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II Corinthians 1:1-11 "His Comfort and Deliverance"
January 13, 2019

Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 1. If you think we're just starting, you missed last week.

Paul spent 18 months on his second missionary journey in Corinth planting that church, and he watched God grow an amazing church. The details are found in Acts Chapter 18. A few years later, on his third missionary journey, Paul would find himself in Ephesus for three years, planting a church there. And it is there that the first news arrived to him that there were problems in Corinth. Not only was it a very sensuous, kind of perverse city, but it was now being overwhelmed by the Judaizers, the false teachers who were mixing faith in Christ with the doing of the law. And it really was one of the greatest challenges to the church in that generation. It's still a challenge today. Faith in Christ versus works. That's a discussion we have with most folks.

Last week we reviewed the history of Paul's back and forth communication with the church in Corinth that he so loved that had been overrun by these false teachers, as well as all kinds of internal strife. I'll review it for you quickly, but we can't do this every week.

Paul sent a corrective letter once news got to Ephesus of the problems. We don't have that letter. We do know that it accomplished little. It came back with a letter from them that had lots of questions in it, and to that letter Paul responded with what we have, I Corinthians. Timothy, a retiring kind of a young man, was sent by Paul to take this to them. It didn't any good, not only didn't do any good, it seemed to get worse. In fact, Timothy was not a very confrontive guy. He came back and said to Paul, it's worse. The influence of these false teachers is so prevalent that the church is in peril. Paul makes a surprise visit to them, traveling from Ephesus. We don't have any reference to that in the book of Acts. We do have reference in this letter that Paul will say a couple of times, I'm about to come to see you for the third time, but we only know that Paul had been there once.

And so Paul went to visit. It didn't go well. The leaders in the church that had gotten their hooks into the people, withstood Paul to his face, and he was both angry and heartbroken. These were people that he loved. This was the church that he had planned and these folks were being ripped off. And so Paul goes back to Ephesus, writes a more severe letter. We don't have that letter either, but it was sent by the hand of Titus. They had made agreements to come back and let him know if this is going any better, have things changed, fasting and praying and worrying about the people.

Titus didn't come back. Paul left Ephesus after three years, went up the coast to Troas. Couldn't find Titus there either. It's a natural traveled way to get back. There was a ministry there in Troas Paul began, but he didn't have a heart for it. He just worried about the people. Crossed over to Macedonia, the northern part of Greece, where he ran into Titus, and for the first time in a long time the news was pretty good. It seemed like God's word was getting through to many folks. There were still a couple of guys that were in pretty powerful positions that were hanging onto influence, and Paul well the work wasn't done, but it was the first good news that Paul had had in a good long time. And it just so relieved him, because the attack of these false teachers was not just against the gospel, but against Paul. If they could undermine their confidence in Paul, his integrity, his teaching, then they could maybe get the people away from him entirely.

And so Paul writes this letter after meeting with Titus. He's happy, and yet he's at war. He has to defend himself, because the attacks against him weren't personal in the sense that he cared what they thought; it was personal in the sense that he didn't want them to be tripped up. He wanted them to survive this thing. And so Paul writes this letter to them. It is a mixture of both joy and confrontation. It is Paul with his most exposed emotional self, and at the same time very explosive in some of the things that he says as he wants these folks to do well. It's 257 verses of the heart of the pastor for a church that he loved.

Paul would eventually get to Corinth. He spent three months there. You can find that in the book of Acts as well. But the pain that they had caused, the hurt that he had felt, the betrayal that he had suffered, the

stumbling, the upheaval, the false teachers, the hatefulness, Paul just -- he lived and died with those things for months and months and months. So this morning we start on his letter to them, but we're really just going to look at the introduction. Paul, in the first 11 verses, doesn't get to the issue. He starts that in verse 12. But he wants to say, so thankful to God for answering our prayers, for comforting us through what we have gone through, and we're so grateful that you are doing well. And that's what we'll look at this morning, God's comfort and deliverance for Paul as he hears the good news from Titus and writes this letter, probably from Philippi, sends it back to them by the hands of Titus before he'll arrive there on his own.

Verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all of Achaia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." You would think a guy like Paul would always be up? I read of his exploits and I'm thinking, man, what a life that would have been; right? People get blinded because you're mad at them -- hey, you can't see anymore. You don't get to speak anymore. God was just powerfully with Paul. I think this was a guy that would just strut a little. But it isn't at all like that. He was like Jesus. He was acquainted with grief, and certainly this had driven him to the edge.

Dr. John Henry Jowett, who was probably one of the greatest Canadian preachers in the 1860s, 1880s, in that time, wrote in his autobiography, "I am oftentimes perfectly wretched and everything in my life appears mucky." This from a guy that revolutionized the north in terms of preaching. I think Spurgeon, who was a guy you would think would be jolly all of the time, wrote that he had such depression in His Spirit that he never -- or he wondered often if he would be able to survive it, the extremes. This from a man who God so greatly used. And Paul's the same way. One thing for sure, we have this treasure in earthen vessels, which means not only that the power in our life belongs to the Lord, but let's face it, we're not really cut out for this. If the Lord didn't dwell in us, we probably wouldn't make it. And I get the feeling just reading through the scriptures that sometimes our bodies struggle to handle what our minds and our spirits have committed themselves to.

Maybe the best example is Jesus. He's in the Garden of Gethsemane, He's about to have His relationship with the Father severed because of our sin. He had been with the Father forever. This was the greatest pressure on His life. The physical pain was one thing; this sacrifice was the worst. It caused Him to sweat great drops of blood. A body under such pressure that the capillaries in the sweat glands explode. His body couldn't handle what His heart was intending to do, and so He suffered.

I think that's kind of what we go through. We love the Lord, we want to serve, but sometimes the pressure in the work that God gives us can overwhelm our flesh. And Paul will write a little bit later of being despairing even of life in itself, and that he had a sentence of death in him. That doesn't sound like a happy-go-lucky guy. But he isn't happy-go-lucky, because he puts his life on the line for the sake of the people that he is serving. So his flesh struggles to bear up what his heart is pleased to do. Discouragement is no respecter of persons. If you struggle with that sometimes I wouldn't say, oh, I must not be having faith. Look it, I'm all discouraged. Yeah, welcome to the club; right? It is both a joy and a labor to walk with God, and Paul was no exception.

So he begins this letter as he does most every letter: He begins with his name. I think 13 of his letters begin with his name. This once self-proclaimed persecutor of this church who has miraculously been saved now introduces himself as an apostle, which he does in many places, and then he adds "by the will of God." One of the issues in Corinth was that he was being questioned by these false teachers. He didn't have any letters of commendation. He didn't speak well, he wasn't good looking. They went after just everything: his appearance, the fact that he was suffering so much, I guess God's not with him or else he wouldn't suffer so much, and all. And so they questioned his authority. And one of the things that you'll find Paul stressing in this book is, look, God has given me an authority to be an apostle. In fact, next week Paul will say, "It's a good thing I haven't showed up, or you're not going to like me showing up next time," which, from a little scrawny guy like Paul you go, "Yeah, who do you think you are?" Oh, but the Lord was with Paul. So Paul begins by asserting his authority to a church that had been questioning him because of the false teachers that had been placed around them. He says to them, "I am Paul,

and I'm an apostle, and it is God's will that I'm an apostle."

When Paul was saved on the road to Damascus, and he saw Jesus as the Lord of heaven and he was left physically blind for three days sitting in a house of a disciple, the Lord sent a fellow named Ananias to pray for him. And when Ananias prayed for Paul, he also declared to him in Chapter 9 of Acts that God was going to use him as a chosen vessel to send to him to the gentiles and set him before kings, and send him to the children of Israel; that it was going to be a suffering road, but he was going to be sent, which is exactly what the word "apostle" means, one who is sent. And Paul was sent by God. And Paul knew that.

