

Place: Lurgan Baptist 2:2:2016

A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 2 Corinthians 1:-11

48. THE BOOK OF 2 CORINTHIANS

We talk a lot today about the “ *victorious Christian life.*” I’m all for that as long you understand victory the same way Paul did. Sometimes when I hear people talk about “ *victory,*” it sounds like they want some sort of experience that will deliver them from the trials and struggles of life. They want to be lifted to a higher plane and a “ *higher life,*” that will preserve them from trouble. My ***it just doesn’t work that way.*** Disney World for children is an exciting place to be. There is a ride there that is called the “ ***Pirates of the Caribbean.***” You float along in a little boat where you see menacing pirates with their sharp swords. And it seems like they are going to get you, but they never come close. ***So you have a “ thrill ride,” but you are never really in danger.*** But life isn’t like that. Life is often hard. We face danger at times. If we were to ask Paul “ *Paul, how has your experience been ?*”

He would say, “ *I face trouble every day, and sometimes I despair of my own life. I’m under pressure all the time. I get confused. People attack me. Sometimes life knocks me down. But that’s when the power of Christ shows up to help me. If I have victory, it is victory through trouble not victory apart from trouble.*” Is this not the message that we need to hear to day ? This isn’t a cafeteria. ***That is we***

don’t get to choose our troubles. It’s not as if we can say, “ *I’ll take some light tribulation but let’s hold off on the persecution, and if you don’t mind, I think I’ll skip the part about being knocked down.*” But life isn’t a cafeteria where we can pick what happens to us. We take what God sends us. ***But by God’s grace though we are knocked down, we are not knocked out.*** How does that song by John Newton go ?

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come.
‘Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.*

Now what has all this got to do with this second letter to the church at Corinth ? Well, this is the most personal of all Paul’s letters. The whole epistle pulsates with emotion. As someone has said, “ *it enables us as it were to lay our hands upon his breast and feel the very throbbings of his heart.*” To appreciate the letter and the man who wrote we need to understand the situation. So notice,

1. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THIS LETTER:

Do you recall that this church was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey ? (Acts 18:1) On returning to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, Paul was disturbed to learn about sin in the Corinthian church (1:11 7:1) So it was while he was in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:8) that he wrote his first epistle to Corinth and sent it to the church by the hands of Timothy. (1 Cor 4:7) ***But problems in the church only grew worse.*** Paul desires

to visit the church himself but is unable to do so.

(1:15-17) So Paul then sent Titus to Corinth with orders to straighten things out and meet him in Troas. (2:12-13 7:6-7 7:13-15) Paul comes to Troas but he does not find Titus. (2:12-13) Paul's concern for his beloved Corinthians converts deepened. He found it hard to sit still. Restless, like a caged lion he departs to Macedonia (2:12-13) and there he met Titus who gave him a report which in part, cheered him greatly and in part caused him much anxiety. (2:14-17) It seems that here in Macedonia, possibly Philippi (7:5-6) that Paul wrote this second letter. Now Paul wrote this letter for a number of reasons.

To commend the church for disciplining the offender
(1 Cor 5:1) *and to encourage them to forgive and receive him.* (2:6-11)

To explain why he had apparently “ changed his plans,” and not visited them as he had promised. (1 Cor 16:3-7 1:15-22)

To answer those who in the church who were questioning his apostolic authority. (Ch's 10-12)

To answer those who accused him of wrong motives.
(4:1-2)

To encourage the church to share in the offering for the Jerusalem saints (Ch's 8-9)

To prepare them for his planned visit. (13:1) (1)

(2) THE CRITICS IN THIS LETTER:

Don't you ever think that Paul had no critics. Every preacher has his critics. Joseph Parker stepped into the pulpit of the City Temple in London for his Thursday sermon and announced that he was under some trepidation that day because of a letter he had received. It seemed that a gentleman wrote to tell Parker that he would be in the congregation that day for the express purpose of making a philosophical analysis of the sermon. After a long pause, Parker said, “ *I may add that my trepidation is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the gentleman spells philosophical with an ' f.'*” Now what seems to have happened at Corinth was this. There was a majority who were for Paul. (2:6-7) but there were a minority in the church who were still being influenced by false teachers. (10:10) Indeed some commentators assert that chapters 1-9 are addressed to the repentant majority and chapters 10-13 to the minority being influenced by false teachers.

