

Grounded in Grace

Pictures of Hope and Redemption Pt 3

Picture #2 An Unexpected Destruction

⁸ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. *2nd Corinthians 1:8-11*



We continue in this series of using pictures from 9/11 as illustrations of how God uses difficulties and tragedies to redeem our stories. Most tragedies come unexpectedly and leave behind devastating effects. They destruct our lives and make us feel as if we are in a time of chaos with no stability. However, Paul's words will be able to give us a direction and a sense of understanding when the fire begins to burn and the dust clouds our souls. Let's look at Paul's perspective and words.

The Power of Informing God's People

As Paul began his letter to one of the churches who had been struggling with conflict and dissension in its own way, he informed them of his trials and troubles. As I read this, I believe Paul wanted the Corinthian church to realize two things. First, he wanted them to know that many of their present-day struggles, like deciding who was more spiritual because of their giftedness or whether they followed Paul or Apollo, were petty compared to the destruction he had personally been facing. Paul emphasized that his struggles were very stressful, even to the point of death. The Corinthians' suffering was nothing in comparison to what Paul faced and he wanted them to know that. Secondly, Paul was not a lone ranger. He desired his brothers and sisters to know his struggles. He was vulnerable and honest with his pain. He suffered alone but made it a point to let others know of his pain. He allowed the church to become a fellow struggler in the destruction in his life. In essence, he allowed the power of the church to become evident by his vulnerability. This is where the gospel has its power- in the community of prayer and in fellowship with other peoples' sufferings.

The Forcefully as necessary of God's Providence

Over the last few years, I have borrowed a prayer from a former professor of mine, Dr. Knox Chamblin, that goes, "God, do your will and use these events as forcefully as necessary but as gently as possible." It has been a source of comfort for my soul. I am not sure where Dr. Chamblin came up with this prayer, but it seems this prayer would fit the context of Paul's situation. He seemed to be fighting a sense of depression and desperation. Paul felt life's force in an incredible way. He has suffered in despair and struggled to survive, but he still had hope. In the midst of struggle, Paul understood that the purpose of his pain was found in God's providence. Listen to his words, "*Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*" Paul directly correlated the destruction of his life with the providence of God. He knew that God allowed those circumstances to happen so that he would rely upon God and not on himself. Paul gave us a road map to understand our lives when circumstances cause havoc in our souls. Furthermore, he made us look at the gospel. The gospel is found not just in the theological fact that Jesus was raised from the dead but in the fact that the very power of life will give us life in the midst of death and destruction in our souls. The gospel gives us life and life abundantly.

The Gentleness as possible of God's Deliverance

Lastly, we have the gospel of promise. Listen to Paul's words, "*He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again.*" In the midst of chaos and destruction, Paul had an enduring faith that God would deliver him. Paul looked back and saw that the Lord had redeemed his past. Then he looked to the present and had confidence that the Lord would deliver him. This does not mean that destruction of relationships won't hurt or that there won't be pain. This does not mean that circumstance will cause us to lose hope or long for something more. Nor does it mean that we feel helpless because there is nothing we can do but watch and wait. All of those feelings are real and must be honored. However, we know that we have a gentle God who delivers us while we are crying. We have a God who hurts while we hurt. Even when our lives are being destroyed, we have a God who will hold us while the walls of our souls are shaking. God will draw us near as we feel the gentleness of his deliverance. Look, seek, and find the gentleness of the Lord in your present circumstances. He will find you right where you are.

(A personal note: Dr. Chamblin is facing leukemia and, as he walks this road of God's force, I ask for prayer for him that he will feel God's gentleness.)