

Pressed out of measure

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians, the first chapter. We'll read again from verse 8. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, inasmuch that we despaired even of life.

But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God, which raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, ye also helping together by prayer for us.

But for the gift bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

So we see, as we saw last week, that Paul, if you like, is knocking on the head, the idea that the Christian life is one where you succeed, but you succeed without difficulties.

You are successful, and therefore, there won't be any trials, there won't be any trouble or depression.

[1 : 36] Now, some people like to say that that's their experience. Well, be that as it may, what Paul experiences, is this.

He says, it's a Christian life. God is with him, and he's confident, but yet, he experiences, at least at times, trials, and not only the trials, but depression.

It's really been brought low. He says that, in verse 8, we were pressed out of measure above strength, in so much that we despaired even of life.

He could not have put that more strongly. You couldn't have it put more strongly. He said, we got right to the end of our tether. We were at one trouble after another, people opposing us and all the rest of it, whatever they were, illness and various problems and opposition.

One thing after another, out of measure. It was more than we could physically put up with. We didn't have the strength to go on.

[2 : 53] It was above strength, in so much that we despaired even of life. We gave up. We were so depressed, we gave up. We didn't think we could go on. We thought that all we could do was just die.

That was the finish of us. This was the Apostle Paul. And this is what happened when he was seeking to serve Christ, serve the Church.

It wasn't just that he was strolling around and getting on with an ordinary job and coming into trouble. This was in Asia, when he's preaching, establishing the Church.

What is he coming for? Pressure, one on top of another. Affliction. Remember, that's what this word means. Tribulation. That's what we have in Scripture.

It's like a great weight. He felt, I can't take any more. Well then, that was his experience. And we saw last time that he said it went so far.

[3 : 57] We had the sentence of death in ourselves. That we should not trust in ourselves. But in God, which raised us for death.

So we have, on the one hand, the depression. And more than depression, is a leading Christian who feels despair, giving up.

He can't go any further. And he's in the position where he says, Well, I'm hoping in God I'm doing this for him. Will I ever be brought out of it?

Will I ever be delivered? Why did he go through that? That was the experience on the one hand. Why did he go? Well, there was a reason. We saw that.

He says, so that our trust should be in God. We're revising here, but it's important just to look at these points again. We had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves.

[5 : 02] But in God, who raises the dead. Now, he says that you might think that God was allowing these pressures to come for no good reason.

He said, no, there was a reason. We had to learn to trust God. But you did trust God. Yes, we did. But we didn't trust him enough. Well, that trust in him had to go right down to the very bottom. So that we trusted him right where we had nothing. We were exhausted. We didn't have any spiritual energy to pray or do anything.

And we had to discover that even right when we were as good as dead, he was there. And he was able to raise us up again. So God had a purpose to build up the trust.

I can remember there was a famous building in London when I was a boy. And it had been built in the 1960s, something like that. And it was being demolished.

[6 : 06] They were going to put up a great, a big new office building on it. And you might say when you look, when they demolished the top there, there were these foundations. Very big Victorian chunks of brickwork.

Very wise. You think that they could leave that. It looked solid. A good, solid foundation to build this new building on it. But they didn't.

They got in there. They lived with these drills. And they were just digging away. And digging out. Right down deep. Getting out these foundations. And why was that?

Well, the architect said they're not strong enough. They look all right. You stand on there. They've got solid, good foundations to build them. But no, there's a lot still there that wouldn't bend the way. So they had to dig down and get out all that foundation and go right down to the bottom. And then, make a build something far grander and bigger than they would have done otherwise.

[7 : 09] Well, God's not putting Paul through all this just to make his life a misery. God is dealing with him so that he should learn a deeper trust in God.

You see, if we'd ask Paul, do you think you're trusting God? Oh yes, of course it is. We'd all think that. But afterwards you could say, no.

God is deepening. God is strengthening. Because part of the foundation there was actually not the foundation resting on trusting God, but the trust in self.

Too much of trust in self. Paul has to admit it. He says, I have to admit that we had to learn not to trust in ourselves.

Oh, we did trust in God. But to go forward, to move forward, to do this great work. Progress as Christians. We had to learn more and more.

[8 : 13] To trust in God alone. Not in what we were and how we could manage quite well, very often on our own. So that if Paul had to experience this to go on in faith, well, we do as well.

To progress more and more we have to discover that we can only really trust God. God trusts ourselves. Because even when we, well, when we find it in ourselves, we've got nothing, we can't go on, we don't know what to do next, we're despairing.

But we then discover that we still trust God. His promises, they will grow. They will not move.

We'll discover that although we're utterly weak and hopeless, there in that one place, in the promise of the gospel, that we're, as we look to Christ alone, we discover, well, amazingly, God upholds us, brings us through it, and builds up our life, and uses what we were doing to build up the church, and to witness, and to bless other people and so on.