(3) THE CONTRAST WITH THIS LETTER:

For what a contrast we have here with Paul's first epistle. The former letter had shown Paul as a *Pattern Preacher*, the latter as a *Pattern Apostle*. The first is very *practical*, the second is very *personal*. The first is orderly and formal, the second is ordinary and informal. The first warns against *Paganism*, the second warns against *Judaism*. If the first letter “ *takes the roof off,*” the church at Corinth and lets us look in, then the second letter “ *opens the heart of Paul,*” and lets us see his love and concern for the work of the Lord. George Herbert and outstanding seventeenth

century pastor said of this letter, “ *What an admirable epistle is the second of Corinthians. How full of affections. He joys and he is sorry, he grieves and he glories, never was there such care of a flock expressed, save in the Great Shepherd of the fold who first shed tears over Jerusalem and afterwards blood.*” My this letter gives us a unique view of Paul himself. As Alan Cairns maintains “ *It not only shows us the hands of Paul at work and the feet of Paul tramping the missionary trails of this world, it draws aside the veil and shows us the mind and heart of Paul.*” Is this not therefore a vital book for every preacher ? My There is more to preaching than facility of speech, than oratory. There is more to preaching than systematic theology and all other Biblical courses. There is more to preaching than having the ability to analyse and outline a passage of Scripture.

Of course we must attend to those things. But a true minister of Jesus is a man whose heart and soul are aflame with the love and power of His Saviour. *Is this not what makes this letter so important to preachers ?* It reveals the heart of the greatest of all Christ’s ministers. Now this book falls into three sections.

(1) EXPLANATION CH’S 1-5

Here we see Paul the Minister. After an opening salutation and a great biblical theme the comfort of God, Paul begins this letter with a word of explanation. You know, Paul was the most honest and transparent of men, detesting any kind of double dealing. It pained him deeply that any should question his integrity. So in these opening

chapters

(a) HE DEFENDS HIS INTEGRITY: Ch’s 1-2

Now what is integrity ? The English Dictionary defines it like this “ *honesty, the quality of being whole or united.*” But let me give you a Bible definition. Look at Psalm 15. Now how do you measure to God’s standard of integrity ? Did you notice that the Psalmist mentions the “ *tongue,*” ? Concerning it Washington Irving wrote “ *A sharp tongue is the only edge tool that grows keener with constant use.*” The tongue can ruin a reputation, question a motive and destroy one’s dignity. We all chanted when we were young “ *Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me.*” The truth is, that words do hurt. Those hard verbal attacks inflict wounds as damaging as any bodily wounds. Among the many trials we face few are more devastating than statements made against us. They may be made against our Conduct: thing’s we didn’t do. Against our Words: thing’s we didn’t say. Against our Motives: things we didn’t mean.

Now is this not what happened to Paul in (Ch 1) ? Indeed those were the three areas the Corinthians used to falsely accuse the apostle. Their accusations related to his Conduct: they said that Paul was shrewd and insincere. Do you see his defense in (1:15) ? Conscience is that inner faculty that “ *knows with,*” *our spirit and approves when we do right but accuses when we do wrong.*” You see, when a person has a good conscience he has integrity not duplicity and he can be trusted. Their accusations related to his Fickleness: At the end of his first letter Paul

had expressed his desire to visit them, though he added “ *if the Lord permit.* ” (16:5-7) Much to Paul’s regret he had to change those plans. “ *Plans get you into things,* ” said Will Rogers “ *but you have to work your way out.* ” They were saying “ *If Paul writes one thing he really means another. His yes is no and his no is yes.* ” Paul defends himself by saying that he is not sending double messages. (1:18-22) Just as God is faithful so Paul’s words are faithful. Just as the preaching about Christ was without vacillation so Paul’s words are without vacillation. Their accusations related to his Motives: Some in Corinth were saying Paul wanted to lord it over them. He wanted to throw his spiritual weight around. (1:23-24) But that was not the case. Paul stands before them as a fellow worker (1:24) and as a sincere bond servant. (4:5) Paul’s example should be emulated rather than attacked. Is your example one that others want to emulate or attack ? Servanthood is a rare quality today. In the church some pastors, elders or deacons lord it over the flock. In the workplace employers often lord it over their employees. In the home husbands often lord it over their wives and parents over their children.

Is it because we have lost sight of the Saviour ? The Lord Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. How about you ? Do you lord it over others ? Or do you look to the Lord and use Him as your example for leadership ? (a)

(b) HE DESCRIBES HIS MINISTRY: Ch’s 3-5

In (Ch 3) Paul tell us that his ministry is ***Spiritual not Carnal***: They criticized him for not having letters of

recommendation. The false apostles had come into Corinth with qualifications that they could frame and put on the vestry wall. “ *I don’t need letters of recommendation,* ” says Paul “ *You Christians at Corinth are my letters written on hearts not on stones.* ” Paul pictures himself as God’s secretary writing the Word into the lives of God’s people. What an amazing truth. Every Christian is an epistle of Christ being read of all men.

