

Genesis 45:5–8

1. The Suffering and Comfort of Joseph

God is the sovereign Lord over all history, over the history of redemption, and yes, over our very lives. Therefore, we as saints, while we live on this earth, must realize that God is leading our lives according to His good pleasure. And we must live out our days trusting and believing in Him until the end.

Joseph came to understand this very truth. Looking back on his life with eyes of faith, having arrived at glory, Joseph recognized God's good pleasure and sovereign will. He then praised God and forgave even his brothers who had hated and abandoned him. Joseph realized that God had used not only the sins of his brothers but also all his suffering to fulfill His good pleasure, raising Joseph to the position of savior. Therefore, instead of holding a grudge, he gave thanks to God and took the initiative to live a reconciled life with his brothers and to serve them. Joseph confesses this in today's passage:

Genesis 45:5–8, "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt."

Today, we will once again reflect on the good and pleasing will of God accomplished through Joseph's life. As we saw previously, God sent Joseph ahead and brought him to glory through suffering in order to faithfully fulfill His covenant promises. Through Joseph's life, the whole household of Jacob was delivered from famine and came to dwell in Egypt. This led to the Exodus, and ultimately points forward to the New Exodus that Christ Himself would fulfill.

Looking closer, we can see another reality that God accomplished. In Genesis 45, Joseph says, "Do not be distressed, do not be angry with yourselves... God sent me before you to preserve life... God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant..."

This confession reveals something profoundly important: Joseph is not merely speaking from his own perspective. He is seeing God's purpose and good pleasure for his life **from the perspective of his brothers and family**. He understands that even though his life was marked by affliction, persecution, false accusations, and imprisonment, all of this was for the sake of his brothers' lives and benefit. That is why Joseph comforts them, forgives them first, and seeks reconciliation with love.

Joseph understands his calling in this way, and the same applies to all our lives and suffering. Our suffering is not only about us becoming more like Christ and reaching the glory He attained. God uses our suffering for the **life, benefit, and comfort of our brothers and sisters** in Christ. Through our shared journey, we are brought into glory together. This is a profoundly important aspect of God's good and pleasing will that we must recognize and live out. The Apostle Paul also came to this understanding and confesses it in the following way:

2. The Benefit of Suffering

2 Corinthians 1:5–6, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer."

Look closely at this confession of Paul. Does it not resemble Joseph's? Paul states that his suffering is for the comfort and salvation of the church and the saints. The comfort he received during his trials was also for their comfort. Paul had to suffer first and receive God's comfort in order to comfort the suffering church. He came to see that his life was being used as an instrument for the comfort of the church and the saints. In other passages, Paul even says that his suffering benefits the church, and he views his entire life from the perspective of the church, his fellow members, and the family of heaven.

In Paul's confession, we see the life of Joseph—and ultimately, the life of Jesus Christ. Just as Joseph's suffering was for the salvation and comfort of his brothers, Jesus' suffering was for the salvation and comfort of all His saints. Paul's suffering was also for the sake of his brothers and sisters. Joseph's brothers shared in his suffering and comfort. We share in Jesus' suffering and comfort. We also share in one another's suffering and comfort. This is the fellowship of the saints, the body of Christ. So when one member suffers and is comforted, it does not end with that individual—it becomes connected to the suffering and comfort of the whole body. This is the blessed reality that only the heavenly family experiences. Joseph and his brothers demonstrate this very truth.

Beloved saints, for us, **suffering and comfort** are inseparably connected. Our God is the **God of all comfort**. The fact that He gives comfort to His people presupposes that there will be suffering because we are partakers not only in Christ's glory, but also in His suffering.

Joseph's life bore witness to this. Before he reached glory, he had to endure many sufferings. Yet in those sufferings, God fulfilled His good pleasure and gave Joseph comfort. And with the comfort he received, Joseph then comforted his family, who had participated in that same suffering. Thus, in today's passage, we see Joseph becoming the comforter, reaching out first to comfort his brothers.

We are also participants in the sufferings of Christ. The word translated as "suffering" or "affliction" can also mean **pressure** or **distress**. Because of our faith in Christ, because we love Him and hope for the Kingdom of Heaven, we face hostility from the world that hates Christ. We are pressured even by friends, family, and in both physical and emotional ways.

