

II Corinthians 7:5-16 "Sorrow, the Good Kind"
June 2, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles to II Corinthians Chapter 7 verse 5. This morning we'd like to read through the end of Chapter 7, which will also finish the first part of this book. The whole direction will change after Chapter 7.

We've told you oftentimes, but I guess it bears repeating this morning, that Paul heard about the troubles in Corinth with the false teachers while he was still in Ephesus. It was probably five years after he had left Corinth that the troubles began, the bad news began to arrive. It was a place that, except for Ephesus, Paul had spent the most time in his ministry life. Because of that, he loved this church, maybe more -- I won't say he loved them more, but he was more aware of them than maybe other churches. He had more invested with them, and he had seen this church born in the dregs of society.

When he heard what was going on, he wrote them a letter. We don't have it. It is mentioned in I Corinthians Chapter 5 verse 9. He said, I've written you earlier. In response they wrote a letter back that had more questions than answers. It prompted Paul to write the letter we do have, I Corinthians, where he answered a lot of questions. He challenged their relationship with God. He gave it to Timothy and said, go deliver this, and Timothy went. And he wasn't the most aggressive guy, but he came back and he said, "Man, things are not bad, they're worse. The false teachers have captured the heart of the church. They're leading them astray and away from Jesus, and man, they hate you. And they sought to really bring you down so that they could take the people away."

Paul as a result took an unscheduled trip to Corinth. We don't have a record of it, but we know it happened because in this book, Chapter 12 and Chapter 13, Paul will say, I'm coming to you for the third time. So we know that he did make a trip there at some point. He

called it a sorrowful trip. It didn't go well. He was challenged to his face. The false teachers, having the upper hand, questioned his authority. They challenged his position. They humiliated him. They asked him, according to what we have read, "Is Paul for real? And if God is with him, how come he's suffering all the time? Shouldn't life be going a little bit better?" They complained that his ministry was lackluster, that compared to others, he lacked eloquence and polish. His personal appearance was just horrendous. They wondered why he kept changing his travel plans, and why wouldn't he take money for services like everyone else? Why did he decide to just work on his own when he came? Was he really collecting money for the poor in Jerusalem? And where are those letters of recommendation that everyone else who pulls into town has, but you don't have from the leaders in Jerusalem? And it just went on and on. Paul came back, according to Chapter 2, devastated. It wasn't a good trip at all.

Thinking about it for a time, Paul then wrote another letter. We don't have that one either, but he called it a very severe letter. He gave it to Titus. He sent them out. And about the time that the letter was sent, a riot took place in Ephesus. Paul had been there three years, but this would be the end. They would chase him out of town. Like everything else, Paul has just had a rough life, and a rough goal, but in ministry, a place he'd been at for three years now didn't want him around.

So, Paul went to Troas. It was a place up the coast. It was a place that you would normally travel. He expected to see Titus there, but he couldn't find him. We are told in Chapter 2 that God opened a door of ministry there, something Paul would never walk away from, but he walked away this time, because he said to himself and no one else, I can't find any rest. I'm worried about Titus now, and still worried about how the Corinthians are going to take the last letter that I sent. So not wanting to do any ministry, just beside himself, he gets on the Aegean Sea. He sails over to Macedonia, northern Greece, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea; places he'd been where churches had been planted. He eventually runs into Titus, probably at Philippi, and gets the best news of all: Things are getting better. God is beginning a good work. As a result, Paul writes this that we do have, the II Corinthian letter. He writes it to encourage the return of those folks to the Lord and to chastise those

who are caught up in this false teaching that has been ravaging the church.

He writes this letter. He gives it to Titus as well as two other disciples. They're mentioned in Chapter 8, not by name, one of them probably Luke, and then they go back, and Paul will eventually follow them down into Corinth, where he will visit for the third time.

If you have your Bible open, and I'm sure you do, if you look back to Chapter 2 really quick with me, verse 12, I want to kind of put this in context. Here's what Paul said in Chapter 2 verse 12, "Furthermore, I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, a door was opened to me by the Lord, but I had no rest in my spirit, because I didn't find Titus my brother; and so taking leave of them, I departed for Macedonia." From verse 14 of this chapter all the way till Chapter 7 verse 5, where we are this morning, is a long aside of Paul writing about his ministry and his heart and what he's gone through. In verse 5 this morning we pick up the story from verse 13 of Chapter 2, where he writes this: verse 5, Chapter 7, "For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, we are troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears. Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, has comforted us by the coming of Titus."