***You are writing a gospel a chapter each day
By deeds that you do and words that you say
Men read what you write whether faithful or true
Say what is the gospel according to you ?***

It’s a glorious message far more glorious than the Old Testament law so much admired by Paul’s Judaizing foes. Its true that the Old Testament law had a glory but it was a fading glory. But the gospel instead of waning, like the glow on Moses face the glory of the gospel waxes and waxes with the passing of time. Ours is a glorious ministry and its glory will never fade.

In (Ch 4) Paul tells us that his ministry is ***Sincere not Deceitful***: You see, some at Corinth were accusing Paul of being insincere in his ministry. “ *Paul is in it for what he can get out of it.* ” Do you ever hear that sort of talk ? Here Paul gives evidence that his ministry is sincere ? Do you see,

His Constancy: (4:1) Why would Paul keep on preaching with all the dangers and toils involved if he were not sincere ? A man with lesser motives would have given up

long ago. Incidentally, are you still at the task ?

His Transparency: (4:2) Paul refused to use underhand practices to gain followers. False teachers were doing those things. They were tricking people into believing but Paul would not walk in craftiness or use the Word of God deceitfully, that is “ *adulterating the Word of God.*”

My we handle the Word deceitfully when we mix philosophy and error with God’s truth. But not Paul for he used the Word in an open, sincere way and encouraged the people to search the Scriptures for themselves.

His Theology: (4:4) If the gospel be hidden it should never be fault of the preacher. Satan blinds the minds of sinners because he does not want them to see Christ’s glory. Why is Satan so anxious to blind the minds of unbelievers ? What does he fear more than anything else ? He fears the gospel. Oh, that this truth would grip us.

My the Devil is not afraid of all the social, educational, and political program’s in the world. There is only one thing he is afraid of, the light of the glorious gospel illuminating the subjects of his kingdom. Tell me, way are we wasting our time with things of little importance ? Why we are neglecting the great work of getting the gospel out ?

His Humility: If Paul wanted to get a following for himself and make money he should have preached himself not Christ. But do you see what he says ? (4:5) Do you know what a model minister is like ? He lifts up Christ. He does not talk about himself. He has no desire to be seen, known or promoted. He gives God all the glory.

(4:7)

His Frailty: If Paul was out for personal gain then why did he suffer so much ? Was this not one of the greatest proofs of his sincerity as a servant of God ?

His Glory: His day’s years of trial are nothing compared to the eternity of bliss that awaits him. Tell me, are you living with eternity’s values in view ? (4:18)

In (Ch 5) Paul’s tells us that his ministry is ***Serious not Careless:*** that he works from honest motives not fleshly desires. You see Paul kept three things before him.

The Fear of the Lord: “ *Knowing therefore the terror or fear of the Lord,*” (5:11) Is this kind of attitude not lacking in ministry ? B.F. Westcott the Bible scholar once wrote, “ *Every year makes me tremble at the daring with which people speak of spiritual things.*” Phillips Brooks used to warn about “ *clerical jesters,*” whose jesting about the Bible robbed that inspired Book of some of its power. Today there is an absence of reverence in the public gatherings. Is it any surprise that the younger generation is not taking the things of God seriously ? Paul had a healthy fear of the Lord for he knew that all believers will be judged at the Judgment Seat of Christ. (5:10) The word for “ *appear,*” carries the idea of being revealed, “ *for we shall all be shown as we are.*”

What a day that will be. Our motives will be reviewed. (1 Cor 4:5) Our service will be reviewed (1 Cor 4:5) We often sing “ *Bye and bye when I look on His face I’ll wish*

I had given Him more.” It will be too late then. Give the Saviour more now.

The Love of the Lord: “ *For the love of Christ constraineth us,*” (5:14) This does not mean Paul’s love for Christ, rather the love Christ had for Paul. You see, Paul was so overwhelmed by Christ’s love for Him that to serve Him Christ became the controlling motive of his life. That love led the Lord to the cross to die for sinners. Why did He die ? That we might live ***through Him:*** (1 Jn 4:9) That we might live ***with Him:*** (1 Thes 5:10) and that we might live ***for Him:*** (5:15)

The Call of the Lord: You see we are ambassadors for Christ. Now ambassadors represent their countries and say what they are instructed to say. Do you know what our message is ? “ *Be ye reconciled to God.*” (5:21) Are you embarrassed to confront folk with the claims of Christ ? Do you not realize that you are a privileged person ? For you are an ambassador of the King of Kings. (1)

