

Down But Not Out
2 Corinthians 1:3-11
Part One

This past week four friends went on a fishing trip in the Gulf of Mexico on a 21-foot private fishing boat. The four friends were free agent defensive end Corey Smith, who last year had played with the Detroit Lions, Oakland Raiders linebacker Marquis Cooper, former South Florida football player Will Bleakly, and another former South Florida football player named Nick Schuyler.

When they started their trip the weather was calm, but heavy winds picked up through the day and the seas got heavy, with waves of 7 feet and peaking at 15 feet. Unfortunately one of those waves capsized the boat tossing them into the rough seas. At this time they were approximately 35 miles from shore and were now in the process of fighting for their lives.

To their credit and by virtue of their hard work they did manage to get themselves back to the boat, which they clung to for approximately 12 hours in 63-degree water.

So what happened? Three of the four men, suffering the effects of hypothermia and unable to think clearly, took off their life jackets, released their grip from their capsized fishing boat and floated out to sea where they eventually perished.

So, what does this story have to do with us? It has a great deal to do with us. Perhaps we will never be thrown into the same cold waters as these men were and perhaps we will never have to cling to a capsized boat while we are being battered by heavy seas, but there will be times in our lives when we are facing extremely difficult circumstances that we will feel as if we have been thrown into those same dark, stormy waters.

And in those times, if we cannot find comfort in the midst of the storm we will invariably begin to think on things we should not think on causing us to become anxious and fearful and ultimately if uncorrected lead us to become desperate and hopeless.

So, what is the key for avoiding all of this? I believe the key to avoiding all of this is to know what the Bible says about comfort. This is because it will be our ability to find comfort in the midst of the storm that will allow us to think on the things that we should be thinking and to feel the things that we should be feeling.

And this is my hope for this message this morning that when we are tossed into the dark, cold waters of this life, we, based on what we learn from this passage, might be able to find the comfort we need in the midst of the storm so that we might be able to hang on until help arrives.

So where can we go in the Bible to learn as much as we can about comfort? I don't know of any passage that deals with this subject any more thoroughly than **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**, the passage that we will begin to examine this morning.

So let me read this passage for you. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, (4) 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. (5) For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. (6) But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; (7) and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort. (8) For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; (9) indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead; (10) who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us, (11) you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.”**

As we begin to examine this passage we will answer three different questions. Where should we look for comfort? Can we be assured of finding it? And if we find it, what are we to do with it once we have it?

This morning we will answer only the first question, where should we look for comfort? In other words, where should we look for comfort when we need to feel as if things are going to be okay even while we are being battered by the circumstances of life?

Let me first of all tell you what most people usually look to for comfort. They usually as a first response look to themselves for comfort thinking that they somehow through their own efforts will be able to deliver themselves. And if that fails then they begin to look to others who are typically just as weak and frail as they are. Now for those who are of this world I can perfectly understand why they would do this, but for us, the followers of Christ, there is a better answer. So, what is that answer? Paul gives us the in **2 Corinthians 1:3**.

When we have been tossed into the dark, cold stormy seas of life and we are clinging to our capsized fishing boat we should look to God for comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3).

Let me read for you **2 Corinthians 1:3**. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”**

Now I know that Paul is not specifically telling us that we should be looking to God for comfort in this verse, but I believe by implication this is exactly what he was saying. And why was he saying it and why was he saying it in this way? It is because when he was writing these words he was at the moment basking in the comfort that God had provided him in respect to his own dealings with the Corinthian church. This is what led him, I believe, to break out in praise at the beginning of **verse 3** calling God **“blessed,”** and this is what led him to expand on the theme of comfort all the way down through **verse 11**.

Let me review for you quickly the history of Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church so that you might understand exactly how the comfort of God became so prominent in the mind of Paul.

Hopefully you remember that Paul had established the church in Corinth over an eighteen-month period, during his second missionary journey, beginning in **A.D. 50**. Unfortunately, the church after its inception was filled with all kinds of problems and was a source of grief for Paul. And how do we know this? We know this because of the letters that Paul was compelled to write to them over a period of several years, which I spoke to you about last week. So, what was the first letter?

