

"The Cure for Discouragement"

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

Introduction: Tonight we again return to our study in 2 Corinthians, and we have now come to 2:12-17. There is so much here for us to see, but before we dive into the verses, let me prepare your mind for what we are about to dive into.

When we trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, we immediately signed up for a life of great blessings and also a life of trials and struggles. So the believer's new life in Jesus Christ can be an emotional rollercoaster at times. We must understand that as believers we are members of the Lord's army; and so therefore we have a large spiritual bullseye on us. We also must remember that we are in a sin filled world, and as we live in obedience to God's Word, we can expect opposition. Then we must keep in mind that we are all sinners and so there are going to be people who are going to disappoint us and grieve us.

As believers there will be times of discouragement and even depression. Let me show you the emotional rollercoaster in the life of Elijah.

1 Kings 17:1

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.

This was a mountain top experience in Elijah's life as he stood before Ahab and shook his fist in his face and told of the coming drought. But let us notice what happened later.

1 Kings 19:1-5a

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword.

² *Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time.*

³ *And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.*

⁴ *But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and **he requested for himself that he might die**; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

⁵ *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree,...*

Jezebel threatened the life of Elijah and he fled into the wilderness and requested that God would take his life. Elijah had gone from the top to the bottom.

Let me now get your mind back to 2 Corinthians. The Apostle Paul also experienced great discouragement and depression. We shall see this is the text which is before us. Now not only will we see the discouragement which Paul experienced, but we shall also see where he found ENCOURAGEMENT at this low point in his life.

I. The Discouragement

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:12

Paul had sent Titus to Corinth, and he was waiting for his return so that Titus would give him the report of how the believers responded to the letter which Paul had wrote to them. It seems apparent that Paul and Titus had planned to meet at Troas. So Paul left Ephesus and made his way to Troas and planned to preach the Gospel while he waited for the arrival of Titus. When he arrived at Troas, God had opened a door unto him, which means that God had placed before him an opportunity to preach the Gospel.

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:13a

Here we see that when Paul arrived and God opened the door, Paul had no rest in his spirit. Possibly Titus missed the boat which was to bring him to Troas, but we can only speculate about why he did not show up but the bottom line was that he was not there. At the same time Paul's mind was spinning concerning the letters which he had written to the believers at Corinth. Paul was so concerned about how the people would respond to the letters that we are told that he had "no rest in his spirit".

You see Paul had invested so much into the church at Corinth. He had preached there for 18 months when the church was started. When the church began, he could see the potential which existed within the church. They lacked in no gifts.

1 Corinthians 1:4-7

⁴ *I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;*

⁵ *That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge;*

⁶ *Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:*

⁷ *So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:*

Then on top of all of this there was the strategic location of the church. It sat at a cross roads of foot traffic and mariner traffic. But with the direction the church seemed to be going, Paul was concerned they may throw it all away. Not only was there that concern, but he was also concerned that they may never want him to set foot in their presence again. Let me show you how much this situation worked on Paul.

2 Corinthians 7:5

⁵ For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.

Here we see that Paul was troubled on every side. He had outward fightings and inward fears. This was a reference to the worries and the concerns which he had for the church at Corinth. He was fearful that they would not repent. He was fearful they would buy into the lies of the false teachers who had attacked the credibility of Paul. Paul was at a point here in which he was feeling pressure from all sides because of what was happening within the church at Corinth.

Now let me show you how the pressure had impacted Paul's ministry.

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:13

When Titus did not show up, Paul left "THEM" and moved on to Macedonia. When he says he "LEFT" them, it means he left the disciples at Troas. His heart was so heavy from the sin in Corinth and the situation there that he had a difficult time preaching the Gospel. But Paul had preached the Gospel long enough that there were people who were saved and there was the start of a church in Troas. The point which we need to understand is that Paul's heart was so heavy that he walked away from the open door and moved on to Macedonia when he hoped to meet Titus. Paul was at a very low point in his life.

Notice the words of Robertson:

"It's a dangerous hour for the preacher. His heart is in danger of rebellion. Then when the door is closed, the door that opened to large fields of usefulness, resentment can harden the heart. There was no happiness for Paul in Troas, he had lost his zest for work and idleness was despair. Everything seemed to have gone wrong. There was no joy anymore for Paul's restless spirit."

Now let us notice how Paul was encouraged.