Put yourself for a minute in Paul's shoes. Back in Ephesus there had been a riot, and they had chased him out of town. He comes to Macedonia, and everywhere he turns there's conflict. The word is strife, or fighting, if you will. It is an interesting picture that the place where Paul had come for years was still not really willing to embrace him. You might remember when Paul started the first church in Europe in Philippi, Acts 16, that a riot had chased him out of town. It was still the same there for him many years later. So outside, his flesh could find no rest. There was conflict. But then notice he writes, inside was phobia. It's the word for phobia. It means great anxiety. In fact, the word "downcast" in verse 6 is the Greek word for clinical depression. So, Paul was not just having a hard time with it; Paul was in a pretty dark place serving the Lord and loving the people. His ministry for years, His love for the saints, the hurt over the false teachers' influence in Corinth; Paul had been going through it.

He had written an extremely confrontational letter that he had sent with Titus. It was one of those letters where you just go for broke, no stone left unturned. He wrote it out of love for them. It was do or die. But he realized it could probably not have to be received that way. So, think about Paul here looking for Titus. He's at his limit. He's been chased out of Ephesus. He's too distraught to minister at Troas, where a legitimate work is open for him. He has excessive kind of anxiety over the wellness of the church over in Corinth. He has great concerns whether his letter he has written will be received or if it's being second guessed, or maybe he was. He now worries about Titus's safety. And then if that isn't bad enough, he looks out the window and there's people out to get him there too.

We read this morning in Psalm 126 that if you go to sow with tears, you can hope to reap in joy, and that if you continually do that, doubtless you will come back with rejoicing with the fruit in your hand, the sheaves with you. And I think that's an excellent description of what Paul's been going through. He's hurting only because of the people that he cares for. This isn't Paul hurting for a business that went bankrupt or an investment that went sour. Paul's only concern was God's people and God's word. He was hurting for all the right reasons. And he would be rejoicing for all the right reasons as well.

But I wanted to have you see this picture of Paul, an extremely tough guy in the Lord who's kind of a softy; right? He is moved by the concerns of others. We tend to go to the Bible and think of Bible heroes as invincible, supermen. But they're not cast in iron and they don't have mechanical hearts, and they're not exempt from sorrow or concern. And Paul struggled, hurting for the people, hurting for the unresolved issues, and worried about how they were doing. Though he had great faith, he had great emotion as well, and there's certainly nothing wrong with that.

So, we read in verse 6 that finally Titus showed in Macedonia. We think probably in Philippi. Paul praises the Lord and says in verse 6, "God has lifted up my downcast soul." Paul's no different than you and I. I know sometimes the enemy will try to put you on the bench by telling you, you don't measure up to Bible people --

but you do, because God's work is the same, and we're weak, but He's strong. But notice -- I want you to get a glimpse of this great apostle, Paul, and he's languishing, and he's unable to minister until some news comes to allay his fears about his brother and about the church. He loved both of them with his life. And until he got the news, he was a downcast kind of out-of-business kind of preacher.

It's a great lesson to learn. I know sometimes you come to church and everything seems to be going wrong, and you're discouraged, and God hasn't moved, or you wish that He would, but I guess you learn with Paul that God is greater than your distress. He's certainly larger than your distress, and He's able to meet your needs. And Paul had hung in here by faith, mind you, but that didn't mean his knees weren't knocking. They were, even when he was on them.

So he says in verse 6, "The Lord has comforted the depressed, and He has comforted me by the coming of Titus, and not just his coming," verse 7, "But also by the consolation with which he was comforted in you, when he told us of your honest desire and your mourning and your zeal for me, and then I rejoiced even more." It was good to see Titus alive; even better to see his smiling face and the news that he brought. I couldn't ask for more, Paul said. So concerned about your well-being, and now he tells us about the health of the church and the spiritual well-being of God's people. And in one degree or another, these are the folks who had turned on him for well over a year now, but now they were coming back to being loyal. The consolation with which he was comforted by you, your earnest desire -- pretty strong words in Greek. They are not used very often in the New Testament. It literally means when you yearn for something until you get it, you're not satisfied until you get it, and Titus saw in the church at Corinth that a majority of the people were responding well to Paul's letter of correction and they were listening, and they wanted in the worst way to do better.

He said "your mourning." The word "mourning" is the word for crying out loud, lamenting. It's only used once in the New Testament, in Chapter 2 of Matthew, verse 18, where it says that those in Ramah were weeping or lamenting over the death of the children as a result of Herod's actions. So, Titus comes and he says to Paul,

these are genuine brokenhearted tears, and the Corinthians are wanting to do good, they want to do right. Blessed are the mourning, for they'll be comforted. This is the kind of mourning that comes when you realize you've failed the Lord, and you're not what He wants you to be, and you've come up short. It's the kind of mourning that leads to real change. I don't want to do this anymore, live like this.

