

The One Who Raises the Dead

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 | Pastor Brett Toney | January 25, 2026

The Resurrection

Jesus is risen. The incarnate Son of God lived sinlessly, died sacrificially, and rose victoriously. Do you believe it, Church? Do you believe it not just in your head but deep down in your bones? And if Christ is risen, will he not raise all of us who are united with him by faith and the Spirit? What then of your affliction? It doesn't make it go away, but it does put it into perspective. This is what Paul is drawing us to be refreshed in as we look at 2 Corinthians 1:8-11 this morning. God is the one who raises the dead, and that makes all the difference. Paul is not merely descriptive here of how God comforted him and delivered him. He is exhorting us, comforting us—those words are more closely related in Paul's language than ours. He is exhorting us to not despair in affliction but to rely on God in earnest prayer because he is the One who raises the dead. Paul does this by highlighting his experience of affliction (v.8-9), the purpose of affliction (v.9-10), and a means of deliverance (v.11).

Experience of Affliction (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

Paul adds to his comments on sharing in the affliction and comfort of Christ in v.3-7 that we looked at last week. He has a specific affliction in mind. The Corinthians apparently had more details and awareness of the situation because he doesn't describe it in the particularities. It could be related to the beasts he fought at Ephesus that he spoke of in 1 Corinthians 15:32. It could be the Ephesian riot of Acts 19. Perhaps the "thorn in the flesh" he references in chapter twelve. Whatever the specifics, the Corinthians were either not entirely ignorant of them, or they didn't need to know. What they were ignorant of was Paul's *experience* of the affliction. It was exceptionally challenging. He shares in chapter eleven how he was no stranger to danger and death. Yet this affliction nearly crushed him.

There is glory through weakness. And Paul opts to enter into weakness. He brings the Corinthians into his turmoil writing, “We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death” (v.8-9). Sharing in the affliction of Christ was not a mere metaphor for the apostle. He talked the talk, and he walked the walk. He had sat in the bleak darkness of despair thinking, “Surely, this is the end.” And he doesn’t want his disciples to be ignorant of this. He wants them to know he is familiar with weakness so that they will go through it with him to glory. He wants them to join him in reveling in the golden splendor and renewed strength of the “*kintsugi*” pottery. I hope you looked up a picture of that pottery after I mentioned it last week.

Do you bring others into your affliction like this? I often say you will get out of your Discipleship Group what you put in. If you won’t bring others into your affliction, they won’t bring you into theirs. It’s not easy to do. I’ll be the first to admit it. In this role that I have, I struggle to know how to follow Paul’s example of leading with weakness. It can feel like it is self-serving and garners pity. It can feel like leaders are meant to bear burdens, so, “Stand up straight.” The last twelve months have been particularly challenging for me. It’s not been anywhere close to despairing of life itself. But you can pray for me as we go through this letter—pray that I would learn to see the glory through weakness and better imitate the apostle’s approach to ministry.

Purpose of Affliction (2 Corinthians 1:9-10)

Paul is willing and desirous to go there, to press into weakness, to make the Corinthians not ignorant of these things because he wants them to share in the purpose of affliction. This is the second step to not despair in affliction but rely on God—behold the purpose of affliction. We saw last week that one purpose of God in sovereignly ordaining suffering in the lives of his

people is to equip us to comfort others with that divine comfort we have received. Here is a second purpose for suffering: to rely on God. Even though Paul was so exceedingly burdened, he received what felt like a death sentence *in order that* he would rely not on himself but on God. Glory through weakness. God is shown to be a shield and defender, to be all-sufficient, to be the Father of Mercies and God of All Comfort when his apostle, when his under-shepherds, when his disciples are utterly dependent on *him*. He is glorified by this. It publicly communicates all of God's perfections. Relying on God in the face of death and despair testifies to a lost and broken world, "Behold the God of Heaven and Earth! He is enough and will be enough for you!"

If God delivered us from so great a death before, then surely he will do it again now. And our hope rests resolute on the certainty that he will deliver yet again in the time to come. That's not wishful thinking. That's banking on the certainty of prior experience. It's the assurance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego before the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar. "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king" (Daniel 3:17). But I passed over the source of assurance. It's not only prior experience. It's the certain activity and character of God. Who is this one that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and you and me worship? Verse 9, "That was to make us rely not on ourselves but on *God who raises the dead*." We can face the despair of even death because our God is master over it. Death is not king. Jesus is king. And when he says, "Rise," the dead cannot but obey.

This is what reframes our perspective of our affliction. As hard as something may, death will only serve as a means to bring us to God. When my outlook has been gloomy, and I wonder if spending my life to make much of Jesus is worth it, this is what I speedily come back to. God is the one who raises the dead. I think for a few moments, "Was Jesus of Nazareth a real person

of history? Yes. Did he claim to be God? Yes. Did he die on a cross and was buried in a tomb that was empty three days later? Yes. Is the best, most logical, most historically reliable conclusion that God raised him from the dead? Yes. Then carry on, relying on God who raises the dead.” You can move through that same progression at 2am with a colicky newborn. You can preach that to yourself when you find yourself in the throes of despair. When you are in conflict with your spouse, you can pause and meditate on those questions. God’s purpose in affliction is to bring you to rely on him who raises the dead. Repent of thinking you deserve an easier child. Acknowledge before him if you have been ungodly in introspection. Confess your marital anger. Don’t rely on yourself but be trained by your affliction to rely on God.

Means of Deliverance (2 Corinthians 1:11)

And look to him through one means of deliverance. Here is the third step toward relying on God in affliction, v.11. The ESV brings us this verse more as a command, “You also must help us by prayer.” That *is* a necessary implication. But I think Paul is saying that he has hope that God will deliver him yet again *by means* of the Corinthians helping him through prayer. God will deliver Paul because the Corinthians pray. We don’t pray just to heap up phrases to the deity. Nor do we pray like the prophets of Baal before Elijah to manipulate God into action (cf. 1 Kings 18). God delights to accomplish his will through the means of his people’s prayers. Why? Glory through weakness. Prayer is a very evident display of our dependence on our Father. He is in Heaven. We are on earth. We need *his* will done.

And when God acts in response to your prayers, he gets the glory. And the more who pray, the more who rejoice at his giving of the blessing that was granted. More pray-ers means more givers of thanks, more praise for God. You could look at that and think, “God must need our prayers, our thanks, our praise.” You could think, “Man, God must really be insecure.” Far

from it. He needs nothing as though served by human hands. Yet it is for our good and the good of the world for God's glory to be on display. When God works through our many prayers to multiply praise, we get to be partakers of glory. We are participants of the deliverance he accomplishes. It's like the busboy who gets a seat at the table. He didn't cook the food or serve it. He only cleared the table so it was all ready for the meal. But then he gets invited to sit down and eat.

So, friend, pray! In your affliction, learn to rely not yourself but on God who raises the dead. And run to that God to pray for your deliverance, for the deliverance of your children, for the deliverance of your neighbors—deliverance from all affliction. Pray not as a burden nor as a last resort. Pray in the faithful hope that God ordains to work in this world through your prayers. Pray that you might receive the blessing granted and that God would receive the thankful praise. Don't grumble and murmur about the affliction that God has allowed in your life. Don't give into despair but remember that Jesus is risen. Through the victory of his life that he now lives always to make intercession for you, go with him in his name to the throne of grace to find the grace and the mercy you need.

Relying on God

We very likely give too little thought to the resurrection. This is no doubt in part because Christ's resurrection was so long ago and ours feels so very far away. And that is the very reason why we need to encourage, to exhort one another with such things. When it looks like the darkness is winning—either in the public square or the privacy of our own souls—when it looks like the darkness is winning, we need to proclaim to one another and our own selves that Christ has already won. We must buttress our hope in the resurrection such that we face any affliction with prayerful hope. We dare not stick our heads in the sand or our fingers in our ears, being

willfully ignorant of affliction. We must face it head on, relying on God who raises the dead. He has delivered us in Christ, and he most surely will deliver us yet again.