

WHEN THE

Holidays

AREN'T HAPPY



“For we do not want
you to be unaware, brothers,
Of the affliction
we experienced in Asia.
For we were so utterly burdened
Beyond our strength
That we despaired of life itself.”
-2 Corinthians 1:8

For Compass HB
By Bobby Blakey

A Study in
2 Corinthians

November / December 2022

“IT’S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR...”

Can you hear the music calling you to be of good cheer?

But what happens when your friends don’t come to call?

...When loved ones aren’t near because they aren’t here?

“It’s The Most PAINFUL Time Of The Year...”

Here’s one thing I have learned as a pastor...

The holidays aren’t happy for everyone.

Time set aside to celebrate with family and friends exacerbates the hurt of those who don’t have them.

It seems like every year I serve as a pastor...

(Yes, it already happened while writing this little booklet...)

I am called to meet with someone whose family is having a crisis during the week of Thanksgiving.

Instead of causing us to celebrate the goodness of God with our family, the season can highlight how things are not good with our family.

You see, Ebenezer Scrooge was a miser all the time.

It just seems especially wrong when you take time off for a Merry Christmas.

When the hustle and bustles slows down for a moment at the end of the year...

Some will see they were happier during Christmas Past than they are during Christmas Present. That hurts.

This is why I invite you to read **2 Corinthians** with me.

Paul writes how life hurts.

He has been down. He has suffered affliction. His situation was beyond his own power. He despaired even of life itself.

And yet, he found comfort in the Lord.

He encouraged the Corinthian church with the promise there was comfort to be found in their affliction too.

In fact, he thought this comfort was so real we could pass on to others what we have received ourselves...

Like a Christmas gift.

2 Corinthians is Paul's most personal and emotional letter.

I'll be honest, studying it and seeing the hurt Paul went through has been intense.

The lows go very low.

And for those of us with little faith, the highs might seem hard to even believe, BUT...

There is power that is made perfect in weakness.

There is grace that is sufficient for the trials of life.

There is comfort to be found when the world around us seems cold and dark.

Like a Christmas gift that keeps on giving.

You can't outgive the Giver.

BEYOND OUR POWER

2 Corinthians 1

One of my childhood memories is Grandma taking me to amusement parks. This was my Mom's mom, Grandma Olsen. She took me and my brothers and cousins on many excursions back in the day.

At this time in my young faith, I was learning how to pray. I remember waking up in my Grandma's house in San Juan Capistrano. On the bedside table, there was a spiral notebook with many blank pages. I would write down lists of things to pray for.

On this day, I remember folding up the notebook and putting it back on the bedside table. I didn't need to pray today. I was just going to have fun.

Out of all the times we went to amusement parks with my Grandma, I remember this day because I had a bad attitude. I cared for myself more than others. I was not happy at the happiest place on earth! This day helped me to see how apart from Jesus I am not able to do one good thing (**John 15:4**), not even have fun.

As we read **2 Corinthians 1**, I want to focus on **verses 8-11**. Paul is having the opposite of fun. He has experienced affliction, which is a key word in this chapter and is used more in 2 Corinthians than in any other book in the Greek Bible. The word is often translated tribulation.

Towards the beginning of the chapter, Paul makes a promise there is comfort to be found in every affliction (**v3-7**). In the middle of the chapter, he tells them his conscience is clear (**v12-14**). Towards the end of the chapter, he explains how all the promises of God are YES in Jesus (**v15-20**).

So Paul knows the God of all comfort. He is not in affliction as a consequence of his own actions. And he knows the promises that are his as a soul saved in Christ. And yet, Paul is in pain! Real, intense hurt in his heart!

In **verse 8**, Paul says, “For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.” This means Paul was overwhelmed to the point where he felt like he was going to die. The Greek word for “strength” here is ***dunamis***, which is often translated power. He is saying the situation was “beyond our power.” This is where life will inevitably take each one of us: to the place where we can’t do it, to where we see our need for God.

In **verse 9**, Paul says this feeling of death forced them to rely on the God who raises the dead. Many of us are trying to get through the day (survival) rather than depending on what almighty God is able to do today (revival).