Not only that, Paul says, I heard about your zeal for me. The word "zeal" is the word for boiling. But it must have been a great feeling for Paul that his spiritual kids, and indeed they were, were now interested in him again. And he said, I rejoiced all the more. I couldn't be happier. They were loyal to him again. Loyalty is important in broken relationships. I know today loyalty seems like a disability, at least in culture. Biblically loyalty is probably the most desirable virtue in human relationship that exists. If you're loyal, you have a friend. If you're not, it can destroy everything. Well, these folks had come back around. And Paul, you just see him grinning from ear to ear.

Secondly, he heard that they were repenting of their sin. Literally they wanted to get away from what they were doing to what God wanted for them. So, he says in verse 8, "But even if I made you sorry with my letter, I don't regret it; although I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. And now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow has led to your repentance. For you were made sorry in a Godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow will produce repentance that will lead to salvation, not to be regretted of; but the sorrow of the world will produce death."

I suspect if I was in Paul's shoes, that all of that relationship with the church over this last year, the back and forth, the letters, the worse news, that if you wrote a really strong letter of rebuke or confrontation, as he decided to do, that once you sent it, you might go, "maybe I shouldn't have sent it." I don't know if you've ever felt bad for doing the right thing. You said the right thing, you meant to reach out, and you're not sure how it's going to be received, and so you start to say to yourself, I wonder if I did the right thing, or maybe I could have done it differently, or maybe I shouldn't have

yelled so loud. Maybe I chased them off. I'll never get another chance. And yet Paul was kind of in that spot. He knew everything he wrote was right. He wasn't sorry for any of that. But he was a little worried about how the fallout might go, and so he wondered. It was part of his depression, the difficulty that he was facing.

And I think that's true in any kind of relationship. Sometimes you have to confront others with their words, and love would demand that you speak up. The false teachers will be lying anyway. They're not going to shut up. But Paul needed to speak up in true love. But that has a cost involved. Rebuke is something if that if you receive it, it's like honey. It's sweet, it's good, it's nourishing. But more often than not, people don't receive rebuke very well. And Paul was worried about that. So, he'll point out, even through the rest of this chapter, that he was so thankful that his letter produced sorrow. Not that he was happy they were sorrowful, but that that sorrow produced in them a genuine repentance. I mean, you don't find the Corinthians already defensive, which is how people usually get when you call them on something. They weren't trying to be victims. Oh, that's really not my fault. They were turning back to the Lord, they were turning back to Paul, and so Paul writes here had in verse 9 and verse 10, I'm not happy that you were sorry or grieved, but I'm thrilled that that grief brought you to repentance.

And then he makes this axiomatic kind of statement in verse 10, godly sorrow is a good thing. It'll produce in you a repentance. And he says in verse 9, and that way you're not suffering loss from us. There aren't any resentments, but godly sorrow produces repentance that will lead to salvation, whereas worldly sorrow is just an emotion that leads to death. Pretty important truth.

I suspect that most people in prison are sorry. Not necessarily sorry they did it; certainly sorry they got caught. If I had it to do over again, oh, I'd still do it, but I'd plan better. I'd look around a little bit more. I'm sorry that I wasn't as smart as I thought I was.

The sorrow God is looking for over sin causes you to turn and go another direction. It's like I hate where I'm at, I hate where I'm going, I hate where I've ended up in all of this. I want to find the life that God had.

And by the way, the Bible is filled with examples of those who were sorrowful versus those who are sorrowful in a godly sense. For example, Esau, was hustled out of his blessings of his birthright by Jacob for a meal; right? And when he really later discovered what it would cost him, he tried in every way to talk his dad into reversing the decision, and his father wouldn't. Paul writes about it in Chapter 12 of Hebrews, where he said, "Esau, for a morsel of food, sold his birthright, but afterwards, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected because he could find no place of repentance, though he sought for it with many tears." He was sorry enough, but he really didn't care that he gave up God's blessing or his relationship with God. He was sorry that he missed out on the cash and the power and the inheritance and the house and the things that maybe would come. He was sorry over what he lost. He wasn't sorry that he stepped away from God's greatest blessing of being the firstborn. We read in Chapter 27 of Genesis that Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing that his father had given him, and he said in his own heart, "When the days of mourning for my father are done, I'm going to kill Jacob." That's not repentance. That was pretty much sour grapes kind of guy; right? He was sorry all right, but in the wrong way.

