



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 1:8-11

“The Verdict of Death”

TRANSCRIPT

You know, Mr. Pryor is a very careful man. I don't know whether this goes back to the fact that he's a graduate of Annapolis or not, but he falls into the pattern of being real accurate and generally pretty logical except when he disagrees with me. But this morning, several people smiled, and I smiled up here, because he said at Believer's Chapel we generally teach the Bible in a systematic way. [Laughter] And the reason for that is that we did do that pretty commonly for a long time, but about a few months ago, we interrupted and had a series of messages that were topical in force, and it really blew Mr. Pryor's mind because he had fallen into the pattern of saying that in Believer's Chapel we like to teach the Bible in a systematic way, expounding the Scriptures chapter by chapter and book by book. Well, that's generally what we do, but now he has to add the word generally. And so I smiled and two or three other people smiled in the audience, Howard, when you said that. We are indeed happy to have you here today and we hope you enjoy the ministry of God's word.

We're reading for our scripture reading this morning 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 8 through verse 11. So if you have your New Testaments, turn with me to the first chapter of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and will you listen as I read verses 8 through 11.

Now, remember the apostle addressed the Corinthians, he has expressed in his greeting some of the common things that he usually expresses in his greetings, but then he has specifically spoken of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. And then, using the term “comfort” about ten times - that is, the root of it -- he spoke of the comfort with which he had been comforted and by which he hoped to be able to comfort the Corinthians. And now he picks it up in the 8th verse, and we read:

“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. Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves, in order that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us; He on whom we have set our hope and He will yet deliver *us*, you also joining and helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor *bestowed* upon us through the prayers of many.”

Perhaps it would be helpful since the exposition will generally follow this but some of you may have a different version, such as the Authorized Version or other versions, to note that when Paul in verse 10 speaks about who delivered us and will deliver us and will yet deliver us, some of the manuscripts following a different -- or some of the versions following a different manuscript or so, have set out in their text: He has delivered us, He is delivering us, and He will yet deliver us. But the manuscripts of the Greek text of 2 Corinthians differ at this point, and it’s the conclusion of most textual critics today that Paul did not write: He delivered, He is delivering, and will deliver. But rather, some scribe, not seeing that order and thinking that’s probably what he would

have written, changed the manuscript and the change that he made has been copied by other manuscripts.

Most today read the text: He delivered us, he will deliver us, and he will still deliver us. Now, if you think about it for a moment the change in sense is very insignificant. For if we read: He delivered us and he is delivering us and he will deliver us, then to say he delivered us, he will deliver us -- that is, in the immediate future -- and he will still deliver us -- in the indefinite future -- we’re essentially saying much the same thing. So the confusion is really simply an attempt by textual critics to arrive at exactly what Paul wrote. As in many cases, the differences in the readings of manuscripts do not have any doctrinal significance. In fact, no doctrine of the word of God -- particularly of the New Testament -- is affected by the differences in the manuscripts of the New Testament. In other words, no real Christian doctrine is not supported by the texts that we have. Now, that’s very important for us to expound a text exactly as Paul wrote it in this place, but no Christian doctrine is dependent upon the possession of the inspired, original manuscripts which we would call the autographer.

One last point, in verse 11, the word given by many persons; the term Paul uses for person is a term that commonly in the New Testament means face. It may mean persons. In fact, it may mean persons here. But it also means faces. And when we come to the end of the message, I’m going to offer a suggestion, not as mine, but offer it as a suggestion that has been made by which that text might be rendered by many faces. But we’ll talk about that in a few moments when we come to that part of the exposition.

May the Lord bless this reading and this discussion of his word. And let’s now turn to the Lord for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the way that they speak to us, the way in which they

touch the experiences of our lives which we have every day, and especially the way in which they minister to us the Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that is found in him.

We are grateful for all of the experiences of life and particularly for that experience by which through the Holy Spirit Thou didst regenerate us and cause us to believe in him who loved us and gave himself for us. We thank Thee for the new life that we possess, for the forgiveness of our sins, for the fact that we stand before Thee justified, righteous before the Holy God of Heaven by virtue of that which Jesus Christ has suffered for us.

