Corinthians 1. No less than three reasons are given for suffering, each one introduced with the term *that*: "that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction"; "that we would not trust in ourselves"; "that thanks may be given" (vv. 4, 9, 11). There may be dozens of other reasons, but here are three specific reasons we suffer.

Reason #1: God allows suffering so that we might have the capacity to enter into others' sorrow and affliction.

Reason #2: God allows suffering so that we might learn what it means to depend on Him. Over and over He reminds us of the danger of pride, but it frequently takes suffering to make the lesson stick.

Reason #3: God allows suffering so that we might learn to give thanks in everything. Now, honestly, have you said, "Thanks, Lord, for this test"? Have you finally stopped struggling and expressed to Him how much you appreciate His loving sovereignty over your life?

In your time of "suffering" remember that the LORD JESUS is never preoccupied or removed when you are enduring sadness and affliction! He is "call alongside" of you and giving you the needed strength to overcome. HALLELUJAH!