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Triumphant In Christ

2 CORINTHIANS 2:12-17

Introduction

1. Do you ever become discouraged in you life as a Christian?
2. Have you ever found yourself at a loss for how to proceed in His service?
3. If so, I want you to know that you are not alone.
4. In 2 Corinthians 1:8, the apostle Paul wrote these words:

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“For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;” (2 Corinthians 1:8, NASB95)

5. The Greek words which are translated “we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength” were also used to describe . . .
 - a. An overloaded ship riding low in the water.
 - b. A pack animal so heavily loaded that it falls under its load and cannot get up.
6. Paul felt himself being crushed under an unbearable weight to the point that all he thought he could do was to wait for death.
7. Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, who wrote the majority of the letters in the New Testament also struggled with anxiety and despair in his service to the Lord.
8. Tonight, I would like for us to consider one of those times, and what suddenly brought triumph to his life.

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I. Paul's Anxiety

A. PAUL'S PAINFUL EXPERIENCE IN CORINTH

“This is the very thing I wrote you, so that when I came, I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice; having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know the love which I have especially for you.” (2 Corinthians 2:3–4, NASB95)

1. After eighteen months with the brethren in Corinth, Paul left and went to Ephesus, before traveling back to Antioch.
2. He sent Timothy to Corinth to check on the congregation and remind them of Paul's teachings (1 Corinthians 4:17).
3. However, when Timothy returned, Paul learned that there were troubles in the church.
4. He decided to pay the Corinthians a visit on his way to Macedonia (1 Corinthians 16:5; 2 Corinthians 1:16), presuming he could quickly fix things and be on his way.
5. However, when he arrived, he was opposed by someone pretending to be an apostle (2 Corinthians 11:13).
6. They impugned Paul's integrity claiming that he was double-minded (2 Corinthians 1:17-18) and his speech was contemptible (2 Corinthians 10:10).
7. It seems that none of the members stood up for Paul (2 Corinthians 12:11).
8. This humiliating surprise attack stunned Paul to the extent that he chose to leave Corinth.
9. The result was that Paul wrote a painful letter to the church (2 Corinthians 2:3-4).

Slide 4**B. PAUL'S UNREST OVER TITUS**

“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.” (2 Corinthians 2:12–13, NASB95)

1. Paul sent Titus to Corinth with this letter with instructions for him to come to Troas and let him know how things went.
2. In the meantime, Paul went to Troas in order to preach the gospel there.
3. While he was there, “a door was opened for him in the Lord” (v. 12) meaning that his ministry was flourishing, souls were being won.
4. However, when Titus did not arrive as Paul had hoped, Paul “had no rest for [his] spirit” (v. 13).
5. Paul was so desperate to hear from Titus that he left a good work and went to Macedonia in search of Titus (v. 13).

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6. We have to go to 2 Corinthians 7:5 to find out what happened. In Macedonia, his anxiety only increased: “For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within.” (2 Corinthians 7:5, NASB95)
7. Consider the basis for Paul’s anxiety.
8. Corinth was a place where Paul had invested 18 months of his life (Acts 18:11).
9. He, with the help of Aquilla & Priscilla, Timothy and Silas had built this congregation from the ground up.
10. No doubt, he knew every member by name.
11. Now, it looked as if the future of this church was in grave danger!

12. How many preachers and elders have seen years of diligent labor suddenly be undone by those determined to have things their own way?
13. How many faithful members have left to go somewhere else because of such situations?

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14. I am reminded of what Paul wrote near the end of this letter:

“Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” (2 Corinthians 11:28–29, NASB95)

15. If we were to stop here, this would be a most depressing sermon, and we would miss the best part!

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II. Our Triumph In Christ

A. GOD ALWAYS LEADS US IN TRIUMPH IN CHRIST

“But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place.” (2 Corinthians 2:14, NASB95)

1. It is at this very point that Paul, the depressed, suddenly becomes Paul, the grateful!
2. It is in his declaration of thanksgiving to God that he points us to an understanding of how God works.
3. As Paul writes these words, he is thinking of a well-known custom in the Roman Empire — the Roman triumphal procession.
 - a. Whenever a Roman general had been victorious in a campaign against one of Rome’s enemies, the Roman Senate had the conquering general ride into Rome in a triumphal chariot drawn by four horses.
 - b. He would be dressed in a purple toga and a tunic stitched with palm fronds.