In **verse 10**, Paul talks about how God delivered him from this affliction. This is the same kind of rescue Jesus taught us to pray for in **Matthew 6:13**, that our Father in heaven will lead us not into temptation here on earth.

In **verse 11**, Paul requests that the Corinthians help with prayer. We see his faith in how he says they will all give thanks to the Lord together for his deliverance.

What is an “affliction” you have gone through or are going through right now? What does it look like for you to rely on God?

Who is not having a happy holiday this year? How can you pray for them from today until Christmas day?

*Join me Monday December 5th @ 7:00 PM in the Revival Room for our When Holidays Aren't Happy Prayer Meeting!

CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

2 Corinthians 2-3

Along with Paul's personal affliction, another major theme of **2 Corinthians** is Paul's conflict with the church. Yes, that's right, there are many times in this letter where we can see tension between the people and the apostle that Paul has to address. At some points in this letter this conflict is at least, awkward, and at worst, hard to even understand. Here are three examples:

In **Chapter 1**, the Corinthians are critiquing Paul because of his change in plans to visit them. They are acting like his "Yes" does not mean "Yes" and are questioning his integrity. (Wow! This makes me thankful for everyone at our church who has been gracious to me when I have been late or had to reschedule. Thank you!)

In **Chapter 2**, Paul writes about another letter he wrote to them out of his affliction. This is often known as "the severe letter." There is much speculation about when and where Paul wrote this letter and how the chronology of his interaction with the Corinthians all fits together. But it is clear the contents of this letter were spicy. In verses 5-11, it is clear the Corinthians have confronted someone Paul told them to. He now says they need to be sure to forgive.

In **Chapter 3**, Paul speaks about needing a "letter of recommendation" to the Corinthians. Here Paul speaks very authoritatively that they are actually his letter of recommendation. They are a letter from Christ, written on their hearts. Paul was the mailman who delivered to them the gospel.

AND YET, despite this conflict, in all 3 of these chapters, Paul turns the attention of the Corinthians to the glory of God!

In **Chapter 1**, Paul makes it clear that even if they cannot know when he will visit for sure, all of the promises of God are sure in Jesus (**verse 20**)!

In **Chapter 2**, he talks about his soul being unsettled because he could not find Titus, but thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in a victory procession (**verse 14**)!

In **Chapter 3**, Paul writes about beholding the glory of the Lord as if in a mirror and being transformed into his image from one degree of glory to another (**verse 18**)!

Have you had conflict in the church before? Do you have any now?

How can you redirect this conflict to the glory of God rather than making it about yourself?

Please take some time to pray for our church that we will not have conflict but give the glory to God instead!

DON'T LOSE HEART

2 Corinthians 4

In **Chapter 4**, Paul says he is afflicted in every way: perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always carrying in his body the death of Jesus...

As you can imagine, when you do the work of the ministry, there is a temptation to lose heart. I know I have felt this way. Maybe you have too.

Here are 3 reasons Paul gives to not give up:

#1. Stop Underestimating God's Power (v7)

Being afflicted reminds us ministry is “beyond our power (1:8).” This is actually a profound and helpful point. God’s power in us is actually “surpassing” anything we can do in and of ourselves. The Greek word here is “hyperbole.” We think of hyperbole in English as exaggerated or not to be taken literally. According to **Ephesians 3:20-21**, God’s power working in us is literally able to do beyond anything we can ask or think. To Paul, God’s power working in him was a “treasure.” Perhaps many of us are rich with this treasure but still live like we are poor? Every time I am tempted to quit the ministry it is because I feel overwhelmed. Instead, I need to have faith God’s power is not limited like me, it is “surpassing.”

#2. The Goal Is Souls (v15)

Here’s a second way ministry is not about me. It is genuinely altruistic, which means we do it for others. As more people experience the grace of God, there will be more of us to give him the glory. Even if some we invest our lives in fall away, some will stand firm in their faith to the end. When we all get to heaven, they will be there with us. What a day of rejoicing that will be! The more souls singing worship together, the sweeter it is!