When we follow Christ's joy instead of human pleasure, when we choose our heavenly family over our earthly one, when we follow God's Word rather than the ways of the world, we are rejected, shunned, and treated with contempt. Not only that, we face trials and sufferings for reasons we may not even fully understand.

But what is amazing about our suffering as saints is that it does not end in pain—it leads to **comfort**. God ensures that His children receive comfort even in affliction. After Joseph reached glory, he was finally comforted by God's grace. Likewise, because Jesus has already saved us and brought us into heavenly glory, we are always comforted as we fix our eyes on Him by faith. Our sufferings make us trust Jesus more, become more like Him, love Him more, and long for heaven more deeply. And through the comfort we receive in our trials, we are enabled to comfort our brothers and sisters. Just as God has comforted us, we are also to comfort one another.

So, what is the **ultimate comfort** that we have received? The Apostle Paul says that our comfort **abounds through Christ**. That means **the essence of God's comfort is His only Son, Jesus Christ**. We are comforted because God gave us Jesus, because we are made like Him, and because we are being brought into His glory. Everything God has prepared for us in Christ and His Kingdom is the content

of our comfort. The resurrection of Jesus is our comfort in the face of death. This is a comfort the world can never offer.

But notice: Paul says that our comfort **abounds through the sufferings of Christ**. Our comfort is intimately connected to the sufferings of Jesus. Likewise, Joseph's brothers were comforted because of Joseph's sufferings. This is the principle of the gospel. This is the principle of the Kingdom of God.

Why is it that Jesus' suffering is so crucial to our comfort? Could not the Almighty God have comforted us without Jesus suffering? The answer is no. Without Jesus' suffering, we could never have received true comfort. Without Joseph's suffering, his brothers could not have been saved in the time of famine. Without Jesus' suffering, we could not have been rescued from our most wretched condition.

3. The Comfort of God

To receive the comfort that God gives and to live by sharing that comfort, we must first recognize the most miserable reality of sinners. Only by acknowledging this can we understand the comfort we have received and the fellowship of comfort we are to share. Beloved, what is our most miserable reality? Is it the temporary hardships of life, like famine, that we experience in this world? Is it poverty, illness, or relational problems? These are indeed difficult, but they are not our most miserable reality. Is it our eventual physical death? The world may view physical death as the most miserable reality, but it is not. Our most miserable reality is that, due to sin, we deserve God's infinite wrath and curse and must face eternal judgment in hell. This is the spiritual famine that today's passage teaches us about the true condition of sinners.

Yet, we often deceive ourselves. We forget our true, miserable reality and focus only on the immediate circumstances before us. We become preoccupied with the problems we face in this world, thinking that if these issues are resolved, everything will be fine. However, even if we possess immense wealth, enjoy perfect health, live well in this world, and receive the love of everyone, if we die and lose everything, and endure God's infinite wrath and curse in hell forever, experiencing torment beyond any suffering in this world, what would it matter? We must first recognize our most miserable reality as sinners.

Who in this world can offer true comfort to sinners in such a miserable condition? How can anything in this world, any words, truly comfort those who deserve God's infinite judgment and are heading toward eternal punishment? Therefore, there is no true comfort in this world. There is no true comforter. Joseph could temporarily save his family from famine and offer comfort, but he could not be the true comforter. Only when the problem of our sin is resolved and we are saved from eternal judgment can anything truly comfort us. But God, through Jesus Christ, has accomplished eternal salvation, comforting us. To give us eternal comfort, God did not spare His only Son but gave Him up for us. And in giving His Son, He comforts us. Isn't that truly amazing?

Jesus, the Son of God, took upon Himself all our sins, suffered, and died, bearing all the wrath and curse of God that we deserved. He saved us from death and eternal judgment in hell. Moreover, He lived a perfectly righteous life in our place, rose again, and ascended into heaven, so that we, too, may live as sons of God, possessing eternal glory in heaven with Jesus. And He has brought us into eternal fellowship with the Triune God in that heavenly kingdom. This is the unchanging reality of the true comfort we have received. The event where Joseph's brothers reconciled with him, entered the land of Goshen, and lived in glory with their father Jacob, ultimately being comforted, pointed to this. Just as Joseph's life, from suffering to glory, overflowed with comfort to his family, so Jesus' life, from suffering to glory,

overflows with comfort to us. Now, the eternal comfort of God's kingdom has come, far surpassing the comfort Joseph could offer.