We thank Thee, too, Lord, for the whole church of Jesus Christ, all who know him and who, by the Holy Spirit, have been formed into the one body of which Christ is the head and we are the members. We thank Thee and praise Thee for all that means, for the relationship that believers share to other believers, and the relationship that we have together to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for all the provisions of life, the word of God to guide our steps, the Holy Spirit to give us daily guidance, and the experiences of life by which we’re formed into the character of our Lord himself. We look forward to the future with hope and anticipation of all that Thou wilt yet do for us. We pray particularly, Lord, for those who may be suffering -- as the apostle did -- affliction. And may the text today be an encouragement and a comfort in the truest sense for those whose pathway at the present time is difficult.

We thank Thee for this country. We pray for our president. We pray that Thy hand may be upon the United States of America for freedom -- freedom to preach the gospel, for freedom to live freely, and for other blessings. We give Thee thanks for the past. We look forward to the future with hope. And, Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of prayer for those who are suffering. We pray for those particularly whose names are listed in our calendar of concern and for others also who may be suffering and who need the petitions of the saints. We thank Thee that Thou hast, in marvelous grace,

given us the privilege of prayer for others and for being the means by which the salvation of God becomes theirs in a most practical way. May the result be the glorification of Thy name as the saints pray together and for one another. Bless our time of the singing of the hymn and the ministry of the word.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] As I told the 8:30 meeting, one of my personal desires in the study of 2 Corinthians has to -- has been to deal a little more thoroughly in the exposition of the epistle. Many years ago when I first began to teach in theological seminary, I wrote a commentary on the Greek text of 2 Corinthians and through the years, from time to time, have given messages on various parts of the epistle and, in fact, on certain sections of the epistle but never have expounded it from beginning to end as Mr. Pryor likes for expositions to be. And so this time I thought well, I want to do this a little more thoroughly and spend a little bit more time so that we would go rather leisurely through 2 Corinthians.

Now, occasionally when you follow the ministry of the Lord along that pattern, you come to sections of the word of God that one finds rather difficult to expound and to feel as excited about as other well-known sections. And we have a number of the latter kind in 2 Corinthians but this is one of the former. And so if I had had to do this over again, I might not have devoted myself to these three or four verses. But, nevertheless, I’m going to do it, and we’re still going to take 35 minutes or 40 minutes to do it so, obviously, I’m going to be adding a few little things here and there in order to complete our time together.

But, seriously, the subject for today is “The Verdict of Death” and, of course, the title comes from verse 9 where Paul says we had the sentence of death within ourselves. Naomi in the Book of Ruth uttered a very significant statement. She said the almighty hath afflicted me. Now, Naomi’s name means pleasant, but her experiences were not so

pleasant. And when she attributed her afflictions, which were many, to the Lord God, she was not really saying something that was not thoroughly Scriptural, because if there is one thing the Bible teaches, it is our afflictions do come from him. In fact, that’s found not simply in the Book of Ruth but all through the Old Testament, particularly in the Psalms and in the Prophets. In fact, in one of the greatest chapters of the Old Testament, one in which we’re all familiar, Isaiah chapter 53, at least three times the afflictions of our Lord Jesus Christ are set out. And in that chapter, they are traced to the Lord God himself.

And then in the New Testament, of course we have passages like this, we have other passages that express that same doctrine that the troubles that we are forced to face are troubles that ultimately come from God. It is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on his name but also to suffer for his sake, Paul says in Philippians 1:29.

So faith is a gift -- and we proclaim that constantly -- but our sufferings are also a gift of God. They’re designed to be educational. They’re designed to strengthen us. They’re designed to teach us. And they’re other reasons as well. But at any rate, afflictions come from the Lord God. As one of the Puritans said, “Whoever brings an affliction, it’s God that sends it.” So afflictions come, but ultimately they come from God, though they may come through an intermediary.

Why do they come? Why is it necessary for us to be afflicted? “Well, poverty and affliction take away the fuel that feeds pride,” so another of the Puritans, Richard Sibbs, said. Think about that. Poverty – well, we can understand in Texas at least and in the Dallas area that poverty does cause us to rethink our life, our material life. And there are a lot of Texans that are not quite as proud as they were, materially speaking, a few months back. But Sibbs said, and perhaps he meant this even more significantly, that affliction takes away the fuel that feeds pride.

