

God's Gracious Gift of an Unbearable Burden, Part I- Deepening Our Faith

Call to Worship: Jeremiah 17:5-8

Hymn #81- *A Mighty Fortress*

1st Scripture: 1 Peter 4

Hymn #83- *We Praise Thee, O God, Our Redeemer, Creator*

2nd Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Hymn #27- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*

Introduction:

In the context of seeking to comfort an ailing/hurting brother/sister in Christ, how many of us have either heard and/or used the common expression, "God never gives you a burden that is too big for you to bear?" **I** know that I have both heard and used that expression, probably on several occasions. **However**, while there is an angle of truth to this statement, my experience (and I believe the Scriptures) have both come to prove that it is not all that accurate. **I**n fact, I believe that I can presently say without hesitation that God does, indeed, lay burdens on His children, which are beyond what they could bear. **But** I say this not in the form of a complaint *to* or *about* God. **I** say this with the understanding of the necessity of this reality. **Let** me put it this way: **God** has the sanctifying good of His children in mind, when He lays burdens upon them, which prove to be beyond what they can bear. **Out** of His unfailing love for us, at times, God loads our backs with burdens that we are absolutely incapable of