God is saying, you've got to trust me. You've got to trust me more. So there we are. It comes down to ourselves as well. Our faith has always got to be growing.

[9 : 45] It's always got to be developing. I mean, so, let's not be put off, when, at first we may say, oh, God is allowing these things to happen, they're overwhelming me, and I can't go on.

And we say, what's happening? I'm being bowled over, and I can't manage, and my Christian life. Yes, well, but he's showing us our weakness. And you have a purpose in it. Don't give up.

Trust in what he's doing. Now, that's where we've got to. Let's go on from there. We should have the trust in God, which raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver, in whom we trust, that he will yet deliver us.

The key to it, then, is that we should trust in God, who raises the dead. The only hope, if we can use that expression, what is our only hope?

The only hope is in the resurrection. The God of the resurrection. Now, why is that? Now, why? The God that raises the dead, what does it mean? What's important about the resurrection?

[11 : 02] Well, it's that God comes to us, well, going back to demolition again. Anything that's in our soul, power, goodness, all the rest of it, it's just no good.

It's got to be got rid of. It's like something, you may have an old building, it looks all right, we'll keep this, and we'll keep that, and just about managed to build it up. It'd be a reasonable building, and God is not the whole life.

It's simple. The only hope is what I can give. It's the God of the resurrection of the dead. Just get right back to the start, and say, now, let's get back to nothing, and we'll be all done.

See, now, this is the opposite to modern religion. Now, it's not modern at all. It's been going throughout the whole ages of the church, but it always pretends to be modern.

What's this? Well, it's a modern religion. It's, no, no, you see, it's, you've got to realise there's good in you.

[12 : 11] You've got to realise that God is there to help you, to use all the good points that you've got in.

You see, oh yes, we know you've failed over and over again, but God is there to give you a little bit of help, and that will help you to be a better person, to be nicer to people, to warm up that little spark of life in you till it gets bigger, and the inner life, and you develop your own nature, and that little spark of goodness, you can fan it, and you can build it up, and it's what you can do.

Now, it's dressed up in various ways, but that, that, it comes back to that again, and Jesus is turned into the kind of boy scout leader to people to just help us to build ourselves up, and work on ourselves, and improve ourselves, as if, well, as if we had something there to work on.

And God, the gospel is, you've got nothing there to work on. Nothing in a natural state that is any good. It's the gospel of the resurrection.

The only hope is that we should be raised from the dead. God said, you've got no spiritual life in you at all. You're walking around, but actually, you're like zombies.

[13 : 36] You've got no spiritual life in you. If you're going to live, you've got to have a complete new start. It's as radical as that. Anybody who becomes a Christian, they're starting again.

It's a new life. It's not just giving an impetus to something that's already there. Nothing at all. It's a resurrection from the dead. And that's what is going on about here. This is why it's so important.

Our faith, the true gospel faith, is the faith of the resurrection. And if we get this straight in our minds, if we can see that, we can see what God is doing to Paul and how he's dealing with us and how this is an important lesson.

Now, we're really getting into it. Let's look, because Paul doesn't just go on to something else. He mentions it in detail. Verse 10, God, who delivered us from so great a death and does deliver, and because of that, you see, if we realise what he has done, then we'll look forward to what he will do, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver.

So it's this powerful religion, faith of the resurrection. He has delivered us from so great a death.

[15 : 01] There we've got this word delivered, rescued. Interesting. that word in English, we get it in various meanings, you can sort of play with it.

We are delivered, we're rescued, by God, from so great a death. So we've mentioned that already, that if we are Christians like Paul, we have been rescued from a hopeless state.

Now, when we think about these sufferings, he's really been in great trouble, great problems.

Everything's gone wrong. He may have been ill as well, who knows, we're not given the details, he may have been terribly ill, death store, and all the rest of it.

But that's nothing, even a protracted period of suffering, it's nothing compared to the eternal death of the person who's never brought out of the darkness and into the light, and renewed on the inside by the working of the Holy Spirit to have faith in God.

That's nothing. what is that person? To be left in this life in a dead state and then go out into eternity without any hope? Now, that great death of those people who are eternally vanished from the presence of God, lost forever in misery and destruction and confusion forever, well, what is that?

[16 : 51] That's the most terrible thing. Like, we think of those as like some dreadful lion or something, tearing a person, and we look at these little troubles, they seem very small, like a little kitten giving you a tiny little scratch, compared with that.