Paul’s experiences in Ephesus were certainly similar to that. He was taught, he says, as you analyze these verses, that we are not to trust in ourselves. Second, we are to trust in the God of the resurrection. And, third, that God is glorified in the afflictions that

we are forced to suffer. The Arabs have a proverb: All sunshine makes a desert. That’s true. If you look at the lives of individuals, I think you can see that the Arabs are right -- at least on one point. The Arabs are right there. All sunshine does make a desert. If you see an individual who has never had to suffer anything, you’d generally see a person who is forging and making new depths in superficiality. Usually the person who has never suffered at all is a shallow individual. If everything has gone perfectly for him, well, he’s just that, there’s not much to him. So when Sibbs said that poverty and affliction takes away the fuel that feeds pride, I think he was making a valid point. And the Arabs, too, that all sunshine makes a desert.

Now, let’s look at Paul’s situation and see what he has to say about it. Remember -- we do have some who were not here previously -- remember that the apostle is on his third missionary journey. He has been in Ephesus. And there, for about three years, he had labored preaching the word of God. He’d been forced by the situation there to withdraw from the synagogues, had been carrying on something of an independent ministry. In fact, in Ephesus they had an independent church. It was not connected with any denomination. It wasn’t Presbyterian or Baptist or Methodist or Episcopalian. They just met and remembered the Lord around the Lord’s Table, preached and studied the Scriptures, and sought in that significant community to make a mark for Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul’s trials were many. He had to suffer riots and other things. In fact, he said in his first letter that he had many adversaries. So he had many things to contend with, just not one. But the Corinthian church was disturbing to him. He had been the evangelist by which they had been brought into being. And after he left Corinth, some Palestinian Jews -- they were not Judaists; that is, they seemed to understand the gospel -- but, nevertheless, they were false. In fact, Paul calls them false apostles. Some of them, no doubt, as we see later on, did not understand the gospel but generally, they were particularly incensed at Paul’s assertion of apostolic authority. And so they had disturbed the Corinthian church -- and one person in particular had -- and the result was that the

Corinthian church had been so disturbed that the apostle’s name had suffered. They had accused him of fickleness because he said he was going to visit them, changed his plans, and as I mentioned last week, if a person changes his plans and if he’s an apostle, how can he claim to be in the will of God if he changes his plans? He was either out of the will of God at one time and now is in the will of God or else he was once in the will of God but now he is out of the will of God. And so, the church was stirred up. He wrote 1 Corinthians because of problems he had heard about. And then as the conditions continued, he wrote a stinging letter to them, one that he -- it seems -- almost regretted he had written after it had been sent off by Titus. He became very disturbed over how they would respond to the letter that he wrote them. We don’t have that letter and so we don’t really know the force of it but the apostle occasionally says some things that are rather sharp and so you can just imagine that this was a sharply worded letter. He was disturbed. He finally left Ephesus. He went to Troas. There he waited because one could reach Troas by sea or by land. He waited looking for Titus -- I imagine he took up residence right down by the place where the boats landed. And as every boat came in from northern Greece, he examined the people who left it in order to find Titus, if possible. But when the weather became so bad that no more boats were arriving from northern Greece, the apostle determined to go to Macedonia by the land route. He did. He met Titus in Macedonia, and there Titus gave him a good report. In fact, Titus said that they were so disturbed in Corinth that they had exercised discipline with regard to the offender and, in fact, were very much upset. So much so that Paul felt as he writes 2 Corinthians, as we shall see, that perhaps the discipline should be relaxed with regard to that person.

So that’s the background of Paul’s status here in Ephesus as he -- now in Macedonia ---as he writes the second epistle to them. He wants to comfort them because they are disturbed. And so he talks about his experiences as having comforted him. And through the comfort that he had received, he hoped to be able to comfort them. We

talked last week about the word comfort and tried to point out that it’s a word that means at times to console, at times to encourage, at other times to exhort. It’s a word that has the idea of strength back of it, for it’s built in English on the word *fortis*, the Latin adjective that means strong.

So to comfort someone is not simply to say I’m sorry and to sympathize but to provide some solid strength. Now, the term in the Greek text is a term that has that force to it. It means to call alongside with a view -- not simply to sympathy but to strengthen with the kind of advocacy and comfort that a strong person might give to another person passing through disheartening experiences. In fact, the term “comfort” is a term that is applied to the Holy Spirit as we said. He’s the comforter, so Jesus said. And, further, it’s a term applied to the Lord Jesus who is our advocate. That is the same word in the original text as the comforter. And then we have the God of all comfort in Heaven. So we have three comforters -- two in Heaven and one on the earth. We have the Holy Spirit as a comforter who dwells in all of us as believers and we have the Father, the God of all comfort, and the Lord Jesus as our advocate or comforter in Heaven who acts as our High Priest, prays for us, advocates our cause when we sin.