I think there's something to be said for, and I hope that you know where you stand, but Paul in the midst of writing to a church that had been kind of bludgeoned with these false teachers, and they questioned his authority, to be able to say to them, "I know who I am. God has called me to be an apostle." There's something comforting that you can say this morning of yourself, I'm where I am because of what God wants to do in my life. I'm a salesman by the will of God. I'm a teacher by the will of God. Wherever you find yourself that you know you're in the place that God wants you to be. Paul never got tired of telling people what God had called him to do. He sits down with Luke, shares with Luke the calling. Luke records it in Acts Chapter 9. He stands before an infuriated crowd in Jerusalem trying to give the message that he had always longed to preach, but in the message he puts his testimony in Acts Chapter 22. He stands before King Agrippa years into his imprisonment, and he starts by telling him how he got saved and God's calling. He writes to the Galatians in Chapter 1, can't help but throw in how he got saved. It just became part of Paul's kind of assurance, and in no more so than here. He saw it as a privilege. He didn't believe that this was an authority that he just grabbed on his own. "God gave it to me. It's His will. I just want to be faithful to it." In fact, you will find Paul throughout the epistles saying that he didn't deserve it. "I'm the least of the apostles. I was a persecutor. I don't deserve to be here. I can't believe that God still loves me. By the grace of God, I am what I am." But it blew his mind that he had a place that God would still use him. And I think that's true of all of us, isn't it;

that God has chosen us and He wants to use us? And let's face it, no one else would have chosen us, but He did. And that's an amazing thought.

So Paul's point is, and he'll get to it next -- later on in the chapter, after this introduction, went, hey, look, I'm not an apostle because I wanted to be one; I'm an apostle because God chose me to be one. And so if I'm coming to put my foot down, you better believe that God is going to stand on my foot as I stand on yours. He ordained me, He called me, He used me.

And then Paul adds at the end of verse 1, "And Timothy our brother is with us as well," which I think is important because Paul sent the first letter with Timothy and he got just about chased out of town. Paul is a Type A guy. I don't think you'd have wanted to argue with Paul. But Timothy I think you could have pushed around. Timothy is kind of retiring, kind of slow moving, not very bold in his speech. Paul will have to constantly tell him to suck it up and step up, but Paul and Timothy, entirely different people. So they chased him out of town. Paul says to them, "Hey, Timothy's with me." So even though they made him feel like a failure, Paul wanted Timothy to know and them, God had called Timothy too, and that God would use Timothy. And I suspect that Timothy felt really good having Paul put his name in here and just recognizing the fact that he wasn't a quitter; he was a guy that God could use. I'm sure it encouraged Timothy a lot. And it should encourage you, because you don't have to be a Type A to be used by the Lord. You can be quieter. I don't know if you can be a pastor, because they're all loud, but -- though Timothy was one of those as well. So Paul, "I'm called by the Lord to be His apostle, and Timothy is with me." And Paul, like I said, will often include when he writes to people the people that were with him when he writes.

And then he writes, "To all of the church in Corinth, and all the saints in Achaia." Greece was divided into two parts in Paul's day. Macedonia was in the north. Big, big part. Achaia was in the south. It's much smaller. So that's all that Paul is referring to. I'm writing to the church in Corinth and to all of the saints in the south. There were several churches around that area. There was one in the port city of Cenchrea that is mentioned in the Bible as well. Well, Paul is writing to a church that he loved.

And I want you to notice, and I always got a kick out of it, he calls them the saints. But if you read I Corinthians, it seems to me there were no saints in this church. There were just sinful troublemakers. Fighting, bickering, lying, exalting themselves. I mean, this was a poor example of a saint's church; right? But yet Paul calls them, and every time he refers to them as saints, which to me is very interesting. The word saints, "hagios," means to be called out. It is the word for holy. It is used in the Bible to express what is set aside for God's personal use, or only for His use, if you will. Like you go to a picnic, you put your name on the cup. This is yours; you don't want other people drinking out of it. That's your cup. That's holy; right? That's hagios. Don't drink out of my cup. That's the label God puts on us as His people.

