

2 Corinthians 1:1-7

Good morning and thank you for joining us. We're beginning our study in 2 Corinthians, but in order to set the scene, would you please turn in your Bibles to Acts 18? In Acts 18 we see the beginnings of the church of Corinth.

Just as we do when we begin any book of the bible, it's important to understand the historical background of what's taking place.

The city of Corinth had a population of half-a-million people. Immigrants from the world over settled in Corinth, bringing with them every lewd and wicked practice known to man. Corinth was an evil place.

SHOW PIC Every night in the city 10,000 so-called "priestesses" left the temple of Aphrodite and hit the streets and alley-ways to prostitute themselves. Sexual immorality wasn't just tolerated in Corinth, it was institutionalized as part of their local religion.

CLOSE PIC

Yet in this city of sin, the Holy Spirit used Paul to start a vibrant and Spirit-filled church. That's what we'll see as we go through verses 1-19

1 After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. 2 And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome); and he came to them. 3 So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they

were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and Greeks.

5 When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. 6 But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook

his garments and said to them, "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." 7 And

he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus,^[fn] one who worshiped God, whose house was

next door to the synagogue. 8 Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And

many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.

9 Now the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be

afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; 10 for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this

city." 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

12 When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 saying, "This fellow persuades men to worship God contrary to the law."

14 And when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or wicked crimes, O

Jews, there would be reason why I should bear with you. 15 But if it is a question of words and names and your own law, look to it

yourselves; for I do not want to be a judge of such matters." 16 And he drove them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the

Greeks^[fn] took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. But Gallio took no notice of these

things. 18 So Paul still remained a good while. Then he took leave

of the brethren and sailed for Syria, and Priscilla and Aquila were with him. He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there; but he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Paul ministered in Corinth for 18 months, probably in A.D. 51 and 52. He then left, taking Priscilla and Aquila with him as they went to Antioch.

Later, Paul made Ephesus his base camp for almost three years. And it was while Paul was there in Ephesus that he heard the troubling news-there were several problems in the Corinthian church.

Paul then wrote a letter urging the believers in Corinth not to tolerate sinful conduct in their midst. Sadly, this 1st letter Paul wrote is not in existence today.

Paul then received another update from the church in Corinth requesting his guidance on a variety of subjects. Topics including marriage, divorce, food offered to idols, and the exercise of spiritual gifts in the church. But Paul also had to address the fact that the church at Corinth was condoning, rather than disciplining, sinful conduct.

Paul then wrote a second letter, which is what we call 1 Corinthians in response to that report.

And Paul's letter got a mixed reaction...Some of the Corinthians repented. They responded with a godly sorrow that led to change.

But others resented Paul. "How dare Paul rebuke us! Who does this guy think he is!"

In fact, detractors in the church at Corinth began to question Paul's authority. They dared to cast doubt on his integrity, his honesty, and even Paul's courage.

It was one thing to disagree with Paul, but the Corinthians resorted to mudslinging and slander. Truly absence doesn't always make the heart grow fonder!

News of the reaction to 1 Corinthians came to Paul while he was in Macedonia. In response, he penned another letter to the church. We call it, 2 Corinthians. This is written about a year after 1 Corinthians.

In this letter of 13 chapters, Paul defends himself and his ministry. 2 Corinthians is a raw, emotionally-charged letter. Paul shares his heart and pleads his case as he does nowhere else.

This book has ministered to me personally perhaps more than any other book in the Bible, it's strengthened and comforted me at my lowest moments. It's hard to go through this book without being stirred, because even though we're all different, we all know what it's like to suffer.

As we go through this book I'm calling this series 'Power in Weakness', because that is a theme that is woven throughout these chapters. Despite the pain and the trials, and our lack of sufficiency, God is faithful.

We're only studying verses 1-7, and the title of this morning's message is The Comfort of Christ

Lets pray

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, Paul's introduction of himself as an apostle is necessary because he was held in low regard by some of the Christians in Corinth. Paul wasn't an apostle by an election process or selection committee. Paul was an apostle by the will of God.