So we are certainly well-furnished with comforters. In one of the books on 2 Corinthians, G. Campbell Morgan’s little book on both of the Corinthian epistles, he comments on a disagreement that he had with a friend of his by the name of Mr. Chadwick. He said Mr. Chadwick did not like the idea of our Lord as an advocate, and he thought that it should be rendered by comforter. But he said to his friend after his friend had said that in a public meeting, “I think you’re wrong. I think that our Lord is our advocate.” And Mr. Chadwick said, “But an advocate is a lawyer, and you don’t think of a lawyer as a comforter.” And Mr. Morgan said, “I do. As a matter of fact, I know nothing about law. And so when a legal matter comes up, I go to my lawyer. He’s my comforter. So I think that the word “advocate” is a word that expresses comfort.” Well, they had their little disagreement, but, of course, he was really right because our Lord is

an advocate who is a comfort for us. But that’s the word that lies in the background here. And what Paul is going to say is that this God of all comfort is someone who comforts us not simply once, as in case of the affliction in Asia, but he comforts us constantly and, in fact, forever.

Now, let’s turn to the verses and the first verse that we look at is the 8th verse and Paul writes: “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.” Now in reading the Bible, one of the important things, as we have often said and as you’ve often heard others say, is the little words with which the sentences begin: the conjunctions and the conjunctive connections. And Paul begins the 8th verse by saying for we do not want you to be unaware. In other words, he’s explaining -- in this instance, why he thanks God for the mercies to himself; for we don’t want you to be unaware, brethren, of the affliction which came to us in Asia.

So explanation of why he thanks God for the fact that he has a God who is the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. He wants them to know that he has been afflicted. We don’t want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia. Perhaps Paul thinks that if they understand something of the things that he was suffering, they might better understand his actions.

Now, we don’t know what his affliction is. It seems strange for us to read: we do not want you to be aware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia. And then we have to say we don’t know what his affliction was. Some have said he really, actually fought with beasts -- literal beasts. You may remember that a statement like that was made in 1 Corinthians. Other have said, no, the reference is to the riot that is described in Acts chapter 19 when Paul was in the city. Still others have said, no, it’s not that, it’s plots that were made against the apostle’s life. He said that he had many adversaries in the first epistle. Others have said, no, it’s just a combination of trials that the apostle had. Still others, persecutions; some have even suggested he was in danger of being lynched. And

still others have said if it’s something that causes him to say he has delivered us, he will deliver us, and he will still deliver us, it must be something that has continued. And maybe it is something that he has suffered as a result of being in shipwreck; a night in the day in the deep, as some of you feel. After I get well into the message, you may feel that you have been a night in the day in the deep. At any rate, some have suggested that perhaps it was some injury that he suffered that is now having permanent effects. And still others, the apostle’s troubles are simply anxiety, as well say in the 20th century: angst, drawing from the German word from anxiety. Or, and probably more agree, that it likely was some deadly sickness that the apostle had and which also may have had some permanent effects. But we don’t know exactly what his affliction was, but we know some things about it that are important.

It, of course, was something that he had not experienced when he wrote the first letter. So it was something relatively recent. And perhaps the most significant thing about it is just what he says about it here: that it was a life-threatening thing. What he says when he says that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life, he uses a metaphor of people who are breaking down under the pressure of a heavy load. And it’s even used of overloaded ships that were in danger of sinking.

So the apostle was thinking about the trials of life that so exert pressure upon us that we feel that we just may not be able to stand it. I often hear people speak about things just like that. In fact, all of the experiences of life can have something of that effect upon us; marital difficulties, business problems, problems with our friends, problems in our families, problems with our children, and problems with our parents. All of these things, in a sense, can be something like that of which Paul is speaking. They can press down upon us. They can make us feel that we’re not going to be able to make it.

Now, of course, when we say things like that and when Paul says things like that, we have to realize that he is thinking of his own capabilities apart from God. You see, it’s

obvious that even an apostle could say things like that. In fact, I think that’s really the point at which Paul becomes very significant for us. We don’t know the precise affliction that Paul had. So in one sense, we can insert our own affliction there, a genuine affliction. And the same principles by which the apostle came to victory are the principles by which we can come to victory, too. They’re the principles by which can be delivered from marital difficulties, business difficulties and trials, personal difficulties, family difficulties. All those things are things that submit to the application of the principles that the apostle speaks about here.