So it's interesting that though the Corinthian church, at least from all that we read in the Bible, hardly acted like Christians at all, or lived like them, that Paul still saw them as such and referred to them as such. And I want you to see that because this is a church that's had a lot of trouble and Paul loves them, but he sees them standing in Christ. His view of these troublemakers was, God's going to finish what He begins. It was a hopeful view, even though there were troublous times. And I think that's true for us. Sometimes our walks can be terribly discrediting to God's work. We don't almost want to say we're Christians because of the way we're behaving, but yet that hardly makes you any less God's child. And God does have long patience. One day we're going to be like Him. We'll see Him as He is. In the meantime, God by His Spirit will try to change us and conform us. But you should see that when Paul writes to this church and others, he always sees the ideal rather than the actual. He sees what God can do and will do rather than so far what He has done. He has an eternal hope for the final outcome, and I think that's really important to see. So he calls them, I'm writing to the church, the saints, and all the saints living in the south.

And then you read this little benediction in verse 2, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ," almost in all of Paul's letters. What you may not know is the Greek word for hello is peace, is "karon." And that's how you pronounce it.

"Karon." The Christian word for grace is "karis." So it sounds very -- almost like a rhyme when you say it in Greek, or Aramaic if you will, so there's a play on words. And Paul, in almost every one of the letters writes "Grace to you that leads to peace." It's a beautiful greeting, and you'll find it a lot in Paul's writing.

Well, beginning in verse 3 and down through verse 11, Paul then, because he's just starting the letter, wants to thank the Lord for the fact that he's gotten some good news, that God has been faithful; that even though Paul has been suffering, that he learned again to trust the Lord, and God would see you through, and when it just broke his heart, now he is reminded again of God's goodness. And so it is this kind of a worshipful praise to the Lord, with a little study in the middle from verse 4 through 11 about how suffering works and why God would allow us to go through what he went through. He's looking to find some reasons for the sufferings that he'd been facing in his broken heartedness over their not doing so well and being kind of deceived.

So he starts in verse 3 by saying, "Well, blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, He is the Father of mercies and the Father or the God of all comfort. He has comforted us in all of our tribulation." So Paul begins by blessing the Lord.

By the way, the word blessed is the English word for eulogy, and it means to speak well of we know that from funerals. Sometimes it's interesting at funerals, people get up and talk about somebody, and everything I know about them is absolutely different than what I'm hearing. It's like the old story about the preacher talking about the man that had died, and the casket's in the front, and somewhere in the service the wife gets up and she walked up to the casket. He said, "What are you doing?" She says, "I'm just looking to see if that was him you were talking about." Eulogies; right? But in the Bible, it's a positive thing. It means to worship.

Notice who Paul addresses. He's the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His deity, obviously Jesus is equal with God in His humanity. He submits to the Father. He's Jesus, the Son, and we are His kids through adoption in Christ. So He praises the Father.

And you should know that it's -- I know we take it for granted. We pray "Our Father" all the time, as if somehow that's an easy road. No one did that in the Old Testament almost. You will find very little references to God being our Father in the Old Testament. You will not find it literally anywhere in the cults, because the gods of the cults and of those who worship idols tend to be cruel and selfish and exacting and all. But it's unique to us because we're saved that God is our Father. In fact, that's what the Lord taught us when we came to the Lord, that He has a relationship with the Father. He's the originator, if you will, of our life.

And notice he thanks the Lord. "Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. But He's the Father to us of mercy and He's the God to us of comfort." The word mercy means not getting what you deserve; as opposed to grace, getting what you don't. And then comfort is the word that you would understand. So thank the Lord that He has given us great mercy and great comfort.