To the church of God which is at Corinth, Paul doesn't say, "to the church of Corinth." He says, "To the church of God which is at Corinth." There is not a church of Corinth. There is not a Church of England. There is only one church: the church of God. See there is this tension between the church and the city. The church which is to be holy, amongst the city which is wicked.

And it's a measuring stick for every church. Is the church influencing the city, or is the city influencing the church?

...1 with all the saints who are in all Achaia: **SHOW PIC** Achaia was the coastal region of Greece. Corinth was the seaport city on the isthmus, east of Athens. This shows us that Paul intended his letters to be shared among the churches in the region **CLOSE PIC**

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This greeting of grace and peace is typical of Paul's

letters, in fact Paul uses this exact phrase five other times in the New Testament.

And each time, the word grace is always first, peace always second. This is because grace is the source of peace. And you can't have peace from God without the grace of God.

Nearly 25 times in both 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul will refer to Jesus as the Lord Jesus Christ, so we should be reminded of what this means. In fact, the phrase Lord Jesus Christ is a Title, a Name, and a Mission.

SHOW PIC

Lord: A title designating not only master and boss, but also the Lord revealed in the Old Testament (known as Yahweh or Jehovah)

Jesus: The given name of the son of Mary, and adopted son of Joseph, which is the Greek pronunciation of Joshua. The name Joshua means, "Yahweh is salvation."

Christ: Is His mission. This is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew word for Messiah, or "Anointed One." This is the One prophesied by the Old Testament Scriptures, sent by the Father to save and deliver us.

CLOSE PIC

So when you see the Lord Jesus Christ, think Title, Name, and Mission

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, Paul opens this letter by praising the God who gives mercy and comfort. Paul knows the mercy and comfort of God in a very personal way.

Remember, Paul was a man who never knew if he could be dead or in prison the next day. He had many enemies and was in constant danger. Yet throughout these letters we see that Paul spent much of his time praising God.

The words 'all comfort' in this passage come from the Greek word *paraklesis*. The idea behind this word for comfort in the New Testament is always more than soothing sympathy. It has the idea of strengthening, of helping, of making strong.

Realize, the Greeks knew nothing of this kind of God. **SHOW PIC** Greek gods and goddesses were believed to throw thunderbolts down from heaven, and inflict curses on populations. They specialized in making life hard on those who crossed them. Natural disasters and sudden calamities were attributed to the capricious whims of the Greek gods. **CLOSE PIC** And when the citizens of Corinth served and sacrificed to these gods, they did so not out of love, but to try and pacify them - to keep them off their back, and out of their life.

So imagine the surprise to these newly converted Corinthians to hear that the true God, is a God of mercy and comfort.

Verse 3 tells us that God the Father is a comforter. We also know that the Holy Spirit is also our comforter **John 14:16 "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever."**

And we see the scriptures that God the Son, Jesus is also our comforter, **Hebrews 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.**

God, in every aspect of His being, is full of comfort, strength, and help for us. God does not abandon us or leave us to fend for ourselves!

4 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.

God works in us, in order to work through us. He comforts us to make us comforters.

God desires to involve us in His work, but we have to go through the necessary preparation. What kind of impact do you think we'd have on suffering people if God rescued us then protected us from all future trouble?

If we never got sick, or hurt, do you really think the people around us would listen when we talked to them about God's comfort and mercies?

See there's a world of difference in quoting a few verses, and passing out sound advice, versus walking through someone's trials with them when you yourself have experienced the same hurt. Our words, no matter how well intentioned they may be, can seem hollow and shallow until people realize how God has comforted us in our afflictions.

It's important to keep this perspective in mind, because what trials and circumstances we're begrudging and resenting now might be what qualifies us to speak into a person's life later.

It's wisely been said: "God doesn't comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters."

But the person who has empathy has surely paid a price to obtain it. The tendency for all of us when we get hurt is to shut down, and lick our wounds - to sit on the sidelines and sulk in our sadness - but healing comes to us when we keep on caring, and loving, and reaching out to others.

Yet sadly, we often never receive the comfort God wants to give us through other people, because our pride refuses to allow us to show our vulnerability to others. Pride keeps us from revealing our needs to others, so we never receive the comfort God would give us through them.