So he says that he is at a loss but he also said that he endured it for the Corinthians’ sake. That is, he was telling them something about the things that he has learned in order that they may learn the things that will help them in the midst of their trials. You know, I think the Corinthians, when they got the letter from Paul, they had been very disturbed. When Titus delivered his stinging letter, he had stirred them up. They had realized that they had sinned against the apostle. They had exercised discipline with respect to the individual who was causing the most of the difficulties. And now comes the letter, and they discover that the reason for a lot of the things that they interpreted as being wrong in Paul’s life were because of an affliction with which he was afflicted. And I’m sure that when it was read in the assembly, as they sat around the Lord’s Table, listened to the word of God, observed and remembered the Lord with the bread and the wine, and the letter was read from the Apostle Paul to the group of Christians there, they must have been a very shame-faced lot; an embarrassed and convicted group of Christians who had complained against the apostle who had been the instrumentality by which they had been brought to the knowledge of the Lord and given by God eternal life.

Paul goes on to say, as he assesses his affliction in the 9th verse, “Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves, in order that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.” The hopelessness of his affliction stands out. He had the

sentence of death within himself. That term is a term that generally referred to some type of expression of the will of an organization. It was used -- well, it would have been used, for example, of a decree that an emperor or the imperial government would issue. So the sentence is of that kind of sentence. It’s a decision, an imperial kind of decision, and Paul lays hold of that figure to express how he felt; a sentence, but the sentence was of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves.

You know, to think that the apostle could actually say we had the sentence of death within ourselves, well, that’s understandable. We can understand that of anyone. Our Lord could certainly have said that the sentence of death he had, but to say in order that we should not trust in ourselves, was something that could hardly have been said by our Lord and certainly would be very difficult in the minds of many of us for an apostle to say. To think that an apostle in this stage of Paul’s life had to be taught again that he should not trust in himself but in the Lord is an amazing thing. In fact, Chrysostom, a 4th Century expositor, is so affected by that that he said Paul didn’t need such a lesson. That what he’s doing is really speaking and giving an example for us. He really is not talking about himself, he’s just talking about the way that others might have felt. He didn’t really feel that way. But Chrysostom is wrong. No question about it. An apostle is not exempt from the kinds of afflictions and trials that other human beings have as well. He says that the purpose of this affliction that he possessed was that he should trust in the God of the resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, let’s just leave it the God of the resurrection. When we say the God of the resurrection, what do we think about? Well, simply, we can say we think of the God who raised Christ from the dead. That mighty power, incidentally, now lives within the heart and life of every believing believer in Christ, so we’re told by Paul in Ephesians. We think also of the fact that he raised us from the death of depravity and sin and brought us into the possession of eternal life. That is a resurrection. And then we look forward to

the resurrection in the future, the bodily resurrection. So there is a three-fold sense in which God is the resurrecting God.

So Christ has been resurrected. We have been brought to life. We look forward to the resurrection in which we receive a body likened to Christ’s own glorious body. So, Paul says, we had the sentence of death that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. So we have to trust in him who is preeminently the God of the resurrection.

Now, we’ll see, as we go through 2 Corinthians, that this is one of the great truths that undergirded the apostle’s life. You know what I think? That every Christian who lives a generally successful Christian life has a fundamental belief in the fact that God is the God of the resurrection; the experiences of life we face with the conviction of that. That brings us through the experiences of life. He is the God of the resurrection. He can do the impossible, if it’s his will. If it’s not his will, then we don’t want that that he can do.

Now, I think that there are a couple of things that I’d like to lay just a little bit of stress on for a moment. It’s an obvious inference from all that Paul is saying. One is this: proud flesh. That’s characteristic of all of us, isn’t it? We are full of pride. And sometimes, when we’ve had spiritual victories, we are most full of pride. Proud flesh can only be tempered by the extremities of despair under the crushing hand of God. In other words, the afflictions from the Lord God come to instruct us to deal with our pride. Actually, that’s what Sibbs said. And that’s what Paul says. That’s what the Bible says. We are creatures. We forget that we’re creatures. We want to use God. You can see whole churches built on the idea of using God; using God to be successful in business, prosperity theology; just one of the illustrations of it. God becomes a mean by which we secure what we want in this life. So proud flesh can only be tempered by the extremities of despair under the crushing hand of God.

