

“Dead Men Don’t Despair”

- 2 Corinthians 4:8-18 -

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2 Corinthians 4:8-18 [We are] hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; [we are] perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death- 18 is working in us, but life in you. 13 And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak, 14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present [us] with you. 15 For all things [are] for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward [man] is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen [are] temporary, but the things which are not seen [are] eternal.

The author Denver Moore once said something to the effect of “what is precious to God becomes important to Satan.” The fact that our further stepping out for Christ in service and ministry causes Satan to come at us to even a greater degree, is a hard lesson to learn and an even harder reality to accept. But it is a certainty for sure. This fact...*plain and simple*...keeps most of us out of church and at the very least, *off of the front lines*. Its not a deep philosophical reason or an elaborate defense, but it is the **truth** just the same!

The subject of this textual passage has never been more pertinent than it is today. I am not here today to judge every individual’s life pressures, their personal stress levels or even...*God help me*, their mental health. But one would have to be living in a cave in order to not clearly see that...*like never before*, mankind is unraveling. In fact, over the past few years, there has been a seismic shift in emotional stability in our culture.

We have the ever growing proliferation of emotional support animals, and rapidly multiplying forms of emotional support *objects* ... or “comfort objects.” I’m not talking about your favorite chair after a hard day’s work, I’m talking about **objects**...a plethora of them really, to carry with you in which to alleviate anxiety, and to simply make one functional in the world. These things are to just hold the bar of our survival, let alone *thriving*.

Then there is of course the expedient growth of prescription drugs to help us cope. Studies report 1 in 8 Americans are now on anti-depressants...some say more. A 65% increase in 15 years, now leaving us with roughly 37 million Americans on anti-depressants. This mystery is hard to explain without embarrassment and maligning people. If such statistics were received as a pandemic, we would pull out all the stops and sequester people and make them all wear masks. Now if you are one of these folks, I’m not trying to beat up on you nor am I a doctor telling you to stop taking them. I am just asking... “*what’s going on here?*”

We now have intensive corporate training to deal with “anger management”...much of which operates on the edge of ludicrous...even spawning a comic movie of the same name with Adam Sandler. It seems that raising your voice in any manner...even to simply make a point...now is seen as on par with violence and being an active shooter. So we are apparently on our way to becoming a culture of soft speaking monotones. But it seems

people are profoundly and quite easily frightened and disturbed, so much so that any display of emotion is now seen as volatile and aggressive.

I could continue further in this line of thinking, but I think I have made my point: *we aren't doing very well. Fragile* would be an understatement. *Especially* when one looks back...even to recent years, at how the generations before us labored and strove to make it through life. Within the world of faith, we read accounts of missionaries, pastors, and evangelists...enduring great pressures and stress to further the gospel... many even going so far as to die martyrs deaths for the furthering of the kingdom. Now we minister in an age where it takes but one word that offends an individual...one perception that they have been in anyway slighted...one "no"...one "you need to stop that" and all we have left is the door swinging behind them.

Every word delivered is now analyzed for some hidden meaning. The church is expected to affirm and support every individual's life choices, any and every "identity" that they have claimed, and be ok with any and every behavior no matter how disruptive and dysfunctional it might be. Now again...I may sound like I'm scolding...but in truth I am simply seeking for us to step back and see all of this and consider "what is happening?" How can the church effectively minister in that environment without running headlong into the fabric of culture and social acceptance? Well, *we can't*. How can we disciple for the next generation of ministry wherein the world we attempt to train for is a hurricane and they are being brought to their knees by the morning breeze?

All stats and studies show that the young adult...known as Gen Z, are dealing with a very fragile mental health paradigm. Gen Z which has been referred to by some as the "loneliest generation," as their endless hours spent online tend to foster feelings of isolation and depression. More time spent on smartphones or watching Netflix means less time spent cultivating meaningful relationships. Additionally, many young people fall prey to the "compare and despair" trap that social media presents. And since they have never actively or personally *seen* any different lifestyle, priority base, or emotional manifest, the one they cling to is seen as "normal" and acceptable. I have to ask. Is Satan beating us from within?

The Bible however speaks of a wholly different lifestyle dynamic. Yet we also know scripture it is increasingly maligned in even an average Christian environment, leaving a whole generation without direction and authority. An age without a map. A people that is finding itself increasingly alienated from traditional faith that calls upon us to "be a man"...even that offends many of us even though the extrapolation of such a phrase is only in our heads and imaginations.

We have a bible that tells us that we can't have everything we want and be a Christian. That just because I *desire* it and it feels good physically does not mean I can embrace it and still be a Christian. The fact remains that the Bible says men and women are equal but different, that your identity is what God says it is, that God hates lying, gossip, and material idolatry, and while loving you He hates your sin.

Paul doesn't however back down from the solid rock of truth...a truth that is never changing and still...*when applied*...moves the world. He had been speaking concerning our individual ministries...as each of us do indeed have one, even if we are failing to live it out. One could argue that Paul's primary motivation here in this passage is to speak into those embracing a "high" ministerial life, and I believe on some level that is true. But one cannot ignore that Paul has already brought us back to the factual reality that...*again*, we all are to "be in the ministry."

