

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 – God is the Father of compassion who comforts us

Paul, with rich experience of God's comfort, shares this with the Corinthians

Paul, the much persecuted apostle sent to the Gentile nations, praises God for seeing him through many life-threatening difficulties, and uses this to encourage troubled believers in Corinth.

3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

"Praise be to God" – Paul extols God for the suffering and difficulties that he has experienced.

"Father of compassion" – a reflection on God's limitless compassion, and never failing comfort. This letter frequently refers to God's strengthening and refreshing of believers who face difficulty.

• **For further study**, read *Psalm 145:9; Lam. 3:22; Micah 7:19; Isaiah 40:1; 51:3, 12; 66:13.*

IN PRACTICE Few would disagree that Paul was a courageous and good man, who fulfilled a vital and far-reaching mission and gave us much of the NT teaching. Here he alludes to the extreme difficulties he has faced, detailed later in this letter. His point is that, to set out to follow the Son of God who was love and compassion incarnate, is to set out on a rough road. But it is a great training ground, for understanding both the challenges faced by every believer, but also the comfort of God which flows to every believer. The fallacy we all fall for is that of not needing God in the good times, the lure of self-sufficiency. But Paul says, expect trouble – and also expect God to be right with you in the dark valley, our confidence against the fear that evil oppression stirs up. Paul, who has taken more hits than anyone, is a survivor. God who has so often comforted Him, is the same God, there to comfort us.

QUESTION *Paul starts by praising God for His goodness against a backdrop of hurt and hopelessness. How is he coaching us to respond to our pain and difficulty?*

PRAYER Father God, as we come to You as Your children, we are overwhelmed by Your care and comfort while the world is trying to overturn us with hurts and rejections. We call to mind the difficulties and challenges we are facing now – and we praise You that You are not only greater than all of them together, but that You turn the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil into a training exercise and a fresh encounter with Your mercy. We receive Your love afresh, in and through Jesus. Amen.

5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

"Share... in the sufferings of Christ" – cannot, of course, refer to Christ's unique atonement for sin, Romans 5:8-10; Romans 6:10. Paul endured danger, opposition and adverse conditions for the sake of God's people and the gospel, much as Jesus did.

6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

"Distressed... for your comfort" – Paul's opponents sought to use his many hardships to discredit him. Paul maintains that his sufferings are a way God uses to strengthen other believers.

7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

The Living Word

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

The Bible readings for Sunday, March 31, 2019 with commentary notes

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **March 31** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Mothering Sunday. Theme: **The rich working of God's compassion.**

Exodus 2:1-10 – An Egyptian princess's compassion saves baby Moses

Psalms 34:11-20 – The Lord's special compassion for those broken to pride

John 19:25-27 – Jesus expresses His compassion for His mother

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 – God is the Father of compassion who comforts us

Exodus 2:1-10 – An Egyptian princess's compassion saves baby Moses

Moses, born into oppression, is rescued for God's purpose to be fulfilled in Him.

The Israelite descendants of Jacob who followed Joseph had become numerous and a new Pharaoh who knew nothing of the good Joseph had done, resolved to enslave them – and ordered all male Hebrew babies to be thrown into the Nile.

1-4 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

"A man of the tribe of Levi" – named Amram and Jochebed, Ex. 6:20.

"She hid him" – there is a strong parallel here with Israel in Egypt. Moses was born into oppression, saved by an "ark" from a watery death decreed by the pharaoh, rescued and grew to maturity in the Pharaoh's court.

"Papyrus ark" – ark is the same word as used for Noah's massive barge. Papyrus was strong enough to be used for light craft and pitch was used for

waterproofing all boats, Genesis 6:14, Isaiah 18:2.

5 Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it.

6 She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

"Down to the Nile to bathe" – not just washing but morning devotions to a river regarded by the Egyptians as a goddess with life-giving, healing properties. To discover a crying baby floating in the embrace of the Nile goddess (in her perception) would be a significant sign.

7 Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

"To nurse the baby" – children were nursed for three years or more before being weaned, often by a 'wet nurse'.

8 "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother.

9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her,

"Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him.