And, secondly, in connection with this, the remnants of the disease of pride linger in the saints. You would think that saints would not be proud. Well, one of the things

that they must know in order to be saved is that they are sinners, that they displease God, that their lives are out of harmony with God, that they’re under sin, guilt, and condemnation. Well, you would think that having come to know Christ as personal savior -- we’ve learned that lesson; we’ve passed beyond that. No. The remnants of the disease of pride linger in the saints and even in the apostles. Think of it. In the apostles. If Paul had to deal with pride, how much more do I have the requirement and the necessity to deal with pride? You can see Paul was no perfectionist. He didn’t believe when you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ you were possessed of a life of perfection. Here he is late in his life talking about the fact that he needed afflictions in order to be taught to trust in the living God in the experiences of life. So easy to forget.

Take Abraham, what a marvelous picture we have of a man being touched at the place of pride and of autonomy in his life. Abram, now, mind you, he’s known the Lord for many years, Abram, you have the promises, don’t you? Yes. Not only do I have the promises, Lord, but I’ve got the evidence. There’s Isaac, the young lad, the child of promise. God’s faithful to his word. Through him the whole world is going to be blessed. All the families on the earth shall be blessed. Abram, I want you to take Isaac -- notice the way Moses writes. You know, it’s almost as if all of the good things about Isaac are thrown up before Abram’s eyes. Take Isaac, your only son, you’ve just set off the other son, Isaac is the only son in the most significant sense. Not enough to say your only son -- not enough to say your son, he says your only son. And not enough to say your only son, he says whom you love. And offer him up on the altar. Think of the turmoil that produced. Talk about an affliction. And this went on for days. Shall I obey the Lord God or shall I obey the promise? He’s the seed through whom everybody shall be blessed, through whom the Messiah shall come, we, of course, learn. But finally he realizes to obey God and to leave the consequences to God is what we must do. And so he doesn’t rationalize. He simply obeys God. He believes he’s the God of the resurrection. He acts that way. So he offers up Isaac. I wish we could talk about it more,

but it’s marvelous the way Moses tells the story. Abram starts out. The story gets slower and slower because as Abraham gets to Mariah, he’s let desirous of seeing this come to pass. When he’s building the altar, I can just imagine him seeing a lot of rocks around it and saying those rocks won’t do. There’s one over there about a quarter of a mile away, I think that’s the one I need. And so he spends this lengthy time building the altar. Everything in the whole story slows down. Even unbelieving students of Genesis have noted that reading the Hebrew text.

Well, at any rate, he obeys the Lord God. He believed in the God of the resurrection. As the apostle puts it in Romans 4, verse 17, he calls into being that which does not exist as he talks about Abram. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says that when Abram went up and took Isaac up and left the others back and said we’ll come back later, he was, in effect, confessing the doctrine of the resurrection.

So Paul says, we had the sentence of death within ourselves, in order that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. So, my dear Christian friends, when the trials of life come to you, when the afflictions come to you, when the difficulties which seem beyond your capability, remember the God of the resurrection is there and can bring victory there. And remember, too, that trials, as Mr. F.B. Meyer used to say, are God’s vote of confidence in us. He sends affliction to us because he wishes to cause us to grow, and he stands by the side of us as the comforter, the advocate, and sees that we do.

And, finally, for our time is just about up, the apostle in verse 10 and verse 11 speaks of the deliverance. He talks about it from the divine side and he talks about it from the human side. He gives a general statement -- his general statement of the God of the resurrection of personal application: who delivered us from so great a peril of death and will deliver us. He on whom we have set our hope, and he will yet deliver us. You, also, joining us in helping through your prayers.

So he’s reminding the Corinthians of the doctrine of the resurrection about which he had written in his first letter perhaps in the 15th chapter there. And he’s really, in effect, saying look, the resurrection is something we look forward to in the future, we’re going to receive a body likened our Lord’s own glorious body, but the experiences of life afford a resurrection every day.