He says, God is teaching us then that he's delivered us from so great a death. Paul, when he comes, perhaps, from out of this period of depression, he's reminded of how when all said and done, he's been brought into a new life, he's been brought into the presence of God, he knows

peace with God, it's like coming out of prison, in a dark, miserable dungeon, he says, well, after all, God is my Father, been brought out into the light, I've been delivered out of death, I've been raised up, I've been resurrected, the first resurrection, we know, there's a physical resurrection to come, but there's this first raising from the spiritual death in Christ, now, that's wonderful, that's what the gospel is, but, he, he said, we must, of course, not say that without remembering that it is through Christ, this resurrection is in Christ, it's based on

Christ's resurrection, that lovely expression, Romans chapter four, the end of that chapter, um, um, he speaks, uh, the end of verse 24, but, for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, the righteousness of God, imputed to us, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, and then he goes on, Jesus, who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification, then, how, where else could you get the whole gospel scheme, um, summed up in just a few words like that, isn't that wonderful, Jesus, our Lord, who was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification, you know, when the truth of the, of, the grace of

God that will bring us life, over and over again in scripture, it's the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it? Now, there's no accident in that, why the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ?

well, the grace of God works through Christ, and it works supremely, intentionally, in that Christ was given over, handed over, for our offenses, for it, not to be crucified, and was raised again for our justification, Christ, cross, he was, he had all the, the blood of misery, here's Paul feeling the pressure that he underwent, the tremendous pressure, despair, agony of mind, that he felt, Paul.

[20 : 38] Well, let's look back, one step further back, look to Christ, who is our head, our savior, the one who has the issues of life and death in his hands, think of the crushing load of misery and despair that he felt.

If we feel depressed, think of how he felt, with a frown of God on him. He was delivered for our sins, our trespasses, outraged again, he underwent that, he underwent, he went through the depths of misery that we cannot even understand, even begin to understand and contemplate.

He went through it and he rose again. See, what he did was accepted, he rose again, he spoke to his disciples, he was seen and touched by them and ate with them and then he rose further and ascended up into glory, he rose again through justification.

Again, just put in a word, justification, that sensual thing that God has put us right in his sight. I like to think of it in this way, that Christ died under the wrath of God for us, for his people.

He rose again and in his risen state is to apply to us, to give to us those blessings which he has won in such a costly way to himself.

[22 : 17] What is a sensual thing that is applied is justification. He puts us right in the sight of God. We are made right, righteous, before God.

Our standing is quite often. That's it. Everything else can go on from there. We are made right, righteous, before the Holy God in Christ.

Well, that's so that the essential truth, God which raises the dead, who delivered us from the third way to death and does deliver, it all depends upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, it's interesting because if we see what he has done, we can trust him for what he will do. Who delivered us, or has delivered us, from so great a death, and does deliver.

He has delivered us, he has rescued us, Christ, Christ did die for his people on the cross, he was offering himself as the price to purchase us, to buy us, back, to redeem us, to God, and, more than that, of course, he has applied it, as we said, Christ has applied it to Paul, it's come into Paul's experience, he's been brought to faith, by the Holy Spirit, and he's put his confidence in God, and Paul says, now, this is the God who raises the dead, he's raised us to life, but he's not stopped there, he says, he does deliver, he is delivering us now, he helps us, he's not a God who did deliver, did do it in the past, and that's finished, he goes on doing it, he helps us, and Paul had to find out that God is going on doing it, his hope and trust had to grow, and so do others, if we've got faith, it's got to grow,

[24 : 39] I mean, it goes by experience, we go through a difficult, perhaps a very difficult stage, but if we've got faith in us, we're learning that the God of the resurrection, the God who's raised up the Lord Jesus, he still is there, and through him, the blessings of salvation are being brought to us all the time, encouragement, strength, more than that, he says, in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us, it's not finished yet, we look forward, this is the great thing about the Christian life, it's not looking back, or it's looking back and past, they're mainly looking forward, we're not talking about the past, we're looking forward all the time, and we're expecting, for he's going to deliver us,

anything that is wrong, and that is spoiling our lives, and making us unhappy, that's all going to go, we're going to be rescued, delivered, from it all, every pain, some pains we have to bear with throughout the present life, but ultimately they're all going to go, and we're looking forward to a glory yet to be revealed, so the

Christian can be confident, Paul is confident, he says, you don't know everything I've been through, but God delivers us, and he's helping us, and although we're still struggling away, and he's struggling, partly because of what's been going on in Corinth, and the things that have been said about him, but he only is confident, that God is not dead, and is not dead, and is not unwilling to help, he will deliver him out of this particular problem that he's in, and that's what we've got to be sure about ourselves, it's no good saying that we trust God, but we don't believe he can cope with this problem or that, we've got to take the problem to him, and say Lord, help us, God of the resurrection, Lord Jesus Christ, help me in my time of need, and he will deliver us, out of all our troubles.

Now that's the first lesson, now just for five minutes more, there's a second lesson here, the first is the lesson of trust, through the resurrection of Christ, verse 11, something else is involved, ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift to be stowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

Very neatly put, he said now it's important, not only that we learn to trust God, but as we go through these problems, you should be praying for them.

