

THE BRIGHT SIDE OF DARK TIMES

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

INTRO: Turn your Bibles, or turn them on to 2 Corinthians 1. While you are finding the chapter, let me say thank you for all the prayers you have prayed for us over the past several days. I feel the strength of your prayers and am thankful.

Today, I want to preach on the subject, "The Bright Side Of Dark Times". As Christians who serve a sovereign God, we have the knowledge that everything we go through in life is filtered through the mercy and grace of one who loves us completely. His love does not shelter us from the realities of this life, but it places us intimately in His care. Ultimately, because of His perfect character, everything that we ever go through will come to a calculate end, for our good and His glory. Let's read our passage together as we look to the Word of God.

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 *"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many."*

There are 4 things Paul mentions in these verses that I want to point out to you. Notice Paul speaks of...

I) GREAT PRESSURE: v8 *"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself."*

ILLUS: I played sports all my years growing up. I LOVED PRESSURE SITUATIONS. My first love was baseball and I was a pitcher. A GOOD PITCHER! I loved it when the game was on the line and I was in control of what happened next. The coach had his say but now stood in the dugout waiting to see what would happen, and I stare down the next batter with all the confidence I could muster... I loved that!

But in life, pressure is not met with as much enthusiasm as it is on the ball field.

ARE YOU GOOD UNDER PRESSURE? Just by a show of hands, how many of you tend to excel under pressure? Just raise your hands, someone will see. THEN THERE ARE THOSE WHO CHOCK UNDER PRESSURE... Are there any chokers that would admit it? I've been known to choke under pressure from time to time. And there has been a lot of pressure lately. And the verdict is still out, as to how well I'm doing.

I don't know about you, but I'm glad to know that someone like Paul also knew the weight of pressure. He wrote to the Corinthians, the pressure we were under... *"was far beyond our ability to endure..."* That gives me a little comfort, knowing that I'm not the only one going through things. The great apostle went through difficult things also. I haven't been singled out to feel the pressure of life, Paul felt it too! You may feel it! Don't ever let the devil deceive you into thinking you're the only one that goes through dark times. He is trying to isolate you from the flock, feeding you lies, in the hope of taking your life. BUT HE IS A LIAR! Everyone goes through hard times sometimes.

I) GREAT PRESSURE: v 8 CONTINUED PRESSURE, PRESSURE, pressure to *prepare* another dinner, pressure to *produce* another pay check, pressure to *pretend* you know what your doing when your kid is struggling and looking to you for answers. **CAN YOU FEEL THE PRESSURE? I CAN.** I feel it every time I stand to preach.

Now, this could be preached on from a lot of different angles. We could talk about our individual pressures, comparing whose is hardest, the most challenging, the most difficult. BUT, I don't think that would be true to the context of this passage. Look at what Paul says, v 8 "*We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure...*" Paul does something here that's a little interesting. He says he wants to share something with his readers about what he's been through while in Asia, but then he doesn't ever tell them what it was. WHAT? WHY NOT? There are scholars that have tried to figure out what might have happened, but we just don't know. Now, the church at Corinth may have known, but we don't know. Was it the beast at Ephesus that he fought, that he referenced in 1 Corinthians 15? Was it the time that Demetrius, the silver smith, in Acts 19 tried to run him out of the city because he was preaching about Jesus? IDK! Was it the time they beat him with 39 lashes in front of the Jewish proto-council because of his preaching that was upsetting the religious system? We don't know! We don't know what it was, but we know what it did, and how it made him feel.

I believe there was a reason he left it vague. I believe what caused the pressure was not important to Paul. It's not what causes the pressure, that's important, it's what the pressure causes in you that's important.

It's not WHO causes the pressure that's important, It's WHO you rely on in times of pressure that's important!

We all have great pressure! Standing around comparing notes on whose is worst is not going to accomplish anything. Have you ever noticed that people, practically everyone, spends more time talking about their pressures than they do TALKING TO the one who can relieve their pressure? We'll spend all day talking to everyone who will listen about the pressures of our life, and 5 minutes a day talking to the one who can do something about it.