4. Called to Be Comforters

However, our calling as believers does not end with receiving comfort through Christ's suffering. We are called to be comforters, sharing that comfort with one another. To strengthen our brothers and sisters, we are first made partakers of Christ's sufferings. Just as the comfort of the gospel has come to us through Christ's sufferings, now our sufferings are used to comfort our brothers and sisters. In our sufferings, we are comforted by the gospel, and with that comfort, we comfort those who are suffering. Thus, we are made partakers of Jesus' life and bear witness to His glory. Joseph lived this life and bore witness to Jesus' glory. Therefore, the sufferings of believers are not merely for personal refinement and sanctification. We are all connected as one body. Our sufferings are being used to strengthen the body of Christ. Do not forget this.

Therefore, beloved, the sufferings you are enduring are for the comfort and salvation of your brothers and sisters. The comfort you have received is for the comfort of your brothers and sisters. View your life from the perspective of the church and the heavenly family. You are not suffering and growing alone; your brothers and sisters, united with you, are suffering and growing together. The comfort you have received and are sharing in Christ is working in your brothers and sisters, giving them strength to endure when they face similar sufferings and establishing them. Not only with words but also through your life, the comfort you have received is evident to your brothers and sisters. Thus, we share an inseparable fellowship as members of the heavenly family in Christ. This is also God's sovereign plan.

Remember this: your sufferings and comfort are connected to your brothers' sufferings and comfort. Your sufferings and comfort are being used to strengthen the body of Christ. Therefore, none of our sufferings are in vain. Through our lives, God reveals the glory of Jesus and the glory of His kingdom. Joseph received this grace and bore witness to Jesus' glory. Therefore, we must endure in our sufferings and receive the comfort of the gospel.

Even if I have not experienced the same sufferings as you, even if I do not fully understand the difficulties you face, can I still comfort you or not? Would you say, "Pastor Hong doesn't know how hard my sufferings are; he hasn't experienced them, so how can he dare to comfort me?" Perhaps, the more I feel that my sufferings are unique and great, I may harbor such complaints and become hardened, distancing myself from fellowship with the saints. However, we can comfort one another in any situation. And we must. Because, though our sufferings may differ in magnitude and form, the true comfort we have received is the same. Comfort one another in Christ and with Christ. Truly, when we are weary from suffering and crying, if a young child in our congregation comes to us and says, "Jesus is with you; don't cry," shouldn't we be greatly comforted?

Beloved, now, can we not understand more clearly the good pleasure of God accomplished through Joseph's life? We desire to see Joseph's life merely as a journey from suffering to worldly glory. But we must see the hidden good pleasure of God in that. Ultimately, it points to Jesus. By suffering and receiving comfort beforehand, Joseph was called to live as a comforter like Jesus, called for the life and benefit of his brothers, to become like Jesus, and to bear witness to His glory. This is also our calling and God's good pleasure. Remember this: He calls us to be comforters.

Those who find comfort in Jesus are also those who find themselves as comforters like Jesus in Him. We are not mere comforters of this decaying world. We are comforters who comfort with the eternal and

unchanging reality of the heavenly salvation, which Jesus accomplished even unto death. We are comforters of God's heavenly kingdom. He has made us comforters like Jesus. But do not forget that, to make us comforters like Jesus, He has also given us sufferings like those Jesus received. Therefore, suffering is a blessing for us. By first comforting us in our sufferings, He enables us to comfort one another. Through the fellowship of comfort among the saints, He does not let our sufferings end in suffering but uses them to build up the body of Christ to become more like Jesus. Thus, the apostle Paul, who understood this good pleasure of God, confesses:

Colossians 1:24: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church."

Paul confesses, for the benefit of the body of Christ and my brothers and sisters, for their comfort, I am willing to rejoice in my sufferings. May this confession become ours. It is rejoicing in participating in the life of Jesus, who comforted His people through His sufferings. It is even pleading to suffer for the church and the saints. May our faith and love grow to this extent. May our fellowship reach this image of Christ. And may, through this church, the reality of Jesus and His kingdom be fully manifested. Remember, your sufferings are for your heavenly family, and your comfort is for your heavenly family. Do not forget this, and may you bear your various sufferings joyfully, living as saints who comfort one another.