

## Comfort • 2 Corinthians 1:1-7

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *It Is Well With My Soul*

1. Just around the corner from our hotel in Jerusalem was the American Colony,
  - a. Where diplomats & media big-shots hang out.
  - b. A hotel & restaurant now, it began in the early 1880's as a small community of American believers who moved to Jerusalem to help the poor.
  - c. Their leader was *Horatio Spafford*, a Chicago lawyer & church elder, who with his wife and a dozen others moved there to bring the light of Christ to the people of Jerusalem.
2. Lynn & I went to dinner there with our guide, Amir & his brother, Saar.
3. On a wall of the lobby is a glass case holding mementos from the founding of the American Colony.
4. The most important item there is a piece of stationery from an English hotel.
  - a. On it are written the words to the hymn, *It is Well with My Soul*.
  - b. It's the original Spafford wrote in 1873.
5. In that year, after nearly losing everything in the Chicago fire, Spafford arranged a tript to Europe for his family.
  - a. Delayed by business, he sent his wife and 4 daughters on ahead to England, intending to take a later ship.
  - b. His wife's ship was rammed and sunk by a British vessel, killing all 4 of his daughters.
  - c. His wife Anna survived and sent this simple telegram – "Saved alone. What shall I do?"
  - d. Horatio immediately left for England to bring Anna home.
  - e. On the way back, as they passed the very place where his 4 daughters died, he took out a sheet of stationery from the hotel in England where his wife had stayed, and penned these words –

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,                      When sorrows like sea billows  
**roll;**  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,                      It is well, it is well, with my  
**soul.**

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,                      Let this blest  
assurance **control,**  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,                      And hath shed His own  
blood for my **soul.**

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!                      My sin, not in part but the  
**whole,**  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,                      Praise the Lord, praise the  
Lord, O my **soul!**

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,                      The clouds be rolled

back as a **scroll**;

The trumpet shall sound, and the Lord shall descend,                      Even so, it is well with my **soul**.

It is well, it is well, with my soul.

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6. Those aren't the pious but untested words of some scholar who sits in a secluded study with a desk covered with parchments.
7. They're the words of a man who'd been pressed by the most crushing grief & knew from experience that God is faithful.
8. A few years after losing their girls, Horatio & Anna Spafford moved to Jerusalem intent on bringing the comfort they'd known in Christ to others pressed by trouble.
9. They did! The American Colony became a well-known & respected ministry where many from both the Jewish & Muslim communities came to faith in Christ.

### **B. Today**

1. We've finished our study in Chronicles, so we once again turn to the New Testament and pick it up where we last left off, with 2 Corinthians.
2. We'll get into more background on this letter of the Apostle Paul when we next study it on Wednesday evening, later in November.
3. For now, let me just say that next to 2 Timothy, this is *by far* Paul's most *personal* letter.
  - a. It's also the least systematic or organized of his letters.
  - b. There are several rabbit trails and digressions in it.
  - c. Because of that, some scholars think 2 Corinthians is actually 2 or 3 letters thrown together.
  - d. We know Paul made **3 trips** to Corinth and wrote **4 letters**.
  - e. Some commentators suggest that the 2 missing letters are actually inserted into 2 Corinthians.
  - f. We'll see where in our Wednesday night verse by verse study.
4. This morning, we begin by working our way through the first 7 verses –
8. Where Paul speaks about *our comfort in Christ*.

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. V. 1**

**<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia:**

1. As we read that, I'm well aware there are many here who've been a part of CC for a long time and have sat in many Bible studies.
  - a. Since this is the way Paul opens most of his letters, they've heard all this explained before, several times.
  - b. And right now, they are probably thinking, "Lance, please don't belabor this! I already know what an apostle is, who Timothy was, who saints are."
  - c. "Just move along; these are not the droids we're looking for."
2. Believe me, I would were it not for the fact there are a whole bunch of folk here who've not dug into these verses. This is their first time to understand what

- all this means.
3. The reason Paul identifies himself as an apostle is because that was one of the issues under attack in Corinth.
    - a. As we get in to the letter we discover there'd been a brouha with a guy in the Corinthian church who'd said some pretty nasty & damaging things about Paul.
    - b. The issue was resolved after much difficulty,
    - c. But then there was another round of trouble that came when a group of false teachers arrived in Corinth.
    - d. These clowns renewed the assault on Paul's credibility, saying he wasn't an apostle at all.
  4. This is why 2 Corinthians is one of his most *personal* letters.
    - a. He's put in the place of needing to defend his calling & ministry.
    - b. Not just for the sake of his own reputation,
    - c. But because he knew *what* the Corinthians believed would determine the quality of their faith.
    - d. They needed to know that he was indeed an apostle, one who'd been called & anointed by God.
    - e. Only then would they continue to believe what he'd taught them about the grace of God & the Gospel of Christ.
  5. You see, the false teachers attacked Paul's authority as an apostle, *so that* they could *replace* his teaching with their *own* ideas.
  6. So Paul begins by affirming his apostleship.
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7. The word 'apostle' refers to an officially appointed representative, someone sent with, not a message, but THE message of a king.
    - a. A good synonym for us would be ambassador.
    - b. An ambassador is someone who carries more than just a message, they have authority, officially delegated by a king.
    - c. the ambassador is charged with looking out for the interests of the kingdom and to expand it's influence everywhere he/she goes.
  8. In the early church, the apostles were those original followers of Jesus Whom He commissioned to carry on His work.
    - a. Ephesians tells us they became the *foundation* of the church, with Christ Himself being the cornerstone.
    - b. They were the original 12 disciples, minus Judas who betrayed Christ and hung himself.
    - c. His replacement was hand-picked by God when He intercepted Paul on the Road to Damascus.
  9. Why & how the false teachers attacked Paul's apostleship, and how he refuted their arguments we'll see in the weeks to come.
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10. Paul says Timothy is with him as he writes this because Tim was someone well known to them.
  11. In fact, it was Tim's report about what was going on in Corinth that prompted this letter.
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12. As we saw in our study in 1 Corinthians not long ago, Corinth was the Sin City of the Roman world.