A basic premise of ministry is that to genuinely practice it, it must actually be communicated. If it is not, then it's not really ministry and we are not bearing our calling as we should... as we must. Such a fact is seldom an unknown, seldom an "unaware of" caveat of Christianity, but rather a simply ignored aspect...one lost in the lives of revisionist Christianity. Just the same...if we are "backed into a corner" we will most certainly acknowledge this truth; ***to serve Christ...to really wholly embrace the Christian life...is clearly hard.*** Furthermore, *if you put your hand to the plow, you can never again 'look back' without being an apostate...an AWOL soldier...a run away...simply "in sin."*

Ministry...while immanently diverse, has some static and universal aspects, one of which is the mandate of other-centered service. To serve God is now and forever about you and I stepping up to bless and serve *others*.

Mark 10:45 "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*"

And both in Paul's day **and** ours...and really every day in between, doing that for more than a day, is **HARD**.

But Paul...and Christ Himself, doesn't give us a "bye"...or a "pass" or a "conscientious objector get-out-of-jail-free card." In our text, Paul tells us that "we"...*note again the expected all inclusive status of that position...*that **we** are pressed hard, perplexed at times, persecuted most all the time, and even 'struck down.' Yet despite our modern fears that engagement on that level will be our end, note he says more... "*We are hard pressed on every side, **yet not crushed**; we are perplexed, **but not in despair**; persecuted, **but not forsaken**; struck down, **but not destroyed...***"

But the reality is...for many who *have* passed through these pews *have been* crushed, in despair, believed to be forsaken, and ultimately destroyed. So we have a problem don't we? Because according to scripture, that is not normal...*not a fact*. OK...if we are to accept that premise, what is the secret...what is the elixir for success? It lies in verses 10-12: **The answer is death.**

Throughout scripture we repeatedly read about the principle of "dying" for Christ and the faith. Dying to this world and to sin and its power...to idolatry of the material...the lust for power, prominence and clout.

In Galatians 2:20 Paul said "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*"

He said in 1Co 15:36 "...when you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first."

Jesus speaking of this Same principle, said in John 12:24 "*Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.*"

If you're not willing to deny yourself, to die to your wants, passions, lusts, desires, fears, emotions...then you aren't actually a Christian. For to be *born again* is to fully surrender yourself to the King...for His purposes and for His furtherment. That IS Christianity and always has been up until the past couple of decades when we decided to reinvent it to make it more socially and culturally acceptable. To make it *easier*. According to the scripture you must love Christ more than your mom, dad, your kids, everybody and everything. Not just in theory and principle, but in reality and practice.

Accepting Christ will cost you an easy life. Being a Christian...*according to the Bible*, means you deny yourself and take up the cross...meaning to die to this world, and to do it "daily." It means that you trust in the Lord...even in the hardest situations...the fearful moments, and the times when you are "down"...because that's life. You **will** have days you are far from jovial. But you lean on Him and He has your back.

So many folks believe themselves to be Christians but in reality they are *not* dead...and it is proven by their reactions to the world around them. How can a dead man be depressed? How can a dead man lust and want material and financial gain over Christ? How can a dead man be emotionally compromised and frail? How can a dead man be afraid?

Look, the Christian life is hard. It always has been and always will be. Hence that is why God gave us His Spirit to live inside of us! We *need* that Spirit. We **have to** have Him! With Him, we *will endure*...and furthermore, we are promised that we will *thrive*. Not according to the worlds standards, but **God's** and He sees through an eternal spectrum. It is amazing how many people are being suckered into a brief but unfulfilling life in the flesh...which leads to all of those insecurities and neurosis, (because we were never designed for that life...we were not made for that kind of living so its not going to ever work well)...and then Satan...*after taking this life from you*, goes on to take the real life which follows! That's a true "one-two" punch!

Yes, there will be trials, but the trials are building you in Christ...making you stronger, wiser, and more dependent upon Christ . Where and why did we ever get the idea that this life is supposed to be in black and white and monochrome? God created a life for us that is in full color...moments of both soft and moments that are screamingly loud...times of overwhelming pleasure and nice feeling, and moments of pain and sadness. Without the latter, how would you know the former? How many of us are satisfied with manna every day...while there are some of you that will be satisfied with nothing short of the milk and honey of God's "promised land." Giants and battles? You bet. Victory and a full life? Guaranteed. But there is no half way and no comprised path. Christianity is innately an "all in" endeavor.

2 Corinthians 5:17 *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

As Christians, our very *lives* become ministry in every sense of the word. If this is true, we must then ask ourselves: are we truly manifesting that ministry? Or are we "opting out" and passing the responsibilities on to those who we think have 'received the call' to ministry? Again...as we approach this passage, we must accept the "we" of verse 1 as "all of us."

