

## 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 *Psalms* 145:9; *Lamentations* 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

The Bible readings for Sunday, April 7, 2019 with commentary notes

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Revised Common Lectionary readings for **April 7** in Bible order

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

Lent 5. Theme: **God is creative in renewing His people and His world**

Isaiah 43:16-21 – Be aware! The Lord is doing a new thing

Psalms 126 – The Lord's new season of restoration for His people

John 12:1-8 – Mary does a new and shocking thing to honour Jesus

Philippians 3:4b-14 – Paul changes radically to gain new life in Christ

## Isaiah 43:16-21 – The Lord is doing a new thing

**Don't expect earlier moves of God to be repeated, but discern His purposes now.**

16 This is what the Lord says – He who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters,

*"A way through the sea" – a reference to the exodus through the Red Sea at the birth of the Hebrew nation.*

17 who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together, and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:

*"Chariots and horses" – representing the most advanced (and costly) military resources. The Israelite refugees, on foot, were no match – apart from God.*

18 'Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.

*"Forget the former things" – The Lord is speaking through Isaiah 200 years before the exile, and 300 years before the return of the exiles. However, people are not to dwell on the Lord's past means of deliverance – He is not to be restricted to a certain way of doing things. Today, we are not to look to a previous revival, as the pattern for the next.*

19 See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

*"Doing a new thing" – not like the "way through the sea" of verse 16 but this time "a way in the wilderness". The common factor is miraculously reversing nature, this time releasing "streams in the wasteland" rather than turning back the sea.*

20 The wild animals honour Me, the jackals and the owls, because I provide water in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to My people, My chosen,

*"I provide water in the wilderness" – benefitting the animals who live there, but also spiritual refreshment and new freedom for the oppressed exiles coming out of Babylon.*

21 the people I formed for Myself that they may proclaim My praise.

*"That they may proclaim My praise" – God's purpose is for people to turn to Him and declare His praise. Looking beyond revivals, His ultimate purpose looks forward to a time when creation generally will turn to God, Isaiah 42:11-12, Romans 8:20-21.*

**IN PRACTICE** In a world that presents us with frequent, ongoing change it is natural to seek to preserve and maintain what we have known and loved. We visit stately homes and take trips on steam railways and rediscover former breeds of farm animals. However, spiritually we must keep moving on -- because God is always moving on. The Bible gives us God's timeline of faith, and He constantly surprises us by doing what He has not done before, and saying, in various ways, "I am doing a new thing". We would rather cling to the last 'new thing'. If we have known the excitement of a move of God in revival or renewal or just gentle revitalisation, first we want more of the same. Then we recognise that we just need more of God -- whatever He is doing now. The challenge is agreeing that it won't be the same.

**QUESTION** *What was the last 'new thing' we experienced in church or Christian life? How much are we looking back to that time? How much are we seeking signs of a different move?*

### Psalm 126 – The Lord's new season of restoration for His people

*A hymn of praise to celebrate Israel's return from exile, with Zion at the centre of His plan. Zion, specifically the hilltop, and meaning 'distinctive', here stands for Jerusalem and for the nation. The general thought is that if the Lord can "do a new thing" and restore Zion, the city, after its season of destruction, He can do the same for the people; and if He could do it in the past, He can do it again.*

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.

*"Restored the fortunes" – after the disastrous fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 589 BC and exile of most of its people, Babylon itself was conquered 50 years later by Cyrus, King of Persia. Cyrus then issued a proclamation allowing the captive people to return to their homelands and rebuild their cities, Ezra 1:1-11; 3:7. The psalm sees the Lord's hand behind the political reversal, and release of His people.*

2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.'

*"It was said among the nations" – the Lord's restoration did more than give the people laughter*

*and joy at the change they experienced – it showed the Lord's merciful character to the surrounding nations, a frequent theme in the psalms and prophets e.g. Psalm 9:11, 64:9, Isaiah 12:4.*

3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.

4 Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev.

*"Restore our fortunes" – repatriation and rebuilding was one thing, the prosperity spoken of by the prophets another. This is a plea to complete the resettlement and bring a full restoration of the prosperity of former times, like the dry river bed of the Negev which becomes a flowing stream when the rains come.*

5 Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.

6 Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.

*"Sow with tears" – hard work and the rigours of farming are also used by God. The person who remains humble and dependent on God will experience His blessings on the land.*

### 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.*

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.*

**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?*

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The screenshot shows a website layout with a navigation menu on the right side containing a list of months from June 2018 down to October 2017. The main content area features a quote: "A nation in spiritual darkness receive a peace-bringing mighty king of David's lineage but heavenly origin". Below this, there are numbered sections: "2 The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned." and "3 You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before You as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder." A "Pages" button is visible at the bottom right of the screenshot.