- a. Because a good part of world trade passed through it, it was both rich & decadent.
  - b. So immoral was Corinth, if you wanted to insult someone & say they had no sense of right & wrong, you'd call him/her a Corinthian.
  - c. Whenever the role of a Corinthian was used in a Greek or Roman drama, he always appeared on stage as a drunk.
13. Yet Paul had planted a large church there.
- a. It was a church that had a lot of problems as both letters make evident, but it was a church nonetheless.
  - b. As we read 1 & 2 Cor. we see how the world had crept into the church.
    - 1) Instead of having their minds renewed by the Spirit & Word of God,
    - 2) So that their values & priorities were shaped *by* their relationship with God,
    - 3) The Corinthians allowed the world's values *to shape* their relationship with Him.
  - c. Instead of influencing the world, the church was being influenced BY it.
  - d. Paul wrote to reverse this. And though it took a while and a lot of hard work, eventually it happened.
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- e. [Las Vegas & San Francisco]
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14. That's why he begins here by calling them *saints*; he's reminding them of their identity in Christ.
- a. They're saints; literally → holy ones.
  - b. Men & women set aside from what is common & ordinary to a special relationship with God.
15. In the Bible, saints aren't just a select group of people who've been canonized by the Church.
16. Every believer in Christ is a saint because he/she has been chosen by God & included in His eternal, divine plan.
17. Paul calls them saints because he knew that the key to walking in victory & holiness is to know & embrace our identity, who & what we really are.
18. Christian – you are a saint. Be what you are!

## **B. V. 2**

### **<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

- 1. Grace & peace – 2 words that each deserves its own sermon.
- 2. *Grace-charis* is the Greek greeting; *Peace-shalom*, the Jewish greeting.
- 3. But Greek & Jew come together in Christ so = Grace & peace.
- 4. *Grace* – the unmerited favor & blessing of God that brings beauty & delight.
- 5. *Peace* – the state of being in harmony with one's surroundings.
  - a. Secure, safe, untroubled by distress. No threats on the horizon.
  - b. Free to achieve one's potential because all hindrances have been removed.
- 6. In Paul's greetings, grace always precedes peace because there can be no peace until God first bestows His gracious gift of forgiveness. [appeal]

## **C. Vs. 3-4**

### **<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father**

of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

1. When Paul spoke of comfort & tribulation here, he knew of what he wrote.
2. The church at Corinth had given him a lot of grief.
3. They in turn, as they'd responded to his corrections, had been harassed by the people of their city.
4. But in all these trials, God had comforted them.
5. Indeed, they could not have known God's faithfulness *unless* they'd been pressed.

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6. There are some critical insights to glean here. Look . . .

<sup>3</sup> **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies**

7. "Father" here doesn't refer title/position. It means origin, source.
  - a. God is the *source* of mercy,
  - b. He is the *origin* of mercies = of every occurrence of it.
8. Don't expect mercy from the world. If you do you'll only be disappointed.
  - a. The world is *cruel*.
  - b. The only time it shows mercy is when it's setting you up for a fall.
  - c. There's no mercy in the world because the god of this world is the devil who absolutely HATES you!
9. There's only one place to find mercy—in God. And His mercies are new every morning.

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10. He's also the

**God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our tribulation,**

11. 'Comfort' comes from the same word Jesus used of the Holy Spirit when He said the Comforter would come; the Divine Helper, the advocate called to our side to render whatever assistance was needed at the time.
12. Remember what God said His name was when Moses stood before the burning bush?
  - a. Yahweh – "I AM" / More literally, "I Become"
  - b. The One Who **IS** for us *what we need* at that moment.
13. ***Jesus is Yahweh***; the name Jesus *means*, **Yahweh is salvation**.
  - a. And *salvation* is much more than just forgiveness of sins.
  - b. It's that, but more, more than heaven even.
  - c. You see, salvation isn't just for the sweet by & by.
  - d. It's for now, for the trials of today.
14. Christian, Jesus isn't just Savior for the life here**after**. He's Savior of the life here-now!
15. That's why Paul says He's the God of **ALL** comfort, who comforts us in **ALL** our tribulation.
16. How does He do that?
  - a. **First**, by promising to go with us through it. –
    - 1) Psalm 23;  
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want -

Yea, though I walk thru the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil, for You are with me.  
Your rod & staff, they *comfort* me.