4:8-9 (NLB) *We think you ought to know, dear brothers and sisters, about the trouble we went through in the province of Asia. We were crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure, and we thought we would never live through it. In fact, we expected to die. (physically) But as a result, we stopped relying on ourselves and learned to rely only on God, who raises the dead.*

This passage speaks of the burden we carry as servants, as "ministers," of the kingdom of God. *In Christ* we are hard pressed on seemingly every side, but never crushed. We are often perplexed by the things we must face and the adversity that comes against us. At least for Paul, though, there was no despair. I wonder if we can say the same? Obviously Paul is telling us that we should not, and yes, *need not* be broken by such an affront to our faith.

"...Persecuted but not forsaken; perhaps even *struck down* but are not destroyed..." Why would God allow such to come upon us? If He loves us, wouldn't He, as we would humanly expect, protect us by preventing such adverse conditions? The reality is that God *does* indeed allow us to pass through the fires of trial and testing. We don't want to admit it, and more often than not, we don't want to accept it. We don't want to accept the trials, nor the fact that God allows them! In fact, entire church groups have been formed in the blatant denial that God *does* allow such things, despite the overwhelming scriptural evidence to the contrary.

John four tells of the news coming to Jesus that His friend Lazarus was sick and dying. Christ's answer perhaps seemed cold and uncaring.

Jn 11:5-6 *"Although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days and did not go to them."*

Although we know that Jesus ultimately raised Lazarus from the dead, we also know that at first He stayed where He was and Lazarus died. When Jesus came to the grave site of Lazarus, the scripture tells us, "...*Jesus*

wept. The people who were standing nearby said, See how much he loved him. But some said, This man healed a blind man. Why couldn't he keep Lazarus from dying?"

2 Cor 1:10 (NLB) - *And he did rescue us from mortal danger, and he will rescue us again. We have placed our confidence in him, and he will continue to rescue us.*

You see, Jesus always lived beyond the moment and saw the bigger picture.

(Vs 40-43 of the Lazarus account) "Jesus responded, Didn't I tell you that you will see God's glory if you believe? So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so they will believe you sent me. Then Jesus shouted, Lazarus, come out!"

Verse ten of our text says we are "*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus...*" Or "*Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.*" Such terminology was used concerning the action of pallbearers. In this case, though, it is the "body of Christ" we carry and note the word "always" included there.

We are never to forget that He died for us. This fact should affect every aspect of our lives today and forever. By carrying His death, we manifest His life. It's a mystery, but one that has proven to be fact for 2,000 years.

4:11-12 *Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you. In our walk through this life as ministers of the kingdom, we carry the "death of Christ" within us.*

This encompasses the trials, the burdens we carry, where the weight of the world is often upon our very shoulders. It goes with the territory; furthermore we are literally *delivered* unto this state by Christ Himself. You may at this point want to reject that premise, but understand your argument is not with me today, but with the Bible. He does this not to hurt us by any means, but rather that **His** very life will be manifested, *made visible*, in our mortal lives. We come to him as broken clay pots, and He daily makes us into a blessed and useful vessel, one that looks like Him.

For when, like in the case of Lazarus, He brings *us* back to life, when we triumph through difficulties and stand against the winds of this age, the world cannot help but see Jesus: **Jesus glorified**. But so many do not *want* to be reminded. That is why we are indeed the "smell of death" to some, and the "smell of life to others." (2 Cor 2:16) That is why some are drawn to us, while others will persecute us. The "us" are those in ministry, and the "you" are all those in Corinth and all who read this letter. This includes all who hear these words today.

For Paul, all that he endured and all that he suffered was in order to bring life to everyone he met. That is the heart, the passion, and the very breath of life for the man who embraces his calling to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

Expressing his very soul, Paul in verse 15 lays it out for all to see. Everything he did, all that he had gone through: the beatings, the persecution, the verbal and physical attacks, the weariness, the sacrifices - everything was for them! He loved them! He was *one with them*. To see and be a part of the outpouring of God's grace upon others was Paul's great motivation. Witnessing God's work in action, watching God's love move through one and then another was Paul's paycheck.

Verse 16 says "*That is why we never give up...*" Paul was willing to endure hardships so that he might know the joy of seeing God work, for the blessing of being a part of the metamorphosis of a living soul. The mortal body is slowly passing, and yet for Paul, and many who understand these words in a personal way, there is

found a truth that age only enhances the joy and clarifies the view! Michelangelo said, “The more the marble wastes, the more the statue grows.”

Discouragement is upon the heels of every minister of God’s grace. Yet, we inexplicably “do not lose heart!” Our bodies are tired and growing older, but inside we become more alive each day! Ours is not a life that is to “fade away,” but rather is to become richer each day.

Finally, in verse 17, Paul says this all is just a “light affliction.” History reflects anything but “light affliction” for Paul. But for Paul, it seemed light in comparison to the weight of God’s glory, which he was privileged to be a very personal part of and a witness. The harder Satan worked to bring him down, the more God poured out His glory. For Paul, it was more than a “mind-over-matter, I-think-I can” belief. Paul says He *knows*. He knew that Jesus had been resurrected! He knew that the same power that brought Jesus back from the grave will bring me back from the grave too. That power will stand us together in the heavenly realm; we shall together worship Christ upon the throne of eternity.