

The Comforter

The Comforter

Key Verses: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all **comfort**, who **comforts** us in all our affliction so that we will be able to **comfort** those who are in any affliction with the **comfort** with which we ourselves are **comforted** by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our **comfort** is abundant through Christ."* 2 Corinthians 1: 3-5

Her life was hard from the day she was born. Babies born into poverty seldom find their ways into the comfort most of us, and our children, have known and, quite frankly, take for granted. Her dad was seldom around. When he was, she often wished he was not. Her mother did the best she could, but they barely got by. Her only real possession was a used comforter she received as a gift one Christmas from her mother. She treasured it as if it was woven from the finest silk, though the label read "100% polyester". She had no idea what that meant and did not care.

Eventually the young girl and her mother found themselves on the street with just the clothes on their backs...and, of course, the comforter. It was now beginning to show some wear and tear, much like the lives of this woman and her daughter. They found shelter at the local mission and other places that offered temporary housing, but never a home. God not only made little children very huggable, He also made them very resilient and trusting. No matter what happened, she felt safe as long as her mother was around, and she could wrap herself in that fraying comforter.

Street life eventually takes its toll on even the hardest of people. Her mother began to have health issues that went too long unattended. That happens more than it needs to with people on the street. Sadly, the illness took her life

leaving the girl, now approaching her teen years, alone – except of course for the comforter.

It grieves the heart of God that our affluent churches and society are too often MIA when it comes to these young “ladies” left to fend for themselves on the streets. The outcomes are almost never good, often leading to lives of drugs or prostitution and eventually incarceration. Such was the plight of our young “lady”. Perhaps the saddest thing was when she went through the booking process into the holding cell, they took away her only possession...the comforter.

Sitting alone in a cell, she wept bitterly. And, as so many people do when bad things overwhelm them, she blamed God for all that happened in her life—an abusive dad, her mother’s death, and now they took away the only thing that mattered in her life—that ragged old comforter. It was only gift she ever remembered receiving and last memory of her mother’s love. Now even that was beginning to fade.

The Comforters of this World

At times, all of us have sought comfort from the world. We often begin with other people who we hope can at least sympathize, but in the end little real comfort. Consider these words from Job, David, and Solomon.

“Then Job answered and said, “I have heard many such things; miserable comforters are you all.” Job 16: 1-2

“Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick. And I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.” Psalm 69: 20

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun and behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them.” Ecclesiastes 4:1

When people feel rejected, they often take one of two bad paths. The first is substances—alcohol, drugs, anything that brings immediate or short-term relief that takes pain away or at least makes us numb to it. I have been among many hundreds of men (and women) who sought comfort there. So tragic. That is the first step in Satan's clever schemes to entrap us then lead us into the chains of addiction—bondage God never intended for His free people.

The second untoward path is when people who feel strong rejection turn to *anyone* who will accept them as did the girl in the story. That often puts them in worst places, i.e., the wrong crowds or in dangerous relationships that imprison or lead them to do things they never intended. AND they never found the comfort sought.

God our Comforter

Let's look to David again for the best verse in the Old Testament about the comfort of God. In the best-known of all Psalms, 23rd, David said this in verse 4,

"Your rod and staff, they comfort me."

The meaning may surprise some. The rod is for authority, protection, and discipline. Knowing someone loves us enough to speak biblical truth and exercise authority – at times by setting boundaries – is a great expression of love. The rod was used for discipline to get sheep back in line and keep them there. Doubtful any of us would argue we need that at times. I found over the years, many I minister to wish they had it when they did not. God said He "disciplines those He loves as a father does his children." (Proverbs 3: 12; Hebrews 12: 6)

The shepherd's staff was there for guidance, safety, protection, and rescue. Again, the love of God is demonstrated in every aspect of these tools of the shepherd.