I always liked the prodigal son story because it paints a picture of a father waiting with His open arms for His children, for His Son in that case; right? So come. And that the Lord is more than willing to receive those who come to Him and restore them to life. Paul thought about what he had gone through, and he sees the Lord in I guess that hopeful light again. Man, my Father has been so good to me, though this has been a really difficult and long road. And He has come and He's comforted me. The word comfort here is the word "paracletus." It's the word that describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. It means one who pulls alongside to help us. Thank you, Father; you've stood by me. It is used 29 times in this letter, that same word, to describe the same thing: God's presence alongside of you to strengthen you when you are going through it.

And I thought how often Paul going through serving the Lord found the Lord standing next to him. Acts 18 in Corinth, so sure this was the end of the road ministry wise, Jesus came and stood by Paul and gave him words of encouragement. When Paul stood on the steps of the Antonia Fortress there in Jerusalem to preach and the people wanted to kill Him, and Paul was so discouraged he thought he was going to hang it up in Acts Chapter 23, the Lord came and stood with him and encouraged him. When Paul was on a boat to go to Rome after years of

being in jail for nothing, and the boat looked like it was going to sink after he told the captain, "I'm feeling really bad about this trip," been praying, no one listened, it was the Lord that came and stood by Paul. And by the time the ship crashes, Paul's in charge and everyone's doing what Paul says.

It reminded me a lot of Jesus walking on the water towards the disciples when they'd been stuck in the storm all night. And Paul says to them, in lieu of what he's been going through and getting the good news, "Thank the Lord that He stood by me. My Father has comforted me and He's been there to help. He's comforted us in all of our tribulation."

But then he says this: "That we might be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the same comfort that we ourselves have been comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort or consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and your salvation. And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that if you're partakers of the suffering, you'll also be partakers of the consolation." It's a lot of words, but it boils down to saying, why does God allow us to suffer? Sometimes it is simply to prepare us to serve others. It is for their benefit and not for yours.

I remember reading Robinson Crusoe in college. I don't know if you've ever read it, but he gets trapped stranded on a lonely island. He finds at some point these mysterious footprints on the beach. He's afraid that they're cannibals and he's about to be eaten. But eventually he runs across this wretched little old man named -- Man Friday is what he called him, and he begins to share the Lord with him. And he tells him about the death of Jesus on the cross. He talks to him about the Lord's love. He tells him how the devil wants to convict and -- or I should say, condemn and lead us astray. And finally, Man Friday had not said a word, he finally says, "Why God no kill the devil?" Like that would be a good solution? And at that point in the book, Robinson Crusoe said, "Yeah, we can talk about that later. I got some stuff to do." And he just leaves him. He's got no answer for why God no kill him now. He took off on an

errand.

The Bible is filled with reasons why you suffer, besides the obvious, you live in this world and this isn't your home. If you list them in terms of how often they show up, the number one reason is to validate your faith. You'll find that more often than anything else. Things like, the Lord tests the hearts and he wants you to know where you stand, and it shows you how far you've progressed. The second most often reason for suffering is that you would learn to depend upon the Lord, not upon the world; that you're almost like -- you know, He cuts all of the lines so that your only hope is in Him and nowhere else. The third reason is to develop a heavenly hope or view; in other words, that your hope is to be in another place, not here; that you'll begin to value spiritual things. The fourth reason is that you would learn to be obedient. There's that Psalm, I think we covered it when we were going through the Psalms, that said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I've learned to keep Your word." So affliction has a way of tempering our devotion to the Lord. And then there's this one, the strength to become useful.

Have you ever gone through a serious trial in your life and said to yourself, "I know why I'm going through this: So God can use me to talk to someone else." Nobody does that. What we'd rather say is, Lord, get me out of this. I don't deserve this, I don't want this, I hate this. Deliver me from this. But we never get to: maybe the Lord is wanting to use us. Paul was willing to say to the Corinthians who had really hurt him, I'm sure that we've gone through this so you'll do better, that I'll be able to write to you and encourage you and love you and bless you and be an encouragement to you. And he writes that this is a cyclical kind of a process. I suffer, I go to the Lord, I find comfort. He then sends me out to you, to comfort you who are going through it, and you get better, and you turn around and help somebody else. It really is the way that the body is supposed to function. And the more experiences I have in the Lord, the greater the vault of comfort I'm able to pass along. So there's a benefit to having been around for a while; right? You've got lots to share and pass along.