Shimei, who was a descendant of Saul's, hated David when he came to the throne. When David was older and his son Absalom rebelled against him, and David as an older man said, "I'm not going to stay in town fighting my son, maybe killing him. I'll just walk away. If the Lord's in it, He'll bring me back." And he walked away. Well, as he walked away with his entourage and left Jerusalem, Shimei stood across on another hill screaming epithets at David; what a jerk he was and how he shouldn't have been there. And he's just shooting his mouth off, because he figured this was the end, the demise of David. And one of David's soldiers said, "Do you want me to go kill the guy?" He goes, "No. Just leave him alone. Who knows, maybe he's right. Maybe I'll never come back." Well, eventually the battle was resolved. Unfortunately, his son died in battle. And David returned to the city, and there came Shimei on his knees. "Dude, I was really sorry. I was just kidding; you know what I'm saying?" He couldn't have been sorrier; except he was a liar. He wasn't sorry, and David knew it. So, he says to Shimei, "You can live for now." But on his deathbed, he said to

Solomon, "Make sure you kill that guy." And first thing Solomon did, took out Shimei's life. Shimei was sorry, but he wasn't repentant.

Probably the classic example of the two is Judas and Peter. Both of them did roughly the same thing. Judas was sorry his actions led to Jesus' death. In fact, in Matthew 27 it says, "Judas, his betrayer, seeing that he had been condemned, was remorseful, brought back the 30 pieces of silver to the high priests and elders, and he said this: 'I have sinned against innocent blood.'" And he threw it back at the feet of the priest, who didn't take the money; tried to act real spiritual about it. He was remorseful. It's the word for regretting something or he was upset at the consequences of his treachery. He wasn't upset at the cause. He didn't really believe Jesus was the Messiah. He certainly wasn't going to bow his knee to Him. He wanted Him out of the way; he didn't want Him dead. So, he regretted it. I can't believe that what I did led to His death. Eventually finding to place for repentance, he went out and he killed himself. The world's sorrow produces death. He had remorse, no repentance.

Peter, on the other hand, was at dinner the night before Jesus was betrayed, or saw the effects of the betrayal, and at dinner he swore to Jesus in front of everybody how faithful he would be. Even pointed at his buddies and go, "These guys, I don't trust them. But you can trust me. I'm your loyal follower." And yet it wasn't three hours later that he's in a courtyard, standing there, cursing at the top of his lungs, taking vows and oaths, swearing to have never known Jesus at all, even as the Lord looked down from the trial up above. And it says that Peter went out and he wept bitterly. What a horrible three days for Peter, who did love the Lord, and thought too much of himself and had put himself in this predicament. But he found God's mercy. He truly repented. On the day of the resurrection, it was the angels who said to the women, "Go tell the disciples, and make sure you tell Peter I'm alive," and God singles Peter out. And then in John Chapter 21, in front of all of his buddies, Jesus restores Peter to ministry, because Peter has to say now to the Lord, "Peter do you love Me?" And no bragging now, "Lord, you know my heart. You know I love You." "Peter do you love Me?" And finally, he just says, "Lord, You know. No more bragging. I'm just depending on You to help me." And God restored Peter.

He found a place of restoration through actual repentance.

Same thing with you and I. John was in his 90s when he wrote I John, and he said to us in Chapter 1 verse 7, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse us from all sin." Two verses later, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful, He's just, forgives all of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We need to be repenting a lot, don't we? I think a good practice, though, you go to bed every night, look back over the day, man, and let the Lord have the failures. Stay close by the blood of the Lamb.

The joy of Paul's heart for the Corinthians was, they weren't just saying I'm sorry, they were doing something about it. Have you ever said to your kids, "Say 'I'm sorry'"? And they do this: "I'm sorry," like anyone's going, oh, that's sincere. I'm sure you are. No, they were sorry, and they were doing something about it. God was turning them from their sin and from their deception, back to the Lord, and back to Paul who had been so faithful to them. To prove that, he says in verse 11, "For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, and what a clearing of yourself, what indignation, and what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all of these things you proved yourself to be clear in this manner. Therefore, although I wrote to you, I didn't do it for the sake of one who had done the wrong, nor for the sake of one who was being wronged, but that you might know the care that I have for you in the sight of God and that it might appear to you all."

Paul mentions all that he had heard from Titus and he said, I'm not only hearing that you're sorry, I'm hearing what it did to you as a result. It produced in you a diligence. The word means a determination to make things different. It wasn't just sorry. We're going to make some changes. It supported their "I'm sorry," if you will. It produced indignation in them. It's a word -- to be vexed is what the word means. I'm dissatisfied with what I see in my own life. It produced some fear in them. Oh man, we've been on the wrong side of this. If God wanted to, He could wipe us out. We got to stand before Him. We got to get this right. And they were moved by the fear of the Lord, the fearful consequences.

