

2 Corinthians 1:8-22 – “Reliability of God’s Promises”

1. Trust through Trials – 1:8-11

1:8 - *For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.*

Paul wasn't sharing some message that he hasn't already experienced himself. He's been through the ringer. He knows what it's like to suffer and be afflicted. Paul experienced these things to the degree that he didn't think he would make it through. He's been through persecution after persecution.

- We're not sure exactly what trouble in Asia he's speaking of. Could be the events in Ephesus (Acts 19:13-20:1). Could be a separate trial in another place in Asia.
- “There are at least five suggestions for this trouble: (1) Fighting with “wild beasts” in Ephesus (1 Corinthians 15:32). (2) Suffering 39 stripes after being brought before a Jewish court (2 Corinthians 11:24). (3) The riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41). (4) A particular persecution shortly before he left for Troas (Acts 20:19; 1 Corinthians 16:9). (5) A recurring physical malady.” (Guzik)
- But Paul hit the kind of pressure where he felt like his number was up. Like he was a goner. There was no amount of strength within him that helped.
- Ever been in that kind of trial? Where it's so heavy, there's nothing you can do to alleviate the pain and you reach the point where you think this is going to take you out.

I remember the time I pulled up to a Starbucks a couple years ago, excited for my seasonal Egg Nog latte, and I was told they're no longer making them. My body went numb, I despaired with a despair I hadn't experienced much before. Ok, I know that's nothing compared to what Paul's been through. But here's the take away for us...

- Paul doesn't want us to be **ignorant** of the troubles he's faced, along with his companions. Whether or not we've been through intense heat before or not, we see that others have. And they've made it through. And look at Paul's resolve and outcome from these trials...

1:9-10 - *Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, ¹⁰ who delivered us from*

so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

He was at the point where he felt the death sentence was looming over him. It was curtains. But this caused Paul all the more to trust in God, believing that God could raise them up from the dead! And essentially God did! Paul was spared and he's now communicating to these believers in Corinth, and encouraging them, that God is a delivering God.

- This is another benefit of trials. It teaches us to be dependent on God. When things are going good we can tend to kick things into auto-pilot. We can just coast along without a worry in the world. But when trials come we see our need and that we are hopeless on our own. It teaches us to trust God. Trials bring us to the end of ourselves and brings us back on track with God. God is our source of power and we must remain dependent on Him to walk in His strength and comfort.
- Whatever pressing (*tribulations*) you're experiencing, may it cause you to press into God all the more and know His strength and comfort.

1:11 - you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.

Prayer is vital. Not just for ourselves to be focussed on the Lord, but it's important to pray for others too. Paul was thankful for the prayers others gave for him.

- Don't underestimate the importance of prayer. **Philippians 1:19**, "*For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,*"
- We may not always know what to say to those in affliction, but we know we can pray! And that has an amazing effect not only on strengthening those in affliction, but it also causes many to rejoice when we see what God ends up doing – ***that thanks may be given by many persons...***
- Prayer leads to praise!

Now what was the ***gift granted*** to Paul and his pals? Their deliverance! They saw God to a great work and He received the praise and glory.

Be people of prayer. When pressures mount, press into God and pray. And you'll find through prayer a comfort that will lead to praise.

2. Conduct in Criticism – 1:12-16

1:12 - For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.

As we've said, Paul was facing a lot of opposition. False apostles had come into the church at Corinth and were critical and cynical against Paul. They tried to discredit him as a true apostle. Not only did they do so by saying his trials must be an indicator that he's not really called of God, but now they try to claim he's untrustworthy and unreliable.

- Paul had said in **1 Corinthians 16:5–7**, *"Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). ⁶ And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits."*
- So when Paul doesn't show up exactly when he said he would, the critics are all over him and trying to turn people against him.
- But this wasn't Paul being flaky or double minded. We know that at other times he was hindered by the Holy Spirit to enter into a specific area.

Paul goes on to say in fact that he has a clear conscience. He's conducted himself in integrity and sincerity.

- This word **simplicity** is the Greek word *haplotēs*. It means singleness (as in singleness of mind); free from hypocrisy.
- The word sincerity is the Greek word *eilikreneia*. It means purity of motive. This comes from a Latin word 'sinicerus' (*sini* = without; *cerus* = wax).
- When making busts out of stone or marble, if they made a mistake, lopped off an ear or a nose by mistake, they discovered you could mix wax with ground up powder of the stone, and you could replace a feature without anyone being none the wiser.
- However, when they took it home and left it out in the Middle Eastern Sun, that thing would begin to melt off again. So the busts would begin to be sold with the label, '*sini cerus*' – without wax.
- Paul uses this expression to say that he's not a phony. He's not trying to hide anything from them, he's the real deal. What you see is what you get.
- All the trials and tribulations have only proven this. When the heat was turned up, Paul remained true and sincere, **by the grace of God**.

How do we respond when the heat is cranked up? Do we become less Christ like, or is that when we become all the more solidified in Him?

1:13-14 - *For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end ¹⁴ (as also you have understood us in part), that we are your boast as you also are ours, in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Paul isn't adding anything new to what he's writing. You don't have to read between the lines with him. He's been integral in all he's said. He's said what he means and means what he says.

