

## **COMFORT IN THE MIDST OF SORROW**

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

##### **A. The Marathon Man**

1. In *The Marathon Man*, Dustin Hoffman plays the role of a student obsessed with the marathon. He idolizes great runners of the past and, in his own running, learns to control pain so as to complete the race.
2. Sir Lawrence Olivier plays the part of the "White Angel," a Nazi dentist who terrorized concentration inmates during WWII. He has learned to use pain to get what he wants.
3. The most memorable scene in the movie comes as Olivier stands before the bound Hoffman gesturing with a dental drill in one hand and oil of cloves in the other. The choice he offers Hoffman is resistance (with the consequence of the drill being used again) or compliance (with the oil of cloves being applied to relieve pain).
4. Suffering or relief. Agony or anesthesia.

##### **B. Christians are also Men and Women of the Marathon**

1. Christians are also in a race of sorts.
  - a. But it is not the painless sprint - a quick dash that hardly makes us break a sweat or breathe too hard.
  - b. It is a marathon - the long, grinding endurance test that, by its very nature, involves suffering.
2. We are in this race for the long run.
  - a. We must learn how to control pain to finish the race.
  - b. Discipleship is often a matter of both pleasure and suffering. It also is a matter of learning to deal with pain so as to run the race.
3. Knowing Jesus is both agony and ecstasy.
  - a. With great privilege comes great responsibility.
  - b. With great love comes great vulnerability.
  - c. With great expectations come great disappointments.
  - d. With great plans come great anxieties.
4. The walk of discipleship involves highs and lows, ups and downs, good and bad, joy and sorrow.
  - a. Are we only "fair-weather friends" of Jesus? It is easy to be a Christian when everything is warm, loving, joyful, radiant, peaceful, good and kind.
  - b. Have we learned the secret of dealing with trials? It is much harder to be a follower when I am discouraged and disheartened, depressed and lonely, weak and hurt.

##### **C. The book of 2 Corinthians is about dealing with suffering in the Christian walk.**

1. In particular, Paul tells us in this book how he maintains his confidence and enthusiasm in the midst of persecution, both from those outside the Christian community and (perhaps even harder) from those within.

#### **I. THE CYCLE OF SORROW AND COMFORT.**

##### **A. The Example of Jesus**

1. Though Jesus was the son of God and creator of the universe, he was not exempt from suffering:
  - a. Jesus was called a "man of sorrows" who was "acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3).

- b. "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from what He suffered" (Heb 5:8).
- c. Jesus was made "perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10).
- 2. But Jesus also knew how to find comfort when he suffered.
  - a. The temptations in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry – God's Word., "It is written..." (Lk 4:1-13).
  - b. The temptation in the garden at the end of his ministry - prayer (Lk 22:39-46).

#### **B. The Example of Paul**

- 1. A listing of Paul's sufferings in 2 Corinthians:
  - a. **2 Cor. 1:8-9a**, affliction in Asia (?). Some terrible danger unrecorded. Rescued by Aquila and Priscilla, known by the Gentiles, Rom. 16:4.
  - b. **2 Cor. 4:8-11** - hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, carrying around the death of Jesus, being given over to death.
  - c. **2 Cor. 6:3-5** - (vss. 9-10: dying, beaten, sorrowful, poor, having nothing).
  - d. **2 Cor. 11:23-29**
- 2. Yet, somehow, he does not lose heart or give up. He keeps running the race.
  - a. Chapter 1 - Hard times, but God delivered (vs. 10).
  - b. Chapter 4 - Troubles, yes. BUT . . . (vss. 8-10)
    - i. . . . not crushed, or in despair, or abandoned, or destroyed; the life of Jesus is manifested (revealed).
    - ii. *"We do not lose heart . . . we are being renewed day by day"* (4:16).
  - c. Chapter 6 - Troubles, yes. BUT . . . (vss. 9-10) *"we live on ... not killed ... always rejoicing ... possessing everything."*
  - d. Chapter 11 - *"When I am weak, then I am strong"* (**2 Cor. 12:9-10**).
- 3. How did Paul keep from giving up? How could he keep going in the face of such sufferings? What was the secret that let him find comfort in the midst of sorrow?

#### **Transition:**

- a. The need to know Paul's secret. Sometimes, we are all too quick to have our own little pity parties over how hard it is to be a Christian, over how tired we are, over how disappointed we are in a brother or sister, over how tough it is at times to keep our standards high.
- b. Perhaps instead of stopping in the middle of the race to catch our breath or take a nap, we need to learn from Paul the secret of being a better marathon Christian - the kind that runs through the pain and learns to catch a second wind, a spiritual strength.

## **II. PAUL KNOWS THE SECRET OF ALL COMFORT! [2 Cor. 1:3-7]**

### **A. God Gives Comfort – 2 Cor. 1:3-4a**

- 1. Paul knows who God is.
  - a. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
    - i. God knows what it is like to have a Son suffer.
    - ii. He knows, too, how to help a Son endure.
    - iii. Paul uses God's relationship with Jesus (as both God and Father) to illustrate His relationship with compassion and comfort.
  - b. The **Father of Compassion**.
    - i. He is the Father of both Jesus and Mercy (v. 3). Like Son, like Father.
    - ii. Just as Jesus shows us the nature of God, so too does God's other "son" - compassion [mercy].

- c. **The God of all Comfort**
  - i. He is the God of both Jesus and "Encouragement".
  - ii. Just as God sent Jesus to us and instructed him what to say, so God can send comfort.
- 2. Paul knows what God can do.
  - a. He "comforts us in all our troubles" (vs 4a)
    - i. *parakaleo* - to comfort or encourage. The basic sense of the word is to stand beside someone to encourage him when he is undergoing severe testing.
    - ii. This word occurs 10 times in 5 verses.
  - b. God is there in *all* our troubles.
    - i. *"Nobody knows the trouble I've seen"* – Spiritual from 1800's.
    - ii. God knows those troubles (vs 4a)
    - iii. Does Jesus Care? #507, v. 1
  - c. The God who knows can comfort.
    - i. He is the God of all comfort.
    - ii. For each trouble, he has a comfort.

**B. Christians Give Comfort – 2 Cor. 1:4b-7.**

- 1. The purpose of God's encouragement (vs 4b):
  - a. We have experienced the comfort of God in our lives.
  - b. We learn how to "channel" encouragement to others.
- 2. The pattern for suffering and comfort (vs 5):
  - a. The sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives.
  - b. With the suffering comes the encouragement.
  - c. The encouragement is so great that it flows over into the lives of our brothers and sisters.
- 3. The ministry of encouragement (vss 6-7):
  - a. Seeing suffering as an opportunity to comfort (vs 6a)
  - b. Receiving encouragement to pass it on (vs 6b)
- 4. The result:
  - a. It will produce patient endurance
  - b. With every pain there is enough comfort (vs 7)

**CLOSING:**

**A. Learning to Live with Pain**

- 1. Look to God for your encouragement
  - a. Don't gripe or complain or give up.
  - b. Look for your spiritual second wind from God.
- 2. Look to your brothers and sisters for encouragement
  - a. Let them encourage you.
  - b. Get your mind off yourself by encouraging them.