(2) EXHORTATION Ch’s 6-9

Here we see Paul the Father, appealing to his converts. In (Ch’s 6-7) Paul is appealing about,

(a) THINGS WHICH ARE SPIRITUAL: Ch’s 6-7

There is an Appeal for Appreciation: (6:1-10) You know as you read this letter you get the impression that the church did not really appreciate Paul and the work that he had done among them. They should have been defending

Paul and not forcing him to defend himself. The Corinthians were boasting about the Judaizers who had invaded the church and yet they had done nothing for them. So Paul reminded them of what he had gone through for them. (6:1-10) It has been well said “ *If you want to find gratitude look in the dictionary.*” I can recall as a teenager coming to this very Bible Class on Tuesday night to listen to Mr. Mullan. Like you I was enriched, enlightened, and encouraged through the ministry. Did he ever occur to you or me to say “ *Mr. Mullan thank you for the countless hours that you have put in to maintain this class.*” Paul was not looking for praise but he was reminding them that his ministry had cost him dearly. What is your Christian service costing you ?

There is an Appeal for Separation: (6:11-7:1) Why were they withholding their love from Paul ? Because they had divided hearts. The false teachers had stolen their hearts and now they were cool toward Paul. So Paul says “ *be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*” (Lev 19:19) It’s one thing to have the boat in the water, it’s another to have the water in the boat.

There is an Appeal for Reconciliation: (7:2-16) As Paul cries, “ *Open wide your hearts to us,*” (6:13) “ *Receive us.*” (7:1) If these believers would only cleanse their lives and their church, God would receive them, (6:17) and they could again have close fellowship with Paul. Sadly, there are many shattered relationships today. In families, homes, churches, and ministries. My they can only be repaired if we face our problems honestly, deal with them biblically and seek to get with God and

each other personally. (a)

(b) THINGS WHICH ARE MATERIAL: Ch's 8-9

You see, because of persecution and privation the mother church in Jerusalem was in desperate need of assistance from outside. The Christians in Macedonia had risen to the challenge but sadly the Corinthian's were not doing their part. Like many people they had made promises but they had failed to keep them. In fact an entire year had been wasted. (8:9) What was the reason for this delay ? The low spiritual level of the church. ***When a church is not spiritual it is not generous.*** Also the Judaizers probably siphoned off as much money as they could.

(11:7-12,20, 12:14) So Paul lifted his appeal to the highest spiritual level possible. *He taught them that giving is an act of grace.* (8:7) It was the working of the grace of God in their lives. Now since these two chapters are among the greatest chapters in the New Testament on giving we should take a look at them more closely.

I heard about a preacher who was trying to raise money for a building project, and he had one particular member in his church who was extremely wealthy, but he couldn't even get this wealthy man to attend, much less to give. Well, an old member of the church got wind of this, and came by the pastor's office and said, " *If you'll give me permission, pastor, I'll not only get this man to come, I'll get him to give the biggest gift to the building program.*" The pastor said, " *Well, if you think you can do it, go ahead.*" Well, five days later, the pastor got a registered letter from this man, not only promising that he would be

in church every Sunday from now on, but also pledging \$100,000 to the building program. Well, the pastor could not understand the change that had taken place in this man until he read this at the end of the letter. " ***P.S. Would you please tell your secretary that there is only one "t," in dirty, and no "c," in skunk.***" Now that's one way to do it. But it's not God's way. How are we to give then ?

Generously: Do you see these Macedonian churches that Paul was using as an example ? They had experienced " *a great trial of affliction.*" (8:1) It means " *rock bottom destitution.*" But their circumstances did not hinder them from giving for they gave generously. Have you used difficult circumstances as an excuse for not giving ?

Enthusiastically: They did not need prompting or reminding as the Corinthians did. In fact they begged to be included. (8:4) You see, grace not only frees us from our sins it frees us from ourselves. The grace of God will open your heart and your hand.

Spiritually: Like the Lord Jesus these Macedonian Christians gave themselves to God and to others. (8:5) If we give ourselves to God we will have little trouble giving our substance to God. The Macedonians giving was like Christ's motivated by love. (8:7-8) You see, God not only *told* us how to give, God *showed* us how to give. " *Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift.*" (9:15) My every time you see that cross, every time you think of those nail-scarred hands, every time you picture eternal life, the love of Jesus, a home in heaven, the grace of God, you ought to say, " *I can hardly wait to*

give.”

