

47-01-01.wpd --Channels of God's Comfort
suffering, comfort, consolation
2 Cor 1:3-7

Divine comfort is the plan for the plight of human suffering.

INTRODUCTION: (Text as Scripture Reading)

--Job 5:6-7(Msg), Don't blame fate when things go wrong--trouble doesn't come from nowhere. It's human! Mortals are born and bred for trouble, as certainly as sparks fly upward. Job's words accurately describe the plight of humanity under the consequences of sin. Human *well-being* was God's original plan. Re-establishing that *well-being* is the plan of salvation. But between humanity's terrible Fall and tremendous Future there is trouble, affliction, suffering. And during this in-between time, **HOM.idea**.

--In *His handiwork in nature*, we see the power of the careful Designer of the universe, and we *praise* Him. In *His revelation in Scripture*, we see the compassion of the caring Creator of humanity, and we *praise* Him. But *the God Jesus showed* was His Father, and our text tells us in v.3, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort*." God wants to touch the whole world with the full comfort of His compassion. He provided a unique channel for this in Christ and also in us through Christ....

I. God Makes His Comfort Transferable, v.4

A. God specializes in comfort ("*comforts us in all our troubles*")

1. It comes in a variety of forms: *encouragement, His felt presence, guidance*, (sometimes) an *obvious miracle* or *answer to prayer*
2. God uses a variety of means: *The Bible, Christian literature, a visit from a friend, a hug, a card or letter* [like Paul's epistles]

B. No trouble is beyond the reach of God's *comfort* ("all our troubles"-- physical, emotional, relational, financial, situational, psychological [Frederick Lehman's *Love of God*, built on the 3rd stanza, found penciled on the wall of an insane asylum, but later discovered as the work of a Jewish poet 1000 years earlier: "*Could we with ink the ocean fill, / And were the skies of parchment made, / Were every stalk on earth a quill, / And every man a scribe by trade, / To write the love of God above / Would drain the ocean dry. / Nor could the scroll contain the whole, / Though stretched from sky to sky.*")

C. Any trouble others face can also be addressed by the divine comfort we ourselves have experienced ("*we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God*")

TRANS: **Divine comfort is the plan for the plight of human suffering.** God is the Source, but we are often the "Channels of God's Comfort" (**title**). To understand why this is so, we need to understand something about our human connectedness and see how....

II. Christ's Sufferings and Ours Are Shareable, v.5a, 7a

A. Humanity is connected (and we suffer together)

1. Obviously, humanity shares the same planet (If we trash our planet's environment, all of us will suffer) [Mother's Day celebrations ought to include an honoring of the Earth... environmentalists bumper stickers: "*Be kind to the Earth. She is your Mother.*" Because we are spiritual beings from God, and physical beings from Earth's soil, there is truth in that!]
2. We are *one human race*, connected genetically by blood, and spiritually by a human spirit and soul ("*No man is an island*" [John Donne]; although divided into many we are really one group, which forms the basis of human *communication* across cultures and across centuries of time; it makes human *sympathy* [*feeling with*] possible, and human suffering emotionally shareable.

B. The Incarnation and the Cross realistically connected God with human suffering (He did not just observe our suffering plight, but experienced it humanly in a real body with a human spirit and a human soul) [some stanzas from my newest poem: INCARNATE LOVE

No platitudes on work's reward---	No lofty words on love's ideal---
God learned an earthly father's trade,	He wept at human grief with tears.
And He who was the forest's Lord	His touch on lepers' wounds was real.
Earned bread by wooden things He made.	His "peace, be still" stilled stormy fears.

No sophistry about life's trials---	No sentimental view of death---
He faced temptation at its source	He felt the rusty nails go in.
And overcame the devil's wiles	He struggled with His dying breath
By making Heaven's word His force.	The day He swallowed human sin.

C. The reality of Christ's Incarnation works in both directions: He took on our humanity to take on our sufferings, but when we adopt His incarnation, we can also share in His sufferings

1. This mystery is not often advertised, but Scripture teaches it and we do experience it, as this passage describes ("*just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives...*"-- self-denial, "not my will but Yours..." "Take up your cross...")
2. The shareability of Christ's sufferings becomes *the doorway* for

sharing His comfort ("...so also through Christ our comfort overflows")

TRANS: Divine comfort is the plan for the plight of human

suffering. In Christ, we become part of the comforting process. We become a channel of the *comfort* that flows from God for other people. This why Jesus said, "*Take up your cross and follow Me.*" Not just so we'd have a great future, but for us to bless others. When we receive divine comfort, it is not just for ourselves, but for all who are connected to us. Paul could say, "*we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.*")

III. Suffering Opens the Comfort Channel, v.5b-7

- A. The goal of comfort is not to remove suffering, but *to endure it with victory*-- v.6, "*...your comfort ... produces in you patient endurance...*" [Song from John 16:33 in KJV, "These things have I spoken unto you / that in Me ye might have peace / in the world ye shall have tribulation / but be of good cheer / be of good cheer / for I have overcome the world."] This Christ's faith for us, based on His own sufferings.
- B. Can we have faith for other people? Yes!-- v.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. (When you know the healing touch of God's comfort for your own grief, trouble, pain, or discouragement, you can believe in that touch for others.... WE MUST TRY IT!)

CONCLUSION:

--**Divine comfort is the plan for the plight of human suffering.** By receiving God's comfort in connection with Christ, we automatically become capable of channeling that comfort to others.

--The chorus of "*Make Me a Blessing*" is really a request that God make us a divine channel of His comfort. Before we stand to sing that prayer,

I want to read stanzas 1&3 [1. Out in the highways and byways of life, / Many are weary and sad; / Carry the sunshine where darkness in rife, / Making the sorrowing glad. // 3. Give as 'twas given to you in your need, / Love as the Master loved you; / Be to the helpless a helper indeed, / Unto your mission be true.]

2 Cor 1:3-6 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, {4} who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. {5} For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. {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. {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.