#3. Think Outside Space & Time (v17)

Although our affliction may seem overwhelming to us in this moment, it does not compare with what God is preparing us for in the age to come. That heavy burden is actually light compared to the weight of glory. That ongoing pain is actually fleeting and passing away compared to eternity in the presence of our God. This is perspective. If it feels heavy... If it seems long... compared to what? Usually we are comparing our present trials to what we expected or wanted our life to be like, rather than to the glorious homecoming we will have with the Lord soon.

1, 2, 3... So we do not lose heart...

I will be honest, approaching this holiday season I was feeling weary. But now that I have been able to spend some quality time reading **2 Corinthians** and writing about it with you, I am renewed. Afflictions, whether personal or even with others in the church, are not a reason to quit the ministry. Afflictions are the hurdles we leap over by faith on our way to the finish line.

What afflictions tempt you to give up ministering to others?

How does **2 Corinthians 4** inspire you to keep going?

WHO DO YOU KNOW IN HEAVEN?

2 Corinthians 5

One of the reasons holidays aren't happy is missing our loved ones who have died. Even on a quick scroll through social media on Thanksgiving or Christmas, you will see posts referring to family members and friends who have passed away. The first holiday season missing someone is especially difficult.

Another difficulty is when our loved ones are not well. Perhaps their body is breaking down with age or they are no longer of sound mind. **2 Corinthians 5:4** refers to this body as a tent. In this tent, we groan, being burdened... The breaking down of our physical bodies can definitely be one of life's afflictions. Yet, there is hope! For those who have faith, to be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. For all of us who believe, it is not that we go to death, but we go to be swallowed up by more life!

1 Thessalonians 4:13 says, "...you may not grieve as others do who have no hope." In the gospel of Jesus, there is real hope for life after death. He already died to pay for our sins and take the judgment we deserved. He rose again to give us a new life of knowing God that will last forever. If you know someone who died with faith in Jesus, then you know someone who is in heaven. While we may miss them, we can also take heart, knowing they are with Jesus who loves them more than us.

The longer I serve the Lord, the more people I minister to... the growing number of souls I know who are in heaven. I've got friends in the bank. Someday we will celebrate a wedding feast with Jesus as we share a rich inheritance together! Something better than the holidays is coming beyond the calendar of earthly years...

But perhaps you are feeling the acute pain of a loved one who died not believing in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This cuts deep. I remember sitting at my Grandma Blakey's funeral. I remember the tears. I remember wondering if I had been faithful to share the good news of Jesus with her? Unfortunately, she was not open to listening to her grandson. But then I had a thought: Who will listen to me share the gospel with them?

This is where **2 Corinthians 5** takes our thoughts. If we are all going to die and appear before the judgment seat of Christ (**v10**)... Then this fear of the Lord should motivate us to persuade others (**v11**). This love of Christ to die for us must compel us (**v14-15**). We should stop seeing people according to the flesh and start seeing them as eternal souls (**v16**). The definition of a Christian is someone who is a new creation (**v17**). And all of us who are in Christ have been given the ministry of reconciliation (**v18-19**). God is now making his appeal to others through us (**v20**).

You are an ambassador of the Lord Jesus. You are heaven sent on a mission to planet earth. You find yourself at the end of the earth in the last days when Jesus is coming soon. Souls are on the line. What will you do with the time given to you? Who are you going to pray for and share the good news of Jesus with this holiday season?

To honor the memory of those who have passed, let us all pass on the reason we have hope we will not die, but be swallowed up by life.

SINCE YOU'VE BEEN SAVED

2 Corinthians 6-7

Since we have these promises beloved, let us cleanse ourselves of every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

-2 Corinthians 7:1

We are living in “the day of salvation.” This is the idea Paul introduces at the beginning of **2 Corinthians 6**. He quotes **Isaiah 49:8**. The idea is also in **Psalms 118:21-24**. The day of salvation is the era of the church age where souls are saved by repentance and faith in the gospel of Jesus. Have you been saved?