Jesus Our Comforter

it is both painful and joyful to remember this. ***God did not comfort Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane or on the Cross!***

The Father did not take the cup of death away as Jesus prayed. Neither did He send angels to destroy evil and save Jesus from the cross. Rather He allowed Jesus to go through the most ***uncomfortable*** period of suffering and abuse the world has ever known—crucifixion.

Jesus knew no comfort, so we would be comforted in knowing He died for our sins and rose again. (Read again the key verses above.) From God's indescribable acts of love, we draw our hope eternal and the kind of comfort the world will never know apart from Him.

The Holy Spirit – Our Comforter

Jesus did His best to comfort His disciples. They were getting more and more anxious about all His talk of leaving them. Would He really abandon them? Of course not. Neither does He abandon us. Here is the promise He made to His disciples that we can stand on today.

“And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” John 14: 16 – 18
KJV

So by now many want to know what happened to the young lady in the story? When we left her, she was entering prison for drugs and prostitution – without her comforter, full of anger and bitterness.

The Rest of the Story

Strange things happen behind prison walls. God does some of His most amazing work in those confines. Don't misunderstand. Most enter and leave without ever finding any comfort at all. Statistics bare that out. But for some who realize their desperate place in life, and that they have nowhere else to turn, the name of God is known to pop up in some circles of conversation. By God's grace, our friend was incarcerated in a prison where the chaplain was a Christian and a local church with a prison ministry was engaged.

Because she had arrived at such a place in life, she attended a service one night with below zero expectations. Her mind simply could not escape the thoughts of all that had happened to her and her mom. Anger and bitterness can fill even the tender heart of a child and render it hard as stone as it had done in hers. But God...

The speaker passed out some old worn King James Bibles. When he returned to the podium, he asked them to a certain page. He read that passage in John 14 on the Holy Spirit. But the only word she heard was "comforter". That got her complete, undivided attention. She had heard a little about God and Jesus as a child – who hasn't? But she never felt His presence or saw Him in action. No one ever told her how much God loved her or showed the compassion of Jesus to her or her mom in a meaningful way. All she heard and knew were just empty words.

Now something quickened a lifeless spirit within her. She hungered for something or someone to fill that empty void in her life she filled in every way possible from drugs and evil men. Prison life had isolated her even more. But now someone said the magic word—**Comforter**. She wanted to hear more about this Comforter that promised love and life and offered hope she never knew.

As the weeks and months went by while she served out her term, she became alive again and soaked up all the Truth she was

taught. Finally, completely broken, she fell into the arms of the only Comforter Who could wrap His arms around her and never let her go. She gave her life to Christ and found the comfort she had longed for since losing her mother...and the comforter.

One final note. When she was paroled and on the way out of the prison, they gave her a bag that contained what she was wearing when she entered. It contained some dirty old clothes and one ragged old comforter. She embraced and buried her face in it. She wept as she sniffed it hoping for a familiar smell that would remind her of her mother. But it only smelled of must and dust.

As she walked out of the prison into a world where she was really free for the first time, she thought about throwing the old comforter in the trash. After standing by the can for a few minutes, she decided to keep it as a reminder—a reminder that once she found her only comfort in this ragged old piece of fabric. Now she had lasting comfort from the One Who turned her heart of stone back into flesh replacing anger and bitterness with love and hope. Jesus Christ, her risen Savior and Lord.

You and Me as Comforters

My dear sisters and brothers, if you have found any comfort in these words the Lord shared tonight through me, use them to comfort someone else. I call your attention again to the Apostle Paul's words in verse 4 above. The Lord did not give us His comfort simply to wrap ourselves up in it as a comforter like the one in the story. No. Like any gift from God the Holy Spirit, He intends for us to use it for ourselves for the purpose He intended, then give it away.

Our greatest moments of comfort come from the comfort we ourselves have received in Christ then sharing it with so many others who, like the girl in our story, seek comfort the world

cannot give. In Christ alone, we have hope and comfort that bears us up no matter what human condition or place we find ourselves.

Walter