- a) The rod was a weapon to use on predators, the staff a tool to guide the sheep.
  - b) David sees himself as a sheep who as he follows his shepherd, finds himself traveling through a dark, narrow, dangerous valley.
  - c) The shepherd knows what he's doing as he leads his flock; as scary as this valley is to the sheep, it a path to a great pasture.
  - d) David's safety in getting thru it is to stay close to the shepherd.
  - e) Instead of getting freaked out by the darkness & danger of the valley, David fixes his eyes on the shepherd, on his rod & staff.
  - f) He knows the dangers of the valley are nothing in the light of his shepherd's skill.
- 2) Hebrews 13:5-6 - God Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"
- b. **Second**, God comforts us in all our troubles by turning them into tools that shape us into the image of Christ.
- 1) Romans 8 tells us that all things work together for the good of making us more like Christ.
  - 2) Peter reminds us in his letters that trials build character.
  - 3) Salvation isn't just deliverance *out* of trouble – it isn't mere escape; it's **redemption THROUGH** it.
  - 4) God turns our trials into gold,
  - 5) Just as pressure turns a lump of dirty, black coal into a diamond.

**that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**

17. God doesn't help us just so we could brag about it, or so that we could argue over who had the greater revelation of His presence.
18. God helps us so we can encourage and help one another.
19. It's only those who've endured what we've endured who can bring the kind of help we need.
20. One man wrote of his experience of losing 2 of his sons in a short period of time.
  - a. The grief & sense of loss was overwhelming & threatened to send him into total despair.
  - b. A well meaning friend came over and tried to *talk* him out of it.
    - 1) He asked questions, then laid out a convincing argument on *why* the guy shouldn't be so depressed.
    - 2) He'd never lost a child himself, but didn't think that was relevant.
    - 3) The grieving father couldn't wait for the guy to leave.
    - 4) The next day, another friend dropped by, one who had lost a child several years before.
    - 5) He didn't say much; just sat with his grieving friend & waited for him to speak, then responded simply.
    - 6) When he rose to leave, the bereaved man asked if he could stay a while

longer.

7) Because he had himself been comforted by God, he knew how to comfort others.

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21. We ended last Sunday with the exhortation from Hebrews 10 to not neglect gathering as believers to encourage one another.
  - a. We're entering an uncertain time, when there's every indication we'll be beset by hard trials.
  - b. As the pressure rises, the enemy will be hard at work to turn us against one another.
  - c. Let's not forget that our God is the *Father of mercies*.
    - 1) If we are His children, then we *too* must be marked by mercy. <sup>[1]</sup>
    - 2) Not criticism, not gossip, backbiting and envy.
    - 3) All that is the enemy against whom we must unite & present a solid front.
22. When you're being pressed, when tribulation comes, don't allow pride to rip you off from the comfort others can bring you by being all stoic and acting as though everything is fine & dandy.

#### **D. Vs. 5-7**

**<sup>5</sup> For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. <sup>6</sup> Now if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. <sup>7</sup> And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.**

1. The sufferings of Christ Paul speaks of here mean *all* that which we endure *as we follow Christ*.
  - a. It's the hostility we face from the world *because* we identify with Him.
  - b. It's *also* the general trouble that comes from living in a fallen world, but that we trust God in the midst of.
2. As we look to God in the midst of suffering, He consoles us.
3. In fact, sometimes He *allows* suffering just so He can come to us in the midst of it and remind us of His love & power.
4. He did that with the disciples when he sent them across the lake at night.
  - a. A storm came that threatened to drown them. They were terrified –
  - b. Then Jesus arose from His nap and rebuked the waves, which immediately stilled.
  - c. The disciples ended up *more afraid* of Jesus than they had been of the storm.
  - d. But now their fear was placed in the right thing.
  - e. Their fear of Jesus consumed all other fears – & set them free to really live.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. For Others**

1. In v. 6 Paul said –

Now if we are afflicted, *it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.*

2. Paul had *truly* come to understand what it means to follow Christ.
3. What Jesus endured, He did, not just for Himself but for others, for us.
4. Paul says he understood all that he suffered wasn't just so *he* could learn more about the faithfulness & power of God,
5. But so that others would brought into that awareness & an experience of the goodness of God.
6. Paul's suffering brought him *closer* to God. Being closer to God made him more useful to Him and helpful to others.
7. What was true for Paul is true for us.
  - a. Our growth in grace & experience of the faithfulness & power of God isn't just for us.
  - b. It's for others too. God blesses us so that we might be a blessing.
8. Of course, in order for that to happen, there has to be a sharing of our lives with one another.
9. Everything Paul says here requires a commitment to community, to mutual sharing.

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[1] Luke 6:36