

THANKSGIVING – FROM PAIN TO PRAISE

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

Introduction:

“What is the most painful thing you have ever experienced?” That is a very personal question, but the answer can be quite revealing. If I asked you to actually answer that question, I would probably get quite a variety of responses. Some people tell of a broken arm in childhood, and we realize they’ve not yet encountered much pain in life. Others have endured more pain than we can imagine—not just physically, but real life-pain. And pain like that changes us, either for better or worse.

Suffering is not something we really like to deal with or talk about. Yet is it something we ought to expect as Christians. The Word of God and history are clear about that. The early apostles also knew what it was to suffer. In fact, according to tradition, they were all put to death for their faith and preaching, except for John, who was the only one of the twelve to die a natural death. Yet he, too, knew what it was to suffer. He was banished to the island of Patmos by the emperor Domitian where he lived out the last years of his life in exile.

Today is Thanksgiving Sunday, and it may seem strange to be talking about suffering and pain. But sometimes we have to confront pain and find a way to get beyond our pain in order to find a reason to praise. I hope we can do that this morning.

The Apostle Paul knew suffering. This morning we are going to look at some words from Paul that I hope will help us get a handle on this subject of suffering and enable us to move from pain to praise.

(Much of what you will hear this morning is not original with me. I believe I first found it in the Nelson’s Preachers Sourcebook – I have used it a few years ago, but it bears repeating.)

I want to take you to 2 Cor. 1:8-11. In this passage Paul talked about his most painful experience, and I want us to see how it changed him.

I. What We Faced

Read v. 8. Here we see a glimpse of what Paul was facing. Paul used stark language here. “...we do not want you to be ignorant (*uninformed*), brothers, of the affliction (*hardships*) we experienced in Asia.” The word he uses here is often translated *tribulation*. The root idea is that of pressure. What kind of pressure? “We were burdened beyond measure.” (NIV) It’s like he was saying, “I’ve had difficulties in the past, but I’ve been able to measure them. When I was chained, that was a *five* on the pain-scale. When I was beaten with rods, that was *seven*. When I was shipwrecked in the deep, that was *eight*. When I was stoned, that was *nine*. When I was flogged, that was *ten*. But this pressure and pain was off the chart. It was: “above strength.” He didn’t have the inner reserves to deal with it. It was crushing. “I despaired even of life.” Here the great advocate and example of resilience and hope used the word *despair*. What experience in the apostle’s life is he referring to? We don’t really know. Nothing mentioned in the Book of Acts really seems to equal what Paul described here. By not knowing the specifics, we can better relate it to our own experiences.

There is a church mentioned in the NT that knew something of suffering. Go to Rev. 2:8-11 – the church in Smyrna – read vv. 8-9 - affliction, poverty, religious persecution. These believers were struggling under a burden that was crushing them.

It was pain beyond measure. Paul experienced it. The church in Smyrna experienced it. And just maybe some of you are experiencing that kind of pain as well. But is there something we can learn from that pain? Paul goes on to talk about ...

II. What We Learned

When we are in pain, we often ask *Why?* But Paul didn’t ask it—he answered it (v. 9). “*Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*” The Lord brought him to the edge of the grave to teach him to trust the One who can work all things for good even when it seems to be too much and too late to escape.

In Rev. 2:8 Jesus identified himself to the suffering church in Smyrna: "...the words of the First and the Last, who died and came to life." Paul says, "that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." God brought His Son Jesus Christ through to victory. He brought Paul through his pain. He will do the same for us.

The writer of Hebrews said, "...looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." (12:2-3)

Rev. 2:10 – "Do not fear what you are about to suffer." When faced with suffering, that is exactly what people need to hear. But more than that, they need to hear it from the one who really knows and understands.

When Jesus says, Do not fear what you are about to suffer, he speaks as one who has been there. He suffered in ways we will never know or understand. Yet he endured and he overcame, and now he calls on us to do the same.

Our greatest times of spiritual growth are often during difficult periods of life. Perhaps if you are in considerable pain today, it's because God wants to develop your faith in order to accomplish a wonderful result.

III. What We Experienced

Having taught him that lesson, the Lord gave Paul a threefold deliverance: *Read v. 10* – The verb "to deliver" occurs here in the past, present, and future tenses. The NKJV renders this verse, "(He) delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us." In other words, He did and He does and He will deliver. In 2 Timothy 4:17–18, the very last words that Paul ever wrote, he said: "...I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom." Then having written this, Paul was promptly beheaded! Isn't that interesting? That tells us something about a Biblical perspective on

deliverance. God delivers us all along the way, but one day He's going to snatch us out of all our pain and pressures and problems.

Refer back to Rev. 2:10 again. Jesus says, Be faithful, don't quit, don't give up. Hang in there, even if it ultimately means death—we don't face that much in our world, but others have and many will continue to do so. The reward is the crown of life.

James 1:12 – "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." Refer back to Paul...

IV. Why We're Thankful

Turn back to 2 Cor. 1. Paul doesn't stop with the thought of deliverance. That leads him into the area of thanksgiving and why we are thankful.

You see, there is something that helps along the process of deliverance—the prayers of God's people. *Read v. 10b-11*. Have you ever wondered why God provides for prayer? If He has delivered, is delivering, and will yet deliver, why do we need to pray? So we'll have a part in what He's doing. When we pray about a situation, we gain a sense of ownership for it, and when the deliverance comes, our thanksgiving rises up to God.

Conclusion

Friend, if there is pressure or pain in your life today, take it to the Lord Jesus and learn afresh to lay it at the feet of the One who can raise the dead—the One who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. If you know someone in pain, come alongside as an invisible ally, praying earnestly for them and rejoicing—giving thanks—when the deliverance comes. There is an old hymn that says:

'Tis the grandest theme through the ages rung;
'Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue;
'Tis the grandest theme that the world e'er sung,
"Our God is able to deliver thee."

Is that not reason enough to be thankful this Thanksgiving Day?

Prayer

Communion:

Colossians 1:11-14 – *“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

As we think of God’s deliverance this Thanksgiving Day, the most wonderful truth we can give thanks for is what Paul expressed in those verses. God has delivered us from the darkness of Satan’s control and has brought us into the light of his glorious kingdom.

But to do so cost the blood of his own Son...

May we never lose the wonder of the cross and what was accomplished in Christ’s death for us.

Song: The Wonder of the Cross