- c. In his hand he carried a scepter crowned by an eagle.
 - d. Preceding him would be a number of priests swinging pots of fragrant incense.
 - e. Behind him were the captives he had taken, being led in chains to their execution.
 - f. Behind them were his generals, captains and the commanders of his forces.
 - g. The streets were lined with crowds of people cheering his victory.
4. How does this relate to Paul and his ministry or to our ministry here?
- a. Paul saw himself as one of those being led in the triumph processional which God was leading.
 - b. Through Paul and everyone else who proclaims the gospel, God was spreading forth the fragrance of Christ.
 - c. In spite of all that Satan might do, God continues to reveal the knowledge of His Son in every place.

Slide 8**B. WE ARE A FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST**

“For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:15–16, NASB95)

1. The smell of incense meant one thing to the victors and another to the captives in Paul’s analogy.
 - a. To those prisoners being led behind the general’s chariot, the incense was the odor of death — they would soon be executed.
 - b. To the citizens of Rome and those who were a part of the Roman army, it was the fragrance of life.
2. For Paul & Silas and Timothy & Titus the preaching of Christ was a fragrance to God of the life of His Son.
3. “Wherever Paul went, God could smell the sweetness and beauty of Jesus

in what Paul was doing.” (Ray Stedman)

4. Not only was it the fragrance of Christ to God, it was also the fragrance of Christ to men.
5. For those who reject Christ, it is “an aroma from death to death.”
6. For those who follow Christ, it is “an aroma from life to life.”
7. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”” (John 3:36, NASB95)

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III. The Nature of Our Ministry

A. WE DO NOT PEDDLE GOD’S WORD

“And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God,” (2 Corinthians 2:16b-17a, NASB95)

1. Having said all this, Paul asked a question, “And who is adequate for these things?”
2. The answer is, “No one.” No one is sufficient, in an of himself to carry this out.

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3. A little later in this letter, 2 Corinthians 3:5, Paul wrote, “Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God,” (2 Corinthians 3:5, NASB95)
4. And a little beyond this, in 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul added, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;” (2 Corinthians 4:7, NASB95)
5. In Paul’s day there were those who peddled the word of God for their own

personal gain.

6. They were not concerned about the detrimental effect of their teaching on others.
7. It is no different today, almost 2,000 years later.
8. There are still those whose goal is to manipulate God's Word for their own benefit.
9. Paul said, "We are not like that," and the truth is, neither are we.

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B. OUR MINISTRY IS . . .

“. . . but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.” (2 Corinthians 2:17b, NASB95)

1. From sincerity

- a. Our motives are pure, we have no hidden agenda.
- b. Our preaching is from the heart.

2. From God

- a. We are commissioned by God.
- b. “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation . . . He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” (2 Corinthians 5:18,19b, NASB95)
- c. **By extension, you and I have also been commissioned by God,** “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19–20, NASB95)

3. Christ focused

“For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.” (1 Corinthians 2:2, NASB95)

4. In God's sight
 - a. We preach Christ humbly and fearfully, without any thought of selfish gain or praise from men.
 - b. "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Hebrews 4:13, NASB95)

Conclusion

1. What are we to learn from Paul's experience?
2. It is the fact that we too may encounter those times when we think we are burdened beyond our ability.
3. However, it is in this moment that we should stop and thank God that He continues to lead us and that we are accomplishing more than we realize.
4. We leave the pleasant aroma of Christ wherever we go and in all that we do.
5. Through us, God will cause people of whom we are unaware to come to know Christ.
6. None of us are sufficient for such a task.
7. It is God who is at work within us "both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).
8. My encouragement to each of you is to keep working until your life shall end or until the Lord comes.
9. Why? Because your reward in heaven is great! (Matthew 5:12)