Now here's the thing, when the Lord Jesus returns (***the day of the Lord Jesus***) all things are going to be brought to the light. Whatever we thought we may have been hiding will all be exposed for what it is. This is when all our motives will be clearly seen whether we did what we did truthfully and unto the Lord, or whether it was done for self.

Paul is confident that when the Lord comes back, these believers will be able to boast in him, that they will see he's been pure and truthful.

1:15-16 - *And in this confidence I intended to come to you before, that you might have a second benefit—¹⁶ to pass by way of you to Macedonia, to come again from Macedonia to you, and be helped by you on my way to Judea.*

Paul had every intention to come to them. He wasn't just blowing smoke. He was confident he would come to them as he made his way to Macedonia, and then would swing by them again on his way out of Macedonia back to Judea. He didn't say this half-heartedly, this was his desire. But the Lord had other plans.

- For the believer, there's nothing wrong with making plans, but we need to keep those plans in the Masters hands. Just like when you miss a turn on your GPS and it needs to recalibrate your direction, there are times the Lord needs to recalibrate our direction so we stay aligned with His will.

3. Assurance in Apprehension – 1:17-24

1:17-18 - *Therefore, when I was planning this, did I do it lightly? Or the things I plan, do I plan according to the flesh, that with me there should be Yes, Yes, and No, No? ¹⁸ But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No.*

Paul was never flippant in his plans or his promises. He thought through what he said so that he would not be seen as hypocritical. He's not functioning as someone who walks according to the flesh, where there's no concern for truth.

- Some people only want to say the things that will be accepted or agreeable.

But Paul was happy to say a strong Yes, or a strong No. In other words, when he says yes, he means it. When he says no, he means it. He's not wishy washy.

Paul even compares his word to the faithfulness of God's Word. God is always faithful. What He speaks, is absolutely dependable. The one thing God cannot do is lie. He is a truth keeping God. And in like manner (not sure that I would be comparing myself to God) Paul says, we too spoke a confident word of truth.

1:19-20 - *For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. ²⁰ For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us.*

Paul knew the importance of keeping his word because if he lied in other areas, how could the message of Jesus Christ that he preached be trusted?

- Isn't that something important for us as believers to keep in mind? Are we living integral lives? Is there hypocrisy that others see? It's sad to see how many people use that as an excuse to reject God.
- There's really no excuse to be had, because regardless of what man may do, people need to look to Jesus. He alone is perfect and true. He will never let you down. ***All the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen!***
- But we're certainly reminded that our witness leaves an impression.

Notice something important here, all the promises of God are ***in Him*** (Christ). It's as though God is saying all my promises are wrapped up in, and fulfilled through, Christ!

"Because God's promises come true *in Christ*, we say the *Amen* (Hebrew, 'it is true') *through Christ to the glory of God* (verse 20). Christ is the 'go-between'. God speaks to us *in Christ* and we, who have received the message, speak back to God *through Christ*. The apostle is teaching us that we may approach God by no other path and glorify Him by no other means. Sin prevents us approaching God in our own right; but we may draw near *through Christ*." ¹

¹ Barnett, P. (1988). *The message of 2 Corinthians: power in weakness* (p. 39). InterVarsity Press.

“Jesus Christ reveals the promises, fulfills the promises, and enables us to claim the promises!” ²

Each promise gets a resounding Amen (so let it be).

1:21-22 - *Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, ²² who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*

Paul didn't really need to go into a heavy defence of his role and who he was. He wasn't too worried about what others said of him, because he knew God was establishing him, as he's done with the believers in Corinth. God was faithful. And Paul and the Corinthian believers were being linked together through the work of God. Not only has God established or confirmed them, but they've been **anointed** by God.

- This is the idea of being consecrated (set apart). A prophet, priest or king would be anointed into their new office. Paul likens this to God commissioning or placing us into the family of God.

And we see the work of the whole Trinity in securing each believer and establishing them in the promises of God.

- “**God** had established them in the faith, confirming them **in Christ** by the ministry of the word of God. He had also **anointed** them with **the Spirit**, qualifying, empowering, and teaching them.” ³

But wait, there's more! The Holy Spirit has also **sealed us**.

- A seal was used at this time to mark ownership. Merchants would put their seal in wax on cargo to authenticate themselves as the owner of it.
- This is what God has done for us! We're His! When we give our life to the Lord and are born again, the Holy Spirit comes in and seals us.
- But the definition of this Greek word (*sphragizō*) also means 'security from Satan'.

Not only are we sealed, but the Holy Spirit becomes a **guarantee** for us that better things are coming.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 634). Victor Books.

³ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1823). Thomas Nelson.

When we go through tribulations and trials, it's easy to think where's God? Why am I going through this? Is life going to ever get better? Here's the answer, Not only is God with you, but He's put His seal upon you and has guaranteed you that things are going to get better. He's going to return and claim you to Himself and usher you into your inheritance – eternal life!

- **Ephesians 4:30** says, "...you were sealed for the day of redemption."

We can trust God! When you're in a time of pressing, God will establish you. What He speaks in His Word is dependable – it's always Yes and amen. How can we know these things are true? He's given us His Holy Spirit to anoint, seal, and guarantee us that we're His and His Word will stand true, even in our lives!