It produced in them a vehement desire, a longing, a zeal to do what was right, to break habits, to form new ones. It vindicated them. It set them free.

I always want to lose weight. I just need some vehement desire when I get to 31 Flavors. I need some determination and zeal when I get to the pie and all that kind of good stuff. That's the difference. I'm remorseful, but full. They were sorry. They were repentant.

When John the Baptist was preaching at the Jordan River and doing his baptisms, the scribes and the Pharisees came floating by one day, and in Chapter 3 of Luke, John said in his inevitable way, "You know, if you're really sorry, then you bring forth fruits that are worthy of your repentance. And don't you sit there and say you're Abraham's children, or Abraham is your father. God can raise up children to Abraham out of these rocks." In other words, don't just talk it, do it. Paul was so happy to hear in the testimony, it's not just I'm sorry. No, no, no, I mean it.

So, you go back to the first Corinthian letter, and you read that the Corinthians had a lot of stuff going on, but apparently God was cleaning house; right? The carnality that was there, the division amongst the people, the cliques and the backbiting, which he mentions so often, the flaunting of their gifts, the drunkenness that was found at the agape feast, their willingness to sue one another in the world's courts; even using their liberty while ignoring the weak, stumbling them, and now these false teachers who had turned them from the simplicity that was in Christ to this legalism. Paul saying, I'm hearing that you're going away from those things. You're walking back to the Lord. And to assure them that his letter was not for one person or another. He says in verse 12, I just want you to know I didn't write to you to take some side of the guy that got hurt, or take on a guy that was hurting you. I just wanted all of you to know how much God cared for you. It was a general letter. It was meant to bless you, wanting God's best for you.

Well, he ends with these verses, verse 13, "Therefore we have been comforted in your comfort. And we rejoiced exceedingly more for the joy of Titus, because his spirit has been refreshed by you all." Texan that he is. "For

if in anything I have boasted to him about you, I am not ashamed. But as we spoke all things to you in truth, even so our boasting to Titus was also true. And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, and how with faith and trembling you received him. Therefore, I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything." Translation: I sent Titus your way and he didn't really want to come. He knew what to expect. Things had not gone well. This was like sending a guy into the lion's den.

"Come on, Titus. Take this letter.

"Oh, have you read this letter? Oh, it's not going to be pleasant for me."

"Oh, you'll be all right. They love the Lord."

"Well, you've heard what they're doing."

"I know, I know, but deep down, they know God. They know Jesus. I saw the fruit. They'll be okay. Just tell them."

"Yeah, thanks, Paul. And you're going to stay here; right?"

"Yes, I am. You go, go, go, go, go. You're the disciple."

And he bragged about the fact that God had done a work. He had begun a work. Paul had seen it. He was sure that there were more than just religious people there. They were hearts that had been saved, and they were just buried in misbehavior, or led astray, or buried under sin. And now he comes back and Paul said, "He loves you a lot more than he did when he came. He saw what was really happening, and I'm so happy that my boasting wasn't in vain. I was hoping I was right." I wonder if he really believed it himself all the time. "But because of that, I sent him to you. And I realize that you're the real deal, and it's such a relief to know that you're walking back with the Lord." Proverbs 27 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Paul had certainly put it all on the line to help them, but he'd helped them.

Hard sometimes to encourage folks to do the right thing. You can suffer a lot of grief in the process. Sometimes we'll have people call the church, they'll say, "Hey, so-and-so is really going through it. You should call them."

"Me?"

"Uh-huh. Do you have their number?"

"No, but I bet you do. Yeah, you do. Okay. Then you call them." I hang up really fast. No passing

it off to me, man. Sometimes you just got to get involved. But what a joy.

Paul couldn't be happier. So, it's a fitting climax to the first section of the book. He'll focus in Chapter 8 and 9 on the collection of the poor in Jerusalem, which is what his third missionary journey was all about; to take these sizable gifts of giving from various gentile churches to the poor in Jerusalem to be a witness to them. It is the longest portion of the Bible on money and stewardship that you'll find. By the time he gets to chapter 10, he will have this renewed sense of boldness. Things are going better. He'll speak not as a hurt friend, but he'll now start speaking as an apostle that has authority, and he'll go after these pockets of resistance that are still left in the church. Everybody's back on his side, so now he steps up. He's a little louder, he's a little bit more poignant, he's a little bit bolder as he confronts the remaining resistance there, but this time with apostolic authority. Two chapters, and then the last four before we call it -- 10, 11, 12, 13 -- yeah, four. 10, 11 -- we call it a day.