

# Enduring The Intolerable

John 16:33

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## ENDURING THE INTOLERABLE

"I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."  
John 16:33 RSV  
"You will find trouble in the world--but never lose heart, I have conquered the world"(Phillips)

"In the world you will have trouble. But courage! The victory is mine; I have conquered the world." (New English Bible)

I. Introduction --I can stand it no longer!  
A. Everyone of us sooner or later finds himself in an intolerable situation.

1. Some of these situations are temporary
2. Others seem to have no termination and as we look ahead we see no way out.

B. We find that we face difficulties which seem impossible

1. Burdens too heavy to be borne
2. Requirements too severe to be endured.

II. As long as man has lived he has had to face these intolerable situations.

A. The ancient civilizations of the East sought an answer.

1. In ancient Egypt people found strength to endure by denying any meanings and any importance to what they could not escape.
2. In India people succeeded in finding

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complete triumph of mind over matter and wherever Buddhism prevails we find a conviction that all things of the earth are illusions.

3. Simply deny the reality of what bothers us -- this is an attempt at a solution.

B. This solution leads to other attitudes.

1. It stifles all reason and makes foolishness of all research into the nature of things of the earth.
2. If I am a traveller, says Edith Hamilton, and take shelter for a night in a storm it really does not matter whether or not I mend the roof of the shelter.
3. She goes on to say: "India has gone the way of the things that are not seen until the things that are seen have become invisible."

C. "So the East found a way to endure the intolerable..."

III. This way to deal with an intolerable situation is not only found in Egypt and India.

A. Many people will not face the reality of a situation.

B. Some of us always try to avoid difficulties or it might be better to say that we try to evade them.

1. We refuse to admit their reality
2. Dr. Bonnell tells about a young girl who came to him for a series of interviews. In the first one she said: "I had a nervous breakdown so I had to leave college." Several months later she rephrased this and said:

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"I wanted to leave college so I had a nervous breakdown!"

IV. The classic story of a man trying to run away from an intolerable situation is told in the 19th chapter of the first Book of Kings.

A. The prophet Elijah had been having a very difficult time with King Ahab and his wife Jezebel.

1. He had won an apparent victory on Mount Carmel
2. Then, as so often happens in these intolerable situations everything seemed to fall apart.

B. The result was that Elijah fled into the wilderness and sat down under a juniper tree.

1. "And he asked that he might die"
2. We should never miss the fact that he was not only discouraged -- he was scared.

"Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah saying, So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow."

C. Elijah felt that suddenly meaning was gone from his life.

1. He had fought for righteousness and it seemed to amount to nothing
2. What was the use of moral effort?
3. It seemed that all life, instead of going forward was slipping back.

D. How did God help Elijah deal with this intolerable situation?

1. He let him sleep first and then he fed him!
  - a. We are not disembodied spirits
  - b. We need rest and we need physical nourishment

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2. He gave Elijah some specific things to do

- a. anoint Hazael to be king over Syria
- b. Jehu to be king of Israel
- c. Elisha as his own successor
- d. Canon Sunday of Oxford told his classes that 3/4 of all the honest intellectual work of the world is nothing but drudgery pure and unrelieved.
- e. Billy Mead used to say that inspiration was the application of the seat of the trousers to a chair in front of a typewriter

3. He gave Elijah a faith

- a. Perhaps we should say a philosophy of history
- b. Elijah was shown that God was using history to fulfill his purposes.
- c. He saw something bigger than Elijah, but he saw himself a part of this larger process.

4. God helped him overcome his sense of isolation.

- a. Methodist did not meet primarily to witness a religious drama--in the sense of ritual--they met to

Share Christian experience  
Derive strength from  
Christian fellowship

- b. God said: Elijah, you are not alone. "Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him."

E. So the story ends: "SO HE DEPARTED FROM THERE"

V. Christianity has a way that will help you deal with intolerable situations

A. In the first place we need to see that Christianity deals with our everyday life.

1. Canon West of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine has written a helpful book of meditations on the Sermon on the Mount. Speaking of the religion of the people of Jesus' day he says that a large number of them knew a lot ABOUT religion. "BUT THE OVER-WHELMING MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE, LIKE US, HAD ONLY AN ANNOYING BAD CONSCIENCE ON THE WHOLE MATTER. THEY WERE REPELLED BY THE PROFESSIONALLY RELIGIOUS--DISCOURAGED BY THE SEEMING IRRELEVANCE OF RELIGION TO DAILY LIVING, AT LEAST DAILY LIVING FOR THE LIKES OF THEM."

2. "What had the Law and the Prophets to say to the great mass of unhappy and frustrated people of the day?"

3. These were the people who flocked to Jesus and hung on his words and he had something to say to them.

4. I believe he has something to say to us, too.

B. In the second place we shall discover that Christianity does not try to avoid facing our troubles. In fact it urges us to recognize that we can expect to have trouble.

1. "In the world you have tribulation" says the Gospel of John -- or as Phillips translates it: "YOU WILL FIND TROUBLE IN THE WORLD."

2. Hamlin Garland once wrote:

"Do you fear the force of the wind,  
The slash of the rain?  
Go face them and fight them,  
Be savage again.  
Go hungry and cold like the wolf,  
Go wade like the crane:  
The palms of your hands will thicken  
The skin of your cheek will tan,  
You'll go ragged and weary and swartly  
But you'll walk like a man."

3. That may be too bombastic for todays people but it does represent for me a healthier attitude than the whining, snivelling whimper which we hear today.

3. I like to read about the Apostle Paul and I like to read what he wrote. Do you recall the Scripture: "NOT THAT I COMPLAIN OF WANT: FOR I HAVE LEARNED, IN WHATEVER STATE I AM, TO BE CONTENT... I HAVE LEARNED THE SECRET OF FACING PLENTY AND HUNGER, ABUNDANCE AND WANT. I CAN DO ALL THINGS IN HIM WHO STRENGTHENS ME."

C. Finally--this is it. Paul had learned the secret.

1. He did not face life alone

2. Now let us finish the quotation which the Gospel of John represents Jesus as saying: "IN THE WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE. BUT COURAGE! THE VICTORY IS MINE! I HAVE CONQUERED THE WORLD."

3. Phillips Brooks once said: "Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be strong men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks."

4. The Christian uses the intolerable situation as Jesus used the cross.

a. Nothing could be more intolerable than that.

b. Yet he was able to take such a experience and through it to transform men.

c. At this Lenten Season do not forget the cross.

d. Take the intolerable situations of your life and your world and discover how you can use them for good.

5. In contrast to other unsatisfactory ways Christianity faces the difficulty realistically and uses it for creative ends.

VI. There are many intolerable situations in our world--there are many tragic concerns--there are many intolerable situations in our lives but God is concerned with them, and if we are willing to face them rather than to try to evade them He, through Christ, will strengthen us and we shall overcome them. In the world you will have trouble. But courage. The victory is his. He has conquered the world.