V 8 "...*We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself.*"

"Despaired" (Gr. Exaporeo / eks-ä-po-re'-o) It means..."to be utterly at loss, to be utterly destitute of measures or resources; the total unavailability of an exit from an oppressive circumstance." Paul is saying here, I was in something which had no way out. I looked to my left, my right, but there was no way of getting out of this. I was under great pressure! That's pressure!

The bills are due but there's no chance of more money coming in...That's pressure! AND PRESSURE WILL GET TO YOU! You may explode where people can see, or implode where no one can see, but it will get you if you don't do something about it.

Paul realized when there's no way out that you can see, God, is a God, that makes a way out of no way! Have I got your attention now? We all have pressure!

Notice secondly then...

I) GREAT PRESSURE: v 8

II) GREAT PURPOSE: v 9 *“Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead”*

The problem with most people who are going through difficult things today is, that they're not dead enough...yet. They still need to die a little more so that God can get them to rely on Him.

When people get to the point of death, they tend to always look up. They look to God. When people get to a certain point, they realize, they don't really have all the answers. They realize that they really don't have ANY answers. And then they look to God.

I may not know what you are going through right now, but I do know, there is a GREAT PURPOSE in it. And not only is there a GREAT PURPOSE, notice thirdly...

III) GREAT PROVISION: v 10 *“He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.”*

How cool is that verse?!!!

Paul was saying two things here. 1) I've been there before, & 2) This time won't be the last time! But one thing remains...GOD WILL PROVIDE!

ILLUS: Do you remember the story of David and Goliath! Can you imagine being David? King Saul looks at him and says, “If you lose David, not only do you die...that would be bad, but if you lose, ALL of Israel is going to be taken into slavery. Uh, but try not to think of that... JUST GO OUT THERE SON AND HAVE A GOOD FIGHT!” Wow, now that's pressure! Then King Saul has a reality moment and he says to David, “Wait, you can't do this, you're just a child”. Then David starts telling Saul of the victories God had won in his life. He tells him of a bear and a lion that came to take some of the sheep he watched and how he had killed them with his bare hands. Then he says, THE SAME GOD, THE SAME GOD that delivered me from the mouth of the lion and the paw of the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this uncircumcised Philistine. AND HE DID! And He'll do the same for you.

What's great about that story is that, although David's situation was different this time than it was in the previous times, his GOD WAS THE SAME! YOU MAY BE FACING SOMETHING YOU'VE NEVER FACED BEFORE,. It doesn't matter if your situation is different, AS LONG AS YOUR GOD IS THE SAME!

LISTEN, this isn't the first time the devil has pressed you, but if he didn't take you out then, this won't work either! SOMETIMES we need to tell the devil, hey boogerman, I've been here before. I remember the last time you tried to get me to think I was going to lose my mind...I didn't lose it! I remember the last time you said I wasn't going to be able to feed my kids...I fed them! I remember the last time you said I was going to lose everything...I might have lost some things, but I've still got stuff! Hey devil, this ain't my first rodeo, I know what to do and WHO to rely on, bring on your Goliaths, I have something for them too! THE SAME GOD, THE SAME GOD! HE did it before, He'll do it again!

Now notice lastly...

I) GREAT PRESSURE: v 8

II) GREAT PURPOSE: v 9

III) GREAT PROVISION: v 10

IV) GREAT PRAYERS: v 11 Great provisions are made possible by great prayers!

Great purpose is realized by great prayers! Great pressure is relieved by GREAT PRAYERS! Listen to what Paul said, vv 10b-11 *“On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.”*

If all you do is sit around and wring your hands, and cry, and complain, during tough times, you may not make it through your current trials. BUT if you realize what a valuable resource you have in prayer and God, and start calling on His name, He'll go to bat for you! Your circumstance will meet His grace and favor, and your life will change!

Some sing an old song, “I prayed my way out of trouble” What about you!!!! Are you willing to spend an hour a day to cure a lifetime of heartache? Are you willing to get on your knees to get out of your trouble? LET'S DO THIS!

CONCLUSION: Listen, there is a BRIGHT SIDE to your DARK TIMES, if you will look for it. I know you have gone through some hard times. The PRESSURE has been great. But there's a PURPOSE to you pain, and there is great PROVISIONS in the God you serve. Unlock the door of Heaven with a great PRAYER and see what happens.

(Lead the lost to Christ)