

God's Sovereignty最高统治权 and Growing in Adversity逆境 - 2Cor 4:8-12

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: My father died when I was 15 and I had to work to help support my family. But my father's death wasn't the end of adversities in my life. Earlier, when I was 6, I saw my baby sister burned in a small house fire and then died in hospital. When I was 11, my 10 year old friend had a dragline boom拉铲挖掘机 fall on him and crushed him to death. When I was 12, my 13 year old friend was killed by a car while crossing the road. My best friend from high school died shortly after high school while working at a gas station in New Jersey trying to raise money for his cancer surgery. He was shot in the head and killed. My other good friend from high school was crushed by a truck in Brampton about 15 years ago. And these were not all. I've seen half a dozen relatives die in the past 8 months...but I think it is sufficient for the point... Where was God in all of this? Why did all of these bad things happen to good people? How are good people to deal with all of these bad things? Pastor Greg Bylsma who was to teach with us this week damaged his foot a second time and is struggling to get better...and as a good preacher he now suffers from multiple sclerosis硬化症. The Bible teaches us that God does everything he does for his own good pleasure...not for your pleasure. This does not fit with our Western psyche心态 – that good things must happen to you because you are good. Even as a Christian you have no such guarantee. Being special in God's eyes does not take away troubles from your path. The trouble is, you might get angry when things don't go the way you want or expect, so I will take some time to address this from God's Word.

Our headings are: The Reality of Adversity, and the Reason for Adversity.

Our goals: As Christ's children, you will understand and learn to benefit from adversities in your life.

The Reality of Adversity

8 We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed困惑, but not in despair绝望; 9 persecuted遭受, but not forsaken被弃; struck down, but not destroyed—

1. There are those who say that God expects all men to prosper and be in good health.(Joseph Prince, John Hagee, Benny “buy me a bank draft” Hinn, Joel Osteen, and Joyce Myers). They largely teach that your children should always be healthy and never have accidents. You should never die in a plane crash if you “plead the blood of Christ” on the plane. You are able rebuke cancer and it has to go. You rebuke that spiteful恶意的 spirit in your cousin's life - that cousin who has been giving you a hard time, and she will get better. They quote verses like the following:

Deuteronomy 29:9 "Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon formed against you shall prosper, And every tongue which rises against you in judgment You shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, And their righteousness is from Me," Says the LORD.

3John 1:2 Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers发达.

They ignore verses like:

Ecclesiastes 11:6 In the morning sow your seed, And in the evening do not withhold your hand; For you do not know which will prosper, Either this or that, Or whether both alike will be good.

Psalms 73: 3 For I was envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no pangs in their death, But their strength is firm. 5 They are not in trouble as other men, Nor are they plagued折磨 like other men. 6 Therefore pride serves as their necklace; Violence covers them like a garment衣服. 7 Their eyes bulge肿起 with abundance; They have more than heart could wish.

In other words, according to this prevailing sentiment态度, you are supposed to enjoy a life on earth in bliss and harmony because you are a child of God. (I wonder what Job would have thought of their sermons... who innocently suffered so much.) And if you have adversity, they argue, it was because of your lack of faith – a lack of commitment to the Lord.

2. How ridiculous! They are literally arguing that all the Apostles were lacking faith. But did Paul lack faith when he was sick (Paul's thorn in his side).

2Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Did James lack faith to rebuke Herod who persecuted him— so he was cut in two. Acts 12:2. What about John the Baptist...He did rebuke Herod and still lost his head, literally. Matthew 14:10. Did Paul lack faith because he could not pray for healing for his close friend Epaphroditus. Phi 2:25-27. Was it Paul's lack of faith that cause him to be beaten...multiple times...shipped wrecked... multiple times...imprisoned...multiple times...had to work hard because his ministry needs were not fully met...falsely accused...multiple times...Let Paul speak to you directly!

2Corinthians 11: 23 Are they ministers of Christ? —I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

3. The Bible teaches that suffering (persecution, famine, false accusations, etc) in life is expected and normal. The Bible does not teach them as strange...

John 15:20 "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you..."

Acts 9:16 "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

1Thessalonians 3:4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

2Timothy 3:12 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

2Corinthians 8:2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

Our text teaches that everywhere Paul was he was having troubles. He was literally squeezed wherever he was. Was Paul a wicked man? No. Jesus said that those who are persecuted are often persecuted for righteousness...not as sinners with weak faith....

Matthew 5:10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

So if you have no persecution – that may sometimes indicate that there is no faith. The Devil is so contented with a lack of faith that he brings no troubles across your path.

4. While suffering is a reality for Christians (and suffering can be caused even by your fellow Christians, it does not take away the joy of living for Christ. Look at how Paul described your preservation!

a. Hard pressed- but you are not crushed. You are able to endure, unlike the cars in the junk yard.

b. Perplexed but you are not in despair. There is always hope. There is always a way to escape. Salvation is secured. Food, clothing, and housing may be short, but you are safe.

c. Persecuted (chased after to hurt), but not forsaken. God will be with you wherever you go.

d. Struck down, but you are not destroyed. Though you may be thrown to the ground like clay pots, you will not be crushed. You are preserved by the power of God.

10 always carrying about in the body the (kind of) dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

5. And that suffering you can expect to be like the suffering of Jesus Christ...severe and unfair.

The Reason for Adversity

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 is working in us, but life in you.

1. Adversity is for the glory of a sovereign God. He does whatever he does for a reason: It pleases him!

Psalms 135: 5 For I know that the LORD is great, And our Lord is above all gods. 6 Whatever the LORD pleases He does, In heaven and in earth, In the seas and in all deep places.

2. In suffering you show your love for Christ and his church.

Acts 5:41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Colossians 1:24 I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the

afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church,
This is why Paul said that even though he was dying, the church was able to live.

3. Adversity causes the spread of the Gospel- and hence the blessings of the church.

Acts 8: 1 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.

4. Adversity caused other churches to care for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. A famine 饥荒 was predicted as part of God's plan. But many donations were taken up so that the Christians in Jerusalem could enjoy the love and support of their fellow brothers.

2Corinthians 8: 1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: 2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. 3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, 4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

5. Adversity caused the church to draw closer to each other. A good example of that is when James was executed by Herod.

6. Adversity causes people to look to God for help - pray. This is for the glory of Christ and for the good of man at the same time.

James 5:14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

But keep in mind that sometimes sickness and other adversities are directly because of sin.

7. Adversity helps to keep Christians dependent on God. This is the subject of Revelation.

Revelation 2:10 "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, **that you may be tested**, and you will have tribulation 苦难 ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Mark 10:21 Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."

Keep in mind that the poor may be poor not because they were lazy or lacked faith. If that were the case, the Apostle Paul would not have said: I want to help you. Poverty makes them bow.

8. Adversity refines you as gold is refined by fire.

1Peter 1:7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Conclusion:

Adversity is real – as real as can be for you as a Christian. But there are reasons for adversity...many reasons. Therefore, you must not complain when you suffer, but ask God for the grace to patiently endure the trials of your life.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: If you have struggled wondering about all your bad experiences in life – sickness, loneliness, betrayal 背叛, poverty, had bad parents, endured rotten people in church, remember this: You belong to Christ Jesus. He bought you with his own blood. He knows what is best for you. He is holy. He loves. He will watch over you when you go through the valley of the shadow of death. And when you are finished enduring – whatever challenges he brings in your path, you will become like gold – pure and precious...and rewarded.

Finally, as Christians we are put through fire to make us pure and reward us. But if you are not God's child, you will be consumed by the fires of hell...that is...unless you ask God to change you and make you his child. Christ died to offer his blood as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of the world.