

Ministering in Adversity

18 October, 2009

By Rev. Lonny R. Bower

Scripture Reference – Acts 27:1 through 28:31

Unit Theme: The Expanding Church

Central Truth: God gives Christians the strength and courage to minister in all circumstances.

Focus: Acknowledge that Christians often face adversity when ministering for Christ and serve the Lord courageously.

Key Verse: 2 Corinthians 4:1

Introduction:

The Apostle Paul was certainly no stranger to adversity, in fact adversity is one of the first things that come to mind when I think of his life and ministry. 2 Corinthians 11:22-29 (which we looked at last week) lists much of the adversity Paul faced throughout his ministry. Adversity comes from all directions and at times it may seem that it is overwhelming. There are few in the ministry today who are not experiencing or have experienced adversity. Jesus experienced adversity; therefore we can expect to face it as well. It has a way of exposing our character and also developing our character. That is, the truth about our motives and character will often be exposed upon the onset of adversity. When you really get down to it God is not as concerned with our comfort as he is our character. A Christian who has never experienced adversity is a weak Christian (a little ‘c’ Christian I often say). Adversity remains one of the truths of our Christian walk, because the enemy of our soul is determined to meet us head on with all the fierceness of darkness that he can muster. If our lives happen to lack adversity, perhaps it is because we are not where God wants us to be. I am certain that many will be challenged and set on edge by this statement, but I would offer a recourse by challenging them to study the scriptures starting with the life of Jesus and continuing through the Apostles. They will find it impossible to find one example that does not include adversity. Though adversity is a fact that we all must face, we can do so with joy and courage, not sadness and fear. **Hebrews 12:2** says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him, adversity when faced with joy and courage will always release the blessings of God not only upon us, but countless others too, though we may not see it, this remains an unchangeable truth.

I. Adverse Circumstances – Acts 27:1, 13-26, 40-44

If one considers Paul’s circumstance already one may be tempted to say “how could it get any worse?” As if it was not enough that the Jews were set against him (looking to kill him) and he was bound for Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Now the weather was out to get him. Sometimes it may seem like the whole world is against us, it is during these times that we often grow the most. That is, as long as we keep the proper perspective of our circumstances. I have often said that when we begin to gripe and complain because of our circumstances we only do so

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because we have lost sight of the cross. It becomes overwhelmingly important that we never lose sight of the adversity that Jesus faced on our behalf. As bad as it may get at times, I am certain that it will never equal the cross of Calvary. How dare we complain when Christ suffered so much for us? As for Paul it seemed that he may never make it to Rome and that things couldn't get any worse – or could they?

➤ **Think about it:**

What adversity are you currently facing?

Are you facing it with joy and courage?

What have the affects been?

“Sometimes we have to come to the end of ourselves before we get to the bottom of things.” —Gary Gulbranson

II. Miraculous Ministry – Acts 28:1-10

Just when things are looking up a snake shows up! It's interesting to note that Paul does not complain, he doesn't call a time out and ask the Lord to take his life – (remember Elijah 1 Kings 19?), but he seems to take it all in stride. If you'll recall the time Jesus told the Disciples “we're crossing over to the other side” (Mark 4:35-38), but as they were going a great storm arose and threatened their lives. Where was Jesus? Asleep in the bow. The disciples did not hear him when He told them we're crossing over, but instead focused on the adversity of the storm and its destructive power. Had they remembered that Jesus said “we're crossing over” perhaps they could have weathered the storm. How does this relate to Paul, you ask? Paul knew he was going to Rome (the Lord had revealed this to him), so there was no storm, no snake, or foe that would keep him from arriving in Rome. Paul was able to press on because he knew that he had a divine appointment to keep. The purpose of the journey never left him – to preach the gospel in Rome. He did not live hap hazard as to temp God, but neither did he shrink back from adversity. As a result the Lord was able to demonstrate His miraculous power continually through him. We often quench the power and Spirit of God, because of our lack of faith or our complaining (remember it was the complaining of the Israelites that brought them the curse of death Numbers 14:27-29). We must determine that no matter what adversity we face, that we keep it all in perspective to the cross, and the call that God has on our life. If we don't, we may end up missing out on countless blessings of God to include opportunities to share the gospel.

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➤ **Think about it:**

Has God ever moved miraculously in your life during the midst of adversity?

Have you ever missed the power of God because of your attitude?

“In His will is our peace.”— *Dante Alighieri*

III. Amazing Opportunity – Acts 28:16-31

Someone has said, where there is a will there is a way. It was Paul’s will to go to Rome, it was his will to preach the gospel and there was nothing going to keep him from either. Once in Rome God opened the doors wide to him for the preaching of the word to all who would listen. As usual, many of the Jews rejected the word and the Lord. This is something that every Christian who shares the word needs to remember, it is not us they reject, but the Lord himself. Eternity will only tell the extent of the impact Paul’s preaching had on Rome. There is no doubt in my mind that Caesar himself heard the gospel message, either directly from Paul or indirectly from others whom Paul had ministered to. While in chains in Rome Paul would write Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. How many times do we miss the opportunities God sets before us simply because we are not comfortable or because we have moved heaven and earth to avoid adversity? It was Paul who would write by unction of the Holy Spirit – all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28).

➤ **Think about it:**

What opportunities have you had because of adversity?

What opportunities have you missed because you chose the road without adversity? – you may never know...

“The world has more winnable people than ever before . . . but is possible to come out of a ripe field empty-handed.”—*Donald McGavran*

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Conclusion:

No one likes adversity but this does not change the fact that we will all face it. As Christians it is comforting to know that we do not have to face adversity alone. That we serve a Lord who wears our t-shirt – He’s been there. Hebrews 4:15 says that our High Priest – Jesus can identify with our temptations. If this is true He can certainly identify also with our adversity. Since adversity is certain to come upon the righteous, we need to make sure that we do not bring it upon ourselves unnecessarily. Jesus said in Matthew 5 that we are blessed when we are persecuted for righteousness sake. I would add that we only complicate things when we suffer persecution for unrighteousness sake. Paul was persecuted for living a righteous life and ultimately gave his life in Rome because of his testimony of Christ. Though his life when viewed from the natural does not sound appealing in the least, a look at it from the supernatural, will change anyone’s mind. Look at all the things that Paul accomplished through Christ – most of which we are largely unaware of. No wonder he would write “I can do all things through Christ... (Philippians 4:13). He was a man that was able to say I didn’t not come to you with words of wisdom or great knowledge, but a demonstration of the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:1-5). The power of God was released in his life because he did not shrink back in the face of adversity, but instead ministered in spite of adversity. I wonder if we’ll have the same testimony when we reach the end of our lives – will we be able to say as Paul did “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)?

Next Week’s Lesson will start a new theme – “The Gospel Fulfills the Law”

God’s Ultimate Solution for Sin – Leviticus 4:1-12; 16:29-34; Hebrews 9:11-28; 10:19-25

- I. Sacrifices for Sin – Leviticus 4:1-12; 16:29-34**
- II. Christ’s Complete and Final Sacrifice – Hebrews 9:11-28**
- III. Living in Christ – Hebrews 10:19-25**

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Except where I have paraphrased all scripture is taken from the NKJV unless otherwise noted.

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