The first letter, which has not survived but was alluded to in **1 Corinthians 5:9**, was written shortly had Paul had left the church in approximately in **A.D. 52**. And why did he write this letter to them? He wrote it in order to get them to separate themselves from various brothers and sisters in Christ who had chosen to live immoral lifestyles. And how did the Corinthian church respond to Paul's letter? They ignored it. At this point in our story it was as if a very large wave had struck Paul's fishing boat, which was the Corinthian church, and the boat was capsized throwing Paul overboard.

So why did they ignore the letter? They ignored it because they, as a church, were having a very difficult time taking sin seriously. This flippant attitude toward sin obviously led to further problems within the church, which Paul addressed in a **second letter**, that we know as **1 Corinthians**. This letter was written in **A.D. 55** while Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey. And how did they respond to this letter. They responded pretty well. So in a sense the storm that had tossed Paul overboard and into the sea was now subsiding but it would very shortly get much worse.

So what happened? Shortly after having received the letter, false teachers arrived in Corinth from Jerusalem and began to undermine Paul's authority as an apostle of Christ and challenged certain of his teachings. Paul in response to this threat to this rather fragile and immature congregation chose to leave Ephesus in order to make a visit to Corinth based on **2 Corinthians 2:1**. This visit did not go well. During this visit Paul was personally confronted and publicly ridiculed by these false teachers, based on **2 Corinthians 2:5-8, 10; 7:12**. And did the church rise up to defend him? No, they sat on their hands and let him take the abuse. This was absolutely the most terrible time. And it would have been so easy for Paul simply to release his grip on the Corinthian church and to simply float away into the pit of despair and into the state of hopelessness but he didn't.

Paul returned back to Ephesus and wrote a third letter, which we also do not have, that is alluded to in **2 Corinthians 2:1-4**, which has become known as the severe letter. Paul in this letter apparently lowered his guns on the Corinthian church, not to harm them, but to save them from these agents of Satan.

Then after finishing the letter he gave it to Titus who was instructed to deliver it to the Corinthian church and then to report back to him at Troas.

Did this happen? No! This did not happen. In fact, Paul did not hear from Titus about how the Corinthian church had responded to his third letter until he reached Macedonia while he was on his way to Corinth.

So let me ask you a question. Did Titus give Paul a good report or a bad report? He gave him a good report. And did this positive report that Paul received from Titus about the church at Corinth comfort him? Absolutely! It comforted him big time. It was as if he saw the lights of a rescue ship coming toward him, and this is what I believe motivated him to write what he wrote in **2 Corinthians 1:3-11**.

But we need to make sure that we understand something. This was not the first time that he had been comforted by God in respect to the Corinthians. God had been continually supplying him comfort in the midst of all his dealings with the church at Corinth. In fact, it was God's continuing supply of comfort that made it possible for Paul to continue to cling to the Corinthian church, which was in effect his capsized ship even while he was, in fact, being battered by them.

So why did Paul continually look to God for comfort in respect to his dealing with the Corinthians even when things looked so bad? It is because of what he believed about God. And fortunately for us he actually listed those things he knew about God in **2 Corinthians 1:3**.

So what does 2 Corinthians 1:3 tell us about God that should cause us to look to Him for comfort when we are facing difficult circumstances?

First of all, we should look to God for comfort when we are facing difficult circumstances because He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:3). Isn't this exactly what Paul told us with his very first words in **2 Corinthians 1:3**? Let me read these words for you, "**Blessed be**

the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So how does knowing that God is the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ help us to look to Him when we have been tossed into a very dark and cold and stormy sea?

Knowing that the God of this universe is also “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” assures us that when we come before His throne He will receive us (Hebrews 4:14-16). Hallelujah!

He certainly will not receive just anybody, but if we have a personal relationship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, He certainly will receive us into His presence if we approach Him in faith believing that Christ is not only God’s lamb, who through His shed blood satisfied the debt of our sin, but is also our great high priest who having offered himself up for our sin once for all is even now in the presence of His Father making intercession for us. And what should this understanding do for us? And what should this assurance that Christ will receive us lead to? It should lead us to come into His presence with confidence.