In verses 4, 5 and 6, Paul uses a lot of words to talk about the same thing: Tribulation, trouble, suffering. There are 10 basic Greek words for suffering in the

language. He will use five of them in this book. The word "tribulation" here in verse 4, and in verse 6 the word "afflicted" are the same word. It's the Greek word "thlipsis." "Thlipsis." Don't try to spell it, just say it, and turn away so you don't spit on someone. But it means to be pressed in or to hem in or to be shoved into a corner. It's kind of like the pressure that doesn't allow you to get up.

So Paul said, "In all the pressure I've been through, I see it as a way that God allowed me to suffer so I could pass on to you the comfort that God will provide." That's a pretty mature way of looking at trial; right? And it's something you certainly should add to your understanding. Also, verse 4 it says, "Who comforts us in all of our tribulation, so that we can be able to comfort those that are in any trouble." All tribulation, any trouble. Here's my point: You don't have to go through the same thing other people are going through to comfort them with God's comfort. Whatever you've gone through, the lessons are the same. So, the drug dealer who gets saved can certainly minister to the Wall Street guy who's lost a bunch of money on the stock market. Well, they got nothing in common except they both have need, and one has found God's peace and the other one needs to hear about it. So don't cut yourself off by saying, I've got nothing in common with him. It doesn't matter. God's comfort can be applied across the board.

So Paul saw a connection. And notice verse 5, he sees a connection between his suffering and entering into the sufferings of Jesus, or if you will, any cost involved in serving the Lord is a way that we share in the sufferings that Jesus went through. The word "pathema" means to suffer. It is usually the word that is used to describe Jesus' suffering. Well, you don't enter into His sufferings in terms of the cross. He died for our sins so that we could be free. But everything else in your association with Jesus is fair game; right? Whether it's opposition or whether it's persecution. Jesus was rejected early on by His own family, His father while He was young, He was maligned and challenged and plotted against and lied about and beaten and killed. If you go to the Lord with your prayer and you go, "Lord, you don't know what I'm going through," you should probably rephrase that, because He knows exactly what you're going through. He knows exactly. He's been there and He can be more than a consolation to you. I mean, He sweats

great drops of blood while his closest disciples sleep. Thanks for the help, guys. Where was Peter while Jesus was under the greatest pressure of His life? He endured with grace the kiss of a betrayer, He was sentenced by a cowardly governor, He was spit upon by the folks He came to save, mocked and nailed to a cross by the soldiers. He knows exactly what you're going through. In fact, you can read in Hebrews Chapter 4 that "We don't have a high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities." He knows what you're going through.

And Paul, in just his thankfulness for God's grace in bringing him through this whole suffering ordeal with these Christians, and still having to deal with it, is so thankful that God not only brought him through to bless others, but he saw himself kind of identifying with Jesus. He was standing where the Lord stood. In fact, he goes in verse 6 and he kind of takes it one step further, and he says when you stand where the Lord stands, you're also going to stand where he stood to comfort and you'll be that source of comforting.

Now, if that's the case, then you should easily begin to make the case for what the Bible does: That you should be in church. You should be in fellowship. You should find a church of people and be involved, because you need to be honest with what you're going through. You need to be able to say to somebody, "Hey, could you pray for me? Because I'm scared to death." Or "I'm really having a hard time." Or "I'm having a hard time trusting the Lord." And your friends and people that know you should say, "Well, I'll start praying." And when God brings you through it, you should be able to turn to your friends and go, "Here's what the Lord did for me," so that you can help them get through it. That's how the body works. Cancer is nothing more than an organism that isolates itself from the body. So we need the church, and you need to be in it. You run in here on Sunday and run out, that's no help to you. That's not a benefit. People should know who you are. Not everyone should know who you are. Not everyone wants to know who you are. But some people should know who you are. And you should have a group of friends that pray for you and love you and know you, because that's how God works. And Paul as the pastor of this church said to the church, this is how it has to be, or how it should be.