Willingly: In (8:9) Paul talks about “ *a willing mind,*” and in (9:7) he says “ *so let him give not grudgingly.*” That literally means “ *out of pain.*” Don’t give out of pain. Or “ *Of necessity.*” (9:7) That means “ *feeling forced to give because of what someone may say or think.*” My there are three kinds of giving grudge giving, guilt giving and grateful giving. Grudge giving says “ *I have to.*” Guilt giving says “ *I ought to.*” Grateful giving says “ *I want to.*” You ought to give because you want.

Thoughtfully: “ *Every man according as He purposeth in his heart,*” (9:7) Giving is neither to be casual nor careless. Giving ought to be carefully thought out, and prayerfully brought out.

Cheerfully: “ *For God loveth a cheerful giver.*” (9:7) The Greek word for “ *cheerful,*” (*hilaros*) is the word hilarious. No wonder Christ said, “ it is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) It’s the cheerful who gets the gold medal.

Knowingly: Do you know that giving is an *Investment* ? Look at (9:6) Giving is not a contribution, it’s an investment. You see, the world says if you want to get take. God says if you want to get give. It was John Bunyan who put it in prose when he said,

*A man there was, and they called him mad;
The more he gave, the more he had*

When you give to God, you better get ready for a blessing, because one thing you are not going to do is outgive Him. A well known philanthropist was asked, “ *How is it that you give away so much, and yet you have so much left ?*” He said, “ *Well, it’s like this, I shovel out and God shovels in, and He has a lot bigger shovel than I do.*” Did you know that giving is an *Enrichment* ? (9:8) Do you see (9:8) ? My God doesn’t need your money, but you need His grace. Do you see the universals in this verse ? *All grace, all sufficiency, all things, every good work. When you give, God gives. When you withhold, God withholds. When you sow, you reap. But when you don’t, you weep.* (Lk 6:38) This does not mean that we should bargain with God. Christian industrialist R. G. LeTourneau used to say “ *If you give because it pays it won’t pay.*” Now listen, I wonder has God given you a new insight into giving ? Do you see that giving is a grace and if you understand something of grace you’ll understand how to give. (1) (2)

(3)VINDICATION Ch’s 10-13

Here we see Paul the Apostle answering the accusations of his enemies at Corinth. Now as you read this section you find Paul referring directly to his accusers, (10:7, 10-12 11:4, 20-23) and answering their false charges. He does not hide the fact that the Judaizers in the church are ministers of Satan who want to destroy the work of God. (2 Cor 11:12-15) Paul uses the word “ *boast,*” or “ *glory,*” time and again in this passage. With a touch of sarcasm Paul says, “ *Your favourite teachers like to boast so I will try to win your love by doing some boasting of my*

own.” In his defense Paul shows that his,

(a) Methods were Superior to those of his Accusers:

Paul did not use carnal methods and exert the power of “*a strong personality.*” Paul did not judge by appearance (10:7-11) and Paul let the Lord do the commending. (10:12-18)

(b) His Motives were Superior to those of his Accusers:

Paul’s desire was to keep the church pure, free from false doctrine and worldly living. (11:1-6) “*Paul cannot be a true apostle,*” said his foes “*otherwise he would accept money for his services.*”. (11:7-21) Paul’s chief credentials however for apostolic ministry was his suffering. Do the false apostles know what hardship and suffering are ? (11:22-33) You see Paul’s attitude was never “*how much can I get ?*” but rather “*how much can I give.*”

(c) His Miracles were Superior to those of his Accusers:

There was his supernatural sight (12:1-6) his supernatural strength (12:7-10) and his supernatural signs. (12:12) Could the Judaizer’s relate any experiences that were like these ?

(d) His Mission was Superior to those of his Accusers:

Paul was planning to make the third visit to them (13:1) because he was a devoted parent (12:14) and they were disobedient children. (12:20)

(e) His Messiah was Superior to those of his Accusers:

Their master was either Satan (11:13-15) or self (10:12) but not Paul’s. (13:3-4) Do you see how the letter closes ? “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” takes us back to Bethlehem where He became poor for us (8:9) “*the love of God takes us to Calvary where God the Father gave His Son,*” “*and the communion of the Holy Spirit,*” takes us to Pentecost, where the Spirit baptized all believers into the body of Christ. My how fitting this benediction was for this divided, unspiritual church.

My what do you think of the victorious Christian life now ?

*Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come.
‘Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home*

For Christ says “*My grace is sufficient for thee,*” (12:9)

**Is it not sufficient in our Personal Witness ?
Is it not sufficient in our Pastoral Work ?
Is it not sufficient in our Public Warfare ?**