Let me read for you **Hebrews 4:14-16**. **“Therefore, since 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 One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”**

So now let me ask this question. Do we believe this? If we do then what should we do when we are tossed into a very dark, cold and stormy sea and we are looking for comfort? We should look to the Lord for comfort.

So what else does **2 Corinthians 1:3** tell us about God that should cause us to look to Him for comfort when we are facing difficult circumstances? We should look to God for comfort because He is a merciful God (2 Corinthians 1:3). Isn’t this exactly what **2 Corinthians 1:3** tells us? Let us once again look at **2 Corinthians 1:3** but this time we will go a little bit further. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies.”** Praise God!

Knowing that God is a merciful God not only assures that when we come to Him that He will receive us but that He will do so compassionately (Psalm 103:13-14).

Just because we may know that God is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and we can therefore expect to Him receive us, there may still be some of us here wondering exactly how He might receive us. Paul has no doubt at all. He believes that we will be received very well. How does He describe God? He describes Him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and then he goes on to say, **“The Father of mercies.”**

But what does this exactly mean? Let me now read for you Psalm 103:13-14. **“Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. (14) For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.”** This obviously is very reassuring. It is one thing to get access to someone; it is quite another thing to know that once we gain access that we will find someone who will treat us with a heart of compassion.

God is not indifferent to our needs, and if we come to Him, taking advantage of the access that we have through Christ, we can be confident that He will treat us compassionately. And why is this? It is because He is the Father of mercies.

So now let me ask you this question. Do we truly believe this? If we do believe this then what should you do if you are tossed into a very dark, cold and stormy sea knowing we have access to God through our Lord Jesus Christ and that He is a merciful God? We should look to Him for comfort.

But we are not done. There is still another reason for us to look to God for comfort that we have not yet considered based on **2 Corinthians 1:3.**

We should look to God for comfort in difficult circumstances because He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). Let us now once again go back to **2 Corinthians 1:3** but this time I will read for you the entire verse. **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, The Father of mercies and God of all comfort.”**

Notice the word “all.” The use of the word “all” in 2 Corinthians 1:3 excludes any other source of comfort and also emphasizes the complete adequacy of the comfort when God supplies it. So how does knowing this minister to us as we look to God for comfort?

Knowing that God is the “God of all comfort” assures us that we do not need to go to anyone or anything else in order to find the comfort that we are looking for.

We cannot find this kind of assurance with anyone else or in other thing else. This is why it is so important for us to look first and foremost to the Lord for our comfort. And this is exactly what Paul did.

If he had been looking to the Corinthians for his comfort over the seven years since he first met them he would have been crushed by all of the disappointments, all of the setbacks, and all of the heartache, but this was not what happened was it? He remained hopeful because God had comforted him.

In other words, rather than being crushed by all that he had suffered, Paul, believing that God through Christ was not only accessible and merciful but also capable of supplying him all that comfort that he would ever need, looked to God and God alone for his comfort. And this is exactly where we need to look at well.

People throughout their lives will be confronted by difficult circumstances. And while they are in the midst of those circumstances they may feel as if they their boat has capsized and they have been thrown into the midst of a very dark, cold and stormy sea.

And if they cannot find a way to be comforted in the midst of their ordeal they will invariably begin to think wrong thoughts that will lead to feel anxious and fearful. And if those feelings persist without any relief they will invariably find themselves spiraling downward into a pit of despair and into a state of hopelessness.

So, what are you going to do if you, at some point in your life, face difficult circumstances? I would hope that you would turn to God knowing that because of your relationship to His Son that you have access to Him, and

because He is the Father of all mercies He will receive you compassionately, and because He is the God of all comfort we can know that He is more than able to completely comfort us, giving us that feeling that everything is going to be okay, no matter how bad our circumstances might be

So hopefully will join with the Psalmist in saying as he did in Psalm 121:1-2, **“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.”**

May God give us the grace to look to the Lord for comfort when we are facing difficult circumstances in light of all that we know about Him.