Well, beginning in verse 8 to 11, and we'll end with

this, this morning, Paul then shares his own experience to apply the lesson. He says, "We don't want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our troubles which came to us in Asia; in which we were burdened beyond our measure, above our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, and He has delivered us from such great a death, and He does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us, and you also are helping together in praying for us, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift that has been granted to us through many." Paul says, look, you should know that we've been learning this lesson as well. We had a trial in Asia. That's where Ephesus is. That had left Paul -- and I want you to notice the words -- burdened beyond measure, above strength, despairing even of life. Paul is not a drama queen. Nowhere in the Bible when you read Paul's story do you go, well, he's exaggerating. No, he seems to just tell it like it is. So when Paul says we didn't know if we were going to live or die, I think you can take that to the bank. He really thought that maybe he wouldn't survive whatever this trial was. There's no positive confession here, by the way. It's all negative. Emotionally spent, physically in real jeopardy, spiritually overwhelmed. In fact, he says in verse 9, I'm pretty sure if the Lord hadn't intervened, we would have died. That's a lot of pressure. That's a real trial.

Now, you might say to me, what happened here? And my answer is, I have no idea. There is nothing in the book of Acts or the experience of his life in Ephesus that would rise to the level of what Paul is describing here. I can bring you 10 Bible commentary books and they'll give you 10 different answers, and they're all guessing, and they all sound plausible. But I'd just as soon tell you I don't know, because the lesson is, I learned to trust God; right? The lesson is down in verse 9. We learn that we shouldn't trust in ourselves, but we should trust in the Lord. And Paul would say that to us by saying, I didn't always do this, or I wasn't always doing this. I got to the end of myself.

You would again presume that Paul, being a man of God, would have learned this lesson, and the answer is, he knew it, but he still had to learn it, and so do we. This isn't a lesson that stays with you. Sometimes it

has to be repeated. And I would say to you because of how dramatic this loss is, it is difficult for us to let go and let God, especially in areas that we want to hang on to, until we're forced to let go and let God. No one wants to put themselves in a situation where they have to trust the Lord for their very existence. We will flippantly say, "Oh, the Lord will handle it," until it's your child that may live or die, and then you're not sure you want the Lord to handle it. You want to handle it. It's too precious, too important. I don't want to give this to the Lord. I want to keep a hold of this, until it's your wife or your husband. Then all of a sudden, the risks sound too great. We do a lot of "oh, I'll just trust the Lord" because we don't care what happens, but when we care what happens, then we learn this lesson. We have to trust the Lord. And Paul said, we were about dead here and I had to learn to trust the Lord. Same thing in his worry about the church. He had to learn to trust the Lord.

Jacob was a guy in the Bible who was a shyster. Though he knew God, he lived his life by the seat of his pants. He was named Heel Catcher for a reason, because he'd always get the better of you. And he lived his life kind of on the edges of faith for years. But he finally came to the end of himself in a situation he couldn't control. He ended up hobbled, unable to run, really unable to fight. And Jacob's defeat became Israel's victory. God changed Jacob's life. But it was a do-or-die that changed his heart.

So Paul said in verse 9, the lesson I learned is I got to learn to trust the Lord, not in myself. The battle of our flesh is constant. And then Paul says this: The Lord has delivered us, the Lord is delivering us, the Lord will deliver us. I got this now. I learned this lesson. God's given us the victory. We can trust in Him. So thanks for praying for us. We pray that our ministries will bring thanksgiving on the part of many for the gift that God has given us of teaching and sharing. In fact, in verse 11 the words "helping together" are three Greek words, and they translated "work," "under" and "with." Those are the three words, "work," "under" and "with." Thank you for standing with us and serving together.

Next week we will take Paul up. In fact, we're going to do a couple more verses next week, down to verse 2 of

Chapter 2, as Paul goes, All right. That's enough introduction. Now let me tell you what I really think. I think you'll enjoy it.