Paul is now speaking to the saved on how we shall then live. In **2 Corinthians 6:14-18** Paul makes it clear we need to be set apart from the world around us. We still live in it, but we are not of it. He quotes **Leviticus 26:12-13** about how God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt and broke the bars of their yoke. If God has set us free from the system of sin in this world, why would we go back and yoke ourselves to it again? Is there something in this world you need to separate yourself from? Is there a relationship you need to separate yourself from?

In **2 Corinthians 7:10-11** we get one of the best definitions of repentance in all of Scripture. It is clear God is expecting more than just feeling bad about our sin. That is just a worldly kind of sorrow. Godly grief produces repentance: a change of mind, a 180 degree turn from sin to God. It is clear repentance proves itself by its deeds (**Acts 26:20**) and bears fruit (**Matthew 3:8**). The repentant person has an eagerness to clear themselves and zeal to prove themselves innocent in the matter.

What are the sins you have repented of?

What proof is there that you have repented of these sins?

YOU CAN'T OUTGIVE THE GIVER

2 Corinthians 8-9

And God is able to make ALL grace abound to you, so that having ALL sufficiency in ALL things at ALL times, you may abound in every good work.

-2 Corinthians 9:8

Even in affliction, you can still be generous to give money. This is the point Paul makes in **2 Corinthians 8 & 9**. He uses the example of the churches in Macedonia who in their poverty were rich in generosity (**8:1-5**). He uses the example of Jesus, that though he was rich, for our sake he became poor, so that we might become rich (**8:9**). The goal is for the Corinthians to give money to a collection that will benefit the church in Jerusalem. (We have seen Paul working on this collection both in our study of Acts and Romans.)

A main teaching on financial giving comes in **2 Corinthians 9:6-8**. Do not let the false teachers who have sought to get money from preaching a prosperity gospel turn you away from the fact God loves a cheerful giver. In fact, in **2 Corinthians 9:9** Paul quotes **Psalms 112:9** because the righteous man was known for his generosity. We do not need to worry about money. If we seek first the righteousness of God, then he will add all the things we need (**Matthew 6:33**).

Look back at the verse in the box: **2 Corinthians 9:8**. When reading this verse, it is important for you to understand that it is in the context of financial giving. It is also important to notice the four ALL statements. God is able to give us everything we need for the good works he has planned for us to do. This means giving is a demonstration of our faith. Do we really believe God will provide for us? If so, give!

It is interesting timing to read these two chapters after we have had a special collection this year at Compass HB in the Double Double Project. People generously gave almost \$2 million dollars. Then, in one week, over \$2 million more dollars were given so we could begin the construction of Double the Auditorium. Praise the Lord for how he answered our prayers in such a generous way! He is able!

Since God has been so generous to us, we want to be generous to pass this on to another church in another part of the world. From now on, when someone gives to the Double Double Project we will send a percentage of that money overseas. Pastor Bruce and Pastor Josh both know a missionary who also has a construction project to build a bigger auditorium for his church. Lord willing, we will see not just one but two new auditoriums built for the preaching of the Word of God! Let the gospel of Jesus ring out among the nations!

Does God think you are generous with the money he gives to you?

How can you be generous to give this holiday season?

A SECOND SECOND CORINTHIANS?

2 Corinthians 10

As I read 2 Corinthians, I also read commentaries to go along with it. Commentaries can be helpful but they may also add speculation to the text and must be read with discernment. Some commentaries speculate 2 Corinthians 10-13 is actually a separate letter. Others speculate these chapters were written later. Now, there is no textual evidence to support these speculations. But what they do reveal is there is a dramatic shift in Paul's tone from 2 Corinthians 1-9 to 2 Corinthians 10-13.

Paul is now clearly addressing opponents who have crept in to the Corinthian church. He quotes them sarcastically in **verse 1** and then clearly in **verse 10**. "They" claim Paul seems strong when he is writing a letter but he is weak in person. Ironically, Paul is doing the opposite of that. He is writing to them in humility with the hope he will not have to come to them and be severe in person.

For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.

~2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Paul understood something his opponents did not. Ministry is not about us, it is about Jesus. There is a power in the gospel to change lives, to make disciples who take their thoughts captive to obeying the commands of Jesus. This power is not in our personality or passion, but this power comes from God, it is divine. Therefore, even as he has to defend himself from accusations, Paul makes his boast in the Lord.