STORY?

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Make no mistake, Paul understood suffering. 2 Corinthians 11:24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils

in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Paul understood suffering. I get a flat tire and my day is ruined!

God may allow situations in our life where our only consolation is found through Christ. Sometimes we think the only consolation can be found is when circumstances change. But not so. God wants to console us right in the midst of our difficult circumstances, and to do it through Christ.

This is the same idea Jesus expressed in **John 16:33: These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will[fn] have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.**”

Jesus also suffered, therefore He is fully qualified and able to comfort us in our time of trial. **Hebrews 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

6 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. When God allowed Paul to suffer, He was teaching

Paul to empathize. And when God comforted Paul, He was showing Paul how to comfort others. Either way, God worked in Paul to work through Paul.

Yet that's not how it was seen by the Corinthians... When they saw Paul suffer they concluded, "Doesn't God protect His own? Paul must not be God's servant."

Story of Alex...?

And when Paul enjoyed peace and prosperity they concluded, "If the world opposes Christ, and Paul is doing so well, he must not be doing anything for God." Comfort or conflict, Paul was in a no-win situation...

Yet here, Paul sets the record straight, "Whether condemned or consoled, God is working in him to help them - the Corinthians!" If afflicted, he can better relate to those who need God's comfort. If consoled, he can better share God's comfort with those who are hurting.

It's unlikely the Corinthian Christians were suffering in exactly the same way Paul had. Probably, not one of them could match the list Paul made in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Yet, Paul can say they are the same sufferings because he recognizes that the exact circumstances of suffering are not as important as what God does and wants to do through the suffering.

Effective for enduring: God's desire is that we would be enduring through suffering. The Greek word for enduring is hupomone. It isn't the idea of passive, bleak acceptance, but of the kind of spirit that can triumph over pain and suffering to achieve the goal.

I read a quote that said 'It is the spirit of the marathon runner, not of the victim in the dentist's chair.'

We'll end our study in verse 7

7 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. In his critics' eyes Paul can't win. But in his own eyes he can't lose. His hope is steadfast. If you suffer for Christ now, one day soon you'll be comforted by Him.

According to many passages in the New Testament, suffering is promised in the Christian life **1 Thessalonians 3:3, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.**

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

All of us have survived a proverbial flood or two, or 20 in our lives by the grace of God. We've lived through some brutal times in our lives, and lived to tell about it.

Maybe you've gone through the hard parts in marriage-you can share how the Lord redeems.

Perhaps you've gone through the health scare, you know what it's like to endure chemotherapy and you've been able to smile again- you can offer hope.

Whatever the Lord has delivered you from and through, we need to use those things to encourage those who are struggling. Pointing them to how Jesus has comforted us in our trials.

To the grief stricken, we can offer the hope of **Hebrews 13:5 Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."**[fn]

To the guilt ridden we can offer the hope of **Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,[fn] who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**

To those who are overwhelmed at their circumstances, we can offer the hope of **Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.**

To those who feel beyond God's grace, we can offer the hope of **John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**

When we suffer, when we go through hardships, God's not punishing us. We wonder that sometimes don't we? We try to replay the past and dissect what we've done to bring on our difficulties.

How we must remember God punished Christ for what we've done. God laid it all upon Jesus on the cross. **2 Corinthians 5:21**
For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Isaiah 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.

In the midst of our hurts, and struggles, God's not punishing us, He's equipping us for something we still have to do. He's doing in us, through his HS, what no human can do. He's doing in us what no textbook, or Tedtalk, or motivational speaker could ever provide.

We receive from God what we can give to other people. It's more than intellect, it's knowing Christ more intimately, and knowing He is the God of all comfort.

In my years here as a pastor, I can't remember a time when so many of you were dealing with such difficult circumstances. And as much as we are here to help you, to bear your burden with you, to pray with you, you know and I know that at the end of the night, when you lay your head on the pillow, it's just you and the Lord.

I pray you know Him as your comforter. And in the midst of your pain, hurt and even confusion, be ready to comfort others.

This brings us to communion

So often in our trials our perspective goes right out the window...earth is not our home.

Luke 22 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Luke 22 20 Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.