In other words, the principle is a principle that is continually applicable in the lives of the saints. What confidence the saints should have. In fact, that’s the way he puts it. He says he will deliver us; He on whom we have set our hope. When Israel stood at the Red Sea and the Red Sea stood before them and the Egyptians stood behind them with all of the firepower necessary to take them back into bondage, when all hope was gone, frightened, they appealed to Moses and said you should have left us in Egypt, wasn’t there land enough in Egypt for us to be buried in there? Moses said, Look, stand still and see the salvation of God. And the pillar of cloud moved over, stood between the advancing Egyptian hosts and the children of Israel, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord which he will accomplish for you, the children of Israel in a mighty exhibition of the God of resurrection power, walked through the Red Sea on dry ground and the Egyptians are saying to do were all drowned including Pharaoh.

That’s the way God delivers. That’s the way he delivers his saints. He has guaranteed it by the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross and the advocate at the right hand of the Father lives, my dear Christian friends, to secure everything for which he has died. What confidence we should have. What confidence in the experiences of life, the tragedies of life. We rest our hope upon the God of the resurrection.

Now, Paul mentions the human side, too. He says you also joining and helping us through your prayers. Now, let’s remember that there is a mystery about prayer. But prayer is not a second force to be looked at as in competition with divine grace. Prayer is not a second force that supplements divine grace. In prayer, as Philip Hughes puts it so beautifully, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. The duty of

prayer is not the modification of God’s power but a glorification of it. So prayer doesn’t change any of the will of God. Of course, it changes us when we enter into fellowship with the Lord God. And prayer is the divinely determined means by which God accomplishes his tasks. And we’re called upon to pray, just like Abraham. He didn’t reason out what was going to happen. He never would have offered Isaac. But he reasoned that he must obey and trust God to be the God of the resurrection.

So when we pray, we enter into fellowship with the Lord God, and he graciously allows us to be part of his saving program. And so the result is, as Paul mentions here a whole group of people who are lifting their eyes and hearts to the Lord God. And not only does the apostle have the assistance of the prayers of God’s saints, but there is a greater manifestation of the glory of God. And it’s in this epistle, incidentally, that we will read about the communion of the saints. And here we have it, in visible form, all the saints looking to the Lord and praying together. That’s the true communion of the saints.

Now, I suggested to you that I’d read Mr. Rutherford’s translation. It’s a wonderful translation. I wish I could be sure it’s exactly right. But taking the word as meaning faces instead of persons, he renders this: that there may be a sea of upturned faces as a widespread thanksgiving goes up to God on our behalf for the gracious act which he, God, has done for us. A sea of upturned faces. What a change that might make in Believer’s Chapel or in any other assembly, for that matter, if we had a sea of upturned faces, constantly looking to God for the blessings of God upon us.

Well, our time’s up. Let me say this simply as a conclusion. So far as God and trials are concerned, he permits them to come. In fact, he sends them. Further, he’s in control of them. Still further, he enables us to bear them. And in addition, he delivers us from them. And, finally, he’s glorified in them. The psalmist’s joyful cry was Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. That’s the expression of the reception of God’s wonderful provision and the afflictions of life. May God help us by His grace to have a similar attitude in the afflictions that will surely come

to every one of us here; even you kids. And you children, you’ll have them, too. But may our thoughts go to the God of the resurrection and the experiences of life. May we know something of what Paul was talking about when he spoke about the God of all comforts, the Father of mercies.

If you’re here today, and you’ve never believed in Christ, you don’t have such a God. You don’t have any reason for comfort. No reason for an advocate. No assurance that the afflictions of life are afflictions through which you will be brought to the glory of God, that is, in your blessing as well. Come to Christ. Believe in Him who offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners. Acknowledge your need of Him. Turn from your proud and self-confidence to the Lord Jesus Christ and receive as a free gift eternal life through Him. It’s offered through God’s ambassadors. Come to Christ and believe in Him, trust in Him that you, too, may have this Father of mercies and God of all comfort.

May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the hope that we have, a hope set upon the God of the resurrection. Lord, we often feel so weak, so often do we sense the feeling of failure, even an unwillingness to really give ourselves to Thee in the experiences of life.

O God, we thank Thee for affliction. We thank Thee for the issues of it. We pray that Thou wilt sustain us in it. And we pray that we may learn the lessons that Thy name may be honored and glorified. We rejoice in the Triune God, and we worship Thee: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the source of all blessing for us.

For those, Lord, who may not yet know Thee may at this very moment, they lift their hearts to Thee and say, I thank Thee Lord that Thou hast given Jesus Christ, the Son of God to die for sinners. I’m a sinner. I need a salvation. I come to Thee now.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“The Verdict of Death” by S. Lewis Johnson

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