Here is Paul, and his companions are with him, and they are doing this special, pioneering work, not everybody is called for that sort of work, to be there in Asia with him and so on, but he says now, in a way you're called to be involved, because you're called to pray, so as we go through this and as we learn these things, you should be involved as well.

[28 : 20] You should be helping together by prayer for us. So, it's not a question of these Corinthians saying, oh, poor old poor, sorry to hear about that, terrible what these missionaries have to go through, all that they have to put up with, or Mr.

So-and-so, Mrs. So-and-so in their Christian life, and terrible what they have to go through. No, Paul says, you have to go through it with them. You're involved as well.

It's your duty. He says, you ought to be involved with them. You have to believe that God will take the Christian leaders through these crises.

You've got to pray about it. You mustn't despair. You're involved as well. You're people. See, if you don't pray, you're not being involved in this matter. And you should be.

God is just part of the purpose of prayer, to involve the whole church, the whole of God's people, to be praying, and so to be taking parts.

[29 : 28] Even in the suffering, you should believe that God is able to do this, and so pray for it. And there are lovely stories told about people who have been very humble people, called to pray, for the fact that people are going through very, very difficult circumstances.

There's a true story. I heard that there's one, I haven't seen that one could recount that the old lady, she's in the meeting before the minister and his wife that they were going off on I don't know if you can flatricks or aware, and she said, oh, I can assure you, I'll pray for you and the reverence every night when you're away, and off in when, I'll say when, and it was some time later, well, a good time later, they came back on service a couple of years later, and she was speaking to them again, she said, you know, one night I just couldn't sleep, I couldn't sleep, I had to get up, I had to get down to somewhere up there and start praying for you and the reverence, I don't know what it was, but I really felt I had to pray, and the minister said, when was that?

And she had to know, she could tell more or less the same, she said, you know, we were the, we were the most difficult fix at that time, we were at our width end, I don't know what the problem was, I think when I heard it I wasn't told the actual teacher, but they were really in trouble in the Christian world, and if God well, it certainly was, when God came along and he wasn't allowed to just praise him, and then when he heard this he said, you know, help did come, then, we received the help of the Lord to bring us through, now that's just a tiny enough example, I believe, of what Paul is saying, he says, you helping together, you're involved, this is why we tell people, people are housebirds, because they say, they say, I'm there to it, you know, I'm there, you're the shadow, how do you get to the service?

That's the way man looks, that's the way the devil tempts us to think, but that's not the fact of it, you are helping in the most important way, when you're praying, you're actually going with, through the

whole thing, with God's people, who are in the front line, you pray to the God of the resurrection, that out of that terrible situation, you may know about it, you may know the actual details, you pray, Lord, just do something, they're putting all the Christians in prison there, Lord, do something, they're burning the Bible, they're closing down churches, and things like this, Lord, do something, the Lord of the resurrection, and we are involved, and we pray, Lord, do it, thou are able to see the Christian literature in there, do it, something, even things that we can't even think, and we are helping, in God's scheme, ye also helping together by prayer for us, and that's not the end of it, but we'll close here, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf, you see, when, if other people are involved, then they will be involved in the joy, and the thanksgiving, they'll hear, when God gives the answer, it'll be like giving the answer to them, hooray, when they hear the news that

God has done such and such for these people, and there will be the thanks given by many on our behalf, many will be involved, and these people, you see, if they didn't take part in the prayer, they didn't get involved with Paul in the work in that way, they wouldn't enjoy it, the, well, it's a duty as well, of course, the duty of thanksgiving, it's a duty, to pray, and then to give thanks, when the prayer is on.

[34 : 05] And so, we close now, but we pray for ourselves, to have greater and increasing spirit of confidence, we're not praying for a God that can't do, it's a God of the resurrection, he can raise from the dead, he can do anything, God who raised Jesus from the dead, he can raise unbelievers from the spiritual death, he can bring us through all problems, now we need a greater encouragement to believers, greater prayer, greater thanksgiving, and so we pray that we will not only have the confidence, but we'll have the experience of God being with us in our own lives, and in the life of the church, he may be thanks to his word, let us pray.

Our gracious God, we thank thee for the encouragement that we have to believe thy promises, oh that we might believe them more sincerely, and act and pray and give thanks on the basis of those promises.

We thank you this evening for the definite answer to prayer that we are seeing in our own church at the present time, and we pray that increasingly we may have the evidence amongst us that God is the God of the resurrection, who raises from the dead.

Raise many people to life in Jesus Christ we pray. Bring many through the trials of this life shy unforeseen.

Bless us so God throughout this week that it's begun. We commit to be again on our special needs. be pleased though God who answers and forgive our sins for Jesus sake.

[36 : 03] Amen.