II. The Encouragement

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:14a

Here we see that Paul now directs his focus toward God for he knew that God is the TRUE source of joy.

Application:

This is a great lesson for us! It is so important in our lives to get our focus upon God. When we are faced with trials and the storms of life, we often lose our focus. We allow our eyes to get fixed upon the problem and we neglect to focus upon God. Let me show you what happens when we do this.

Matthew 14:22-28

²² *And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away.*

²³ *And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

²⁴ *But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary.*

²⁵ *And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea.*

²⁶ *And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.*

²⁷ *But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.*

²⁸ *And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.*

²⁹ *And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus.*

³⁰ ***But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me.***

Peter walked on the water while his eyes were on Jesus Christ, but when he looked at the wind and the water, he began to sink. This is what happens to us when our focus falls upon our problems. Paul knew in the midst of his despair that he needed to get his focus upon God, so that he does. He begins to count his blessings as he moves on.

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:14

I want to draw your attention to the word "triumph" here in this verse. This word is referring to a specific event which happened in Rome. It was known as the "Roman Triumph". Let me explain what it was.

When a Roman general had gained a victory in war in which he conquered an enemy of at least 5000, there was then a Roman Triumph held for him. They would dress him in a purple robe and place him in a chariot pulled by 4 horses. The processional would be led by priests who had censors filled with sweet smelling incense. Behind the General would be the captives from the battle who were chained and led to their execution. In the processional would be his army who had gained the victory under his leadership. Some of these Triumphs would last for 2-4 days due to the size of the processional. There would be 2 white bulls involved in the parade, and the parade would make its way to the Temple of Jupiter where the bulls were sacrificed. The parade went from there to the colosseum, where the captives were executed. The Roman Triumph was a time of great celebration due to the victory of the General.

This is what Paul had in mind when he used the word "triumph". This was in the mind of Paul in Colossians also.

Colossians 2:15

¹⁵ *And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.*

So let me now get your mind back to overcoming discouragement. Paul gets his focus upon the victory which he had in Jesus Christ. Jesus has conquered our greatest enemy which is death, and now we are victorious in Him.

1 Corinthians 15:54-57

⁵⁴ *So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.*

⁵⁵ *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:14-16

Here Paul praises God for the opportunity to serve Him and to have an opportunity to make a difference for Him. But there is so much more here to see.

Paul states that our message is a savour of life unto life in some and a savour of death unto death in others. But what does he mean by this? He is again thinking of the Roman Triumph. Remember I told you that in the parade there were priests who carried censors filled with sweet smelling incense? Well there were also those in the city of Rome who

covered the streets in aromatic flower pedals. So to those who were part of the General's army, this was all a smell of victory and it was the smell of life unto life. But to the captives it was a smell of death unto death, for they would smell this beautiful aroma on their way to the colosseum to be executed.

Application:

This is what happens when we share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. To those who are saved, it is a message of life unto life; but to those who reject the Gospel, it is a message of death unto death.

As Christ leads us in victory, the Gospel to us is always a sweet savour of life unto life.

Illustration:

Recently I had the opportunity to share the Gospel at a funeral, and I was able to see both sides of this. To many the message was a sweet savour of life unto life but to one man it was a savour of death unto death because the man did not want to hear about the believer's victory in Christ.

So Paul praises God for the opportunity to serve and to have an influence in the lives of other people.

Notice 2 Corinthians 2:17

Here Paul praises God that he is led by the Spirit of Christ.

He contrasts himself with the false teachers who "peddle" the Word of God for personal profit and personal gain. The false teachers distort and twist the Bible to say what they desire for It to say. But Paul makes it clear that he was not like that, but instead he was speaking IN Christ. He was controlled by the Spirit, and He understood the magnitude of that blessing.

Conclusion:

This is how Paul came up from the pit of discouragement. He directed his focus toward God, and he began to count the blessings in his life. This is a great pattern for us to follow when we too fall into the pit of discouragement. Let me show you the words of Ray Stedman on the victorious life in Christ.

"The victorious Christian life is not one of continual victory in the sense of overcoming all obstacles and feeling triumphant as you go. No! No! It is one of anguish of heart at times,

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of deep inner doubts, of fighting with frustrations without and fears within. It is one of being opposed oftentimes, yet confident that the God who is within you is able to work his work and do his will, that out of the fear, the frustration, and the failure is coming triumph and victory and the fragrance of Jesus Christ."