"I will pay you" – There is an implication that the princess knew who the mother was, and the two women had an unspoken understanding

10 When the child grew older, she took

him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

"I drew him out" – a wordplay on the name Moses, which sound like the Hebrew mashah, 'to draw out' and may be related to a common Egyptian word for 'son'.

IN PRACTICE The thread linking this week's readings is compassion and in this account of Moses' birth and early life we see how God's Father heart of compassion stirred an Egyptian pagan princess to fulfil His purposes, not just for Moses but eventually for the whole nation. The crying baby floating in a papyrus basket is a salvation story which stirs many emotions, and it seems a far cry from the Egyptian chariots, a generation later, bearing down on the Israelites who seemed to face annihilation at the water's edge - until they were "drawn through" the parting waters to be saved from destruction on the other side. God's overriding characteristic is mercy and compassion, and His favourite action is saving. In a world fallen through Adam's sin and largely rebellious towards God, and therefore all too open to the predations of the devil and his minions, there will always be threats, curses and conflicts. A merciful God of compassion stands over all of them, waiting for those who will turn to Him.

QUESTION *Given the wars and conflicts we see far away and close to home all the time, how would you explain what God is like, and why the world He created is not like Him?*

Psalm 34:11-20 – God's special compassion for those broken to pride

11 Come, my children, listen to Me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

"Come, my children" – the earlier part of the psalm, praise for deliverance, now turns to wisdom, which often used the language of parents instructing children.

12-13 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies.

14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are attentive to their cry;

"The eyes of the Lord" – Psalms 32, 33 and 34 all use this picture of God seeing everything

16 but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth.

"Keep your tongue from evil" – the apostle Peter quotes vv. 12-16, 1 Peter 3:10-12, making a point about Christians living in a peace-loving way.

"But the face of the Lord" – a sharp contrast between the Lord's countenance towards those who trust Him and His expression to those who oppose Him in doing evil.

17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; He delivers them from all their troubles.

18 The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

"The Lord hears... delivers... is close" – assurance

that the Lord looks out for those who, in the Hebrew expressions used, are broken to their own pride and stubbornness, Psalm 147:3.

19 The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

John 19:25-27 – Jesus expresses His compassion for His mother

Near to death, He assigns a disciple to care for her.

In this gospel, this event takes place during the account of the crucifixion, after the soldiers had cast lots for Jesus' clothes, but before His last utterances.

25 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

"Near the cross of Jesus" – soldiers would guard the execution and keep spectators at a distance, but women were a low risk for acting violently and were expected to express their mourning, perhaps near to a dying prisoner.

"His mother's sister" – the only reference in the NT to Jesus' mother's sister, who might have been the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John, see Matt. 27:56.

IN PRACTICE Every Christian believer dwells on what it was like for Jesus to give up His life, and not only give it up, but voluntarily take on Himself the punishment and torture and shame that is so graphically recorded. We can dwell on it, but we don't get close - perhaps hold off from getting too close - to the reality of that experience. In all of this, which is beyond our human capacity to understand, there is this exchange which is even more incomprehensible. Jesus, dying in tortured agony where every breath adds to the pain, speaks out His concern for His mother, standing and sobbing in a family group nearer to the Cross than other observers. There is a saying that, what is in us, is what comes out when we are under extreme pressure. What came out of Jesus was His compassion, forgiving His tormentors and charging the disciple who had shown similar qualities with care of His mother. He loves us with that same love today.

QUESTION *Jesus wanted those who were close to Him to love each other - He had made that plain, and demonstrated it again as He was dying. What sort of priority should we make this in our church gatherings and interactions - and why?*

20 He protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.

"Protects all his bones" – the link to the crucifixion in the Gospel reading is that this verse was taken as having been literally fulfilled by Jesus, John 19:36.

26-27 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

"The disciple who He loved" – John is given the responsibility to provide for Mary (on the assumption above, his aunt), almost certainly widowed and without income and therefore dependent on the provision and protection of others.

"This disciple took her into his home" – A Jewish family law could be used to assign the care of one person to another. There is another dimension to this as the embryo church community gathered – Jesus wanted them to love and care for each other, as He had taught with great clarity, John 13:34, John 15:12, 17.