Is there a way you are tempted to defend yourself?

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24. How can you boast in the Lord instead?

*A good commentary I recommend on 2 Corinthians 10-13 is A Model Of Christian Maturity by D.A. Carson!

THAT PURE DEVOTION TO JESUS

2 Corinthians 11

Paul is being forced to defend himself. He is being accused by opponents in the Corinthian church. In **verse 5** he sarcastically calls them “super-apostles.” In **verse 13** he makes it clear they are actually “false apostles” who have crept in to deceive the Corinthians and draw them away after themselves. This is exactly what Paul said was going to happen when he warned the elders in Ephesus to beware the wolves in **Acts 20:29-31**.

But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

-2 Corinthians 11:3

Paul’s concern is not so much to clear his name, as to exalt the name of Jesus. He wants to make sure the Corinthian church is not deceived. He does not want them to follow anyone but Christ himself.

Are any thoughts leading you away from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ?

And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

-2 Corinthians 11:28

Even though Paul has his personal afflictions...

Even though he is being accused by false teachers creeping into the Corinthian church...

Paul is not just concerned about himself. He is also concerned for others.

Who are you bearing burdens for in the church right now?

How can you pray for them to have that pure devotion to Jesus?

How can you come alongside of them in encouragement today?

THE CLIMAX OF 2ND CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians 12

Thank you so much for reading 2 Corinthians with me! All of our reading has been building up to this point. When I get to this point, I forget I am reading an ancient letter where Paul is defending himself against accusations in the Corinthian church. I even forget the afflictions we all may be having in our lives this holiday season. Instead, I am reminded of truth. The truth in this verse transcends the application of any particular time and space. The truth: God's power is made complete in our weakness.

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

-2 Corinthians 12:9

In **2 Corinthians 12**, Paul tells us of the surpassing greatness of revelations he had received. To keep him humble, he was given a thorn in the flesh. There is a lot of speculation about this thorn in the flesh. Some think it was a physical affliction Paul had. Others think it is the affliction of these false teachers accusing him in the church. All of these speculations miss the point. The point is not what makes Paul weak, but that Paul IS weak. This is the key that unlocks the secret to the power of God. The point is we are all weak. Some of us may be weak physically. Some of us may have relational challenges. Some of us may be burdened for others in our church. All of us have something to do that we are not able to do, but all of us have the power of God who is able!

Make a list of your weaknesses.

Who are you going to share this list of weaknesses with?

How has God's power been made complete in your weaknesses?

How are you going to rely on God's power and not try to do it on your own?

THE TEST OF FAITH

2 Corinthians 13

In our final chapter, **2 Corinthians 13**, Paul reiterates his concern that the Corinthians are in sin. He warns those who may be in sin that he is coming in the power of God.

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!

-2 Corinthians 13:5

I am not sure what the Corinthian church thought about Paul telling them to test themselves, but I know what the Southern Californian church thinks about this today. We don't like it! At our church, we preach from Scripture that you cannot be a Christian and continue in sin. Because of this we are called judgmental, legalistic and harsh. Some have even left.

Well, we can see from what Paul says in this chapter, there is an appropriate time and place to test ourselves. There are people who think they are believers but are deceived. Not everyone who claims to believe will be received by Jesus. Many will be told on that day "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness (**Matthew 7:23**)."

The truth is if you don't test yourself, then life will test you. The trials are coming if they are not afflicting you already. The temptations are right now crouching at your door. I have seen too many people I love fall away. The reason Paul tells the Corinthians to test themselves is because he doesn't want to have to confront them when he comes to visit. Well, Jesus is coming to visit us soon. We will all stand before him one day.

And I hope to see you there, my friend.

Go Eat Pop Corn

You are invited to a Scripture Of The Day event!

Monday December 12th @ 7:00 PM
In the Revival Room @ Compass HB

Daily Videos are coming back!
See the beginning of the first video from Galatians!

This holiday season we are going to read:

Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians

If it's hard to remember the order then:

Go
Eat
Pop
Corn

Hungry?
Come and eat the Word with us!