
Rely on God Who Raises the Dead (2 Corinthians 1:8-11)

A Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow



Why would God let this happen? Why does God let people suffer so much? Why does God let people live in sickness and poverty? Why does God allow people to abuse and harm each other again and again?

In our epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians, Paul talks about some horrible things that he experienced. If you read about Paul's journeys in the book of Acts, you see that Paul suffered so much as he tried to spread the gospel message. But in our lesson, Paul recognized God's purpose in allowing these sufferings in his life. Today, Paul encourages us to learn the same lesson, so that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

Whenever Paul faced struggles, whether he was receiving death threats, sitting in prison, or was actually being stoned to death, Paul was faced with that question: Why would God let this happen? Why would God let so much suffering come to someone who was so faithfully following God and spreading his Word?

But at those times of struggle, Paul had a memory firm in his mind; a memory of another man who asked God, "Why?" A man who had been a good person, who did all he could to help others, but then God allowed evil to come into his life. His friends betrayed and abandoned him. He was arrested for crimes that he did not commit. In prison, he was tortured. In a mock trial he was sentenced to death. And as he awaited that death he asked, "My God, why?"

And Paul would remember this man's name: Jesus Christ. Jesus alone is good. Not one of us can say that we are good people. That is after all what we confess whenever we gather to worship. We deserve God's wrath and punishment. But Jesus didn't. Jesus is a good person. He did everything right, everything perfect.

But God allowed evil to happen to him. He was betrayed by one of his closest friends and abandoned by all the rest. He was arrested and condemned by a mock trial based on false accusations. He was tortured and sentenced to be crucified. And on the cross, he called out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Why did God forsake Jesus? Why did God allow evil to happen to the One

good person? He did that so that evil would not happen to you and to me. God allowed his wrath and punishment to come on his Son so that you and I would never have to face that. God abandoned his Son so that we could know that he will never abandon us.

This is our answer, whenever we suffer. We know that God does not simply watch bad things happen to us, but he became a man so that he could suffer in our place. And as a man, he absorbed all our evil, all our sinfulness into himself, like a sponge. And Jesus suffered the full extent of God's wrath, even to the point that he died on that cross and was buried.

But you and I know that Jesus did not stay dead. God raised him from the dead, and that resurrection changes everything. Because Jesus lives, you and I can be assured that Jesus has completely forgiven our sin. His sacrifice was enough to completely pay for what our sins deserve. His death fully satisfied God's wrath over our sin. And because Jesus lives, you and I can totally rely on God no matter what suffering may come our way.

This is what the apostle Paul explains in our epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians. Paul speaks about some trouble, some certain death, that he and his coworkers faced in Asia. He is most likely talking about the hardships he faced while he was in Ephesus. We know that in Acts 19 Paul faced a riot. Most of us here, thankfully, have never experienced the chaos and terror of a riot, where all order just disappears.

Paul had been preaching the gospel message in Ephesus and God was blessing his efforts there. Many were turning to God. Then, some silversmiths who made a lot of money by making and selling pagan shrines got angry because Paul's preaching was killing their business. They riled people up against Paul and against Christianity. A riot started and they even seized some believers!

Why would God let such terrible things happen to his people? Why would God allow someone who was faithfully sharing his faith to face such terror, such chaos, such evil?

Paul saw a reason for it. Paul knew that if God loved us enough to die for us so that we might never experience the one true evil of hell, then he will certainly not

allow the incomparably small evils of pain and suffering on earth to really harm us. Paul knew that if God allows pain into our lives, it can only be for our good. Why would God go through so much suffering himself to save us and then just let us suffer for no reason? No, in Christ, we know that God deeply cares for us. We know that God wants what is best for us and he will bring that to us, even if what is best for us means some very hard, very painful times right now.

When Paul suffered, therefore, he looked for God's purpose in that suffering. In 2nd Corinthians, Paul learned that in these situations, where he could only despair of himself; in these situations, where he felt that he had received a death sentence, Paul learned to rely not on himself, but on God who raises the dead! God allowed this terrible evil into Paul's life, so that he could learn to trust God.

Paul recognized that if God gave him everything that he wanted, Paul would have relied more and more on what he was doing; on his own efforts. If Paul was always safe, what reason would he have to search the Scriptures to better understand God? If Paul was always where he wanted to be on earth, why would Paul even want to go to heaven?

Instead, through suffering, God taught Paul our lesson for today: Rely on God who Raises the Dead! When Paul was faced with a riot, all because he was doing what God wanted him to do, Paul could not rely on himself. Paul could not rely on parents or on a spouse. Paul could not rely on a president or on conservative values.

When Paul faced the worst situations, when Paul was convinced that he was going to die, Paul learned to Rely on God who Raises the Dead. In the same way, when we look at a world that is drenched in sin, in what will we place our confidence? When people whom we used to trust turn out to be way more sinful than we had ever imagined, will we rely on another sinful human? When we run into chaotic situations in life where everything seems to have fallen apart, will we trust this world to protect us? When we recognize just how great our own sinfulness is, will we put our faith in our own efforts to try harder?

No, when suffering comes to us, when we feel the death sentence, let us not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead! He did not leave us to the death we were headed for, but he instead became a man so that he could be our substitute. God took all the evil and sinfulness that are in us and he took it into himself, all so

he could die on a cross, taking our full punishment.

God did not leave his Son in the grave for us to mourn the chaos that our sin had wrought. Instead he raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore, rely on God who even turns suffering into blessings for us, so that we might learn to trust in him who gives us hope even in death. Rely on God who gives us reason to give thanks even when the worst happens to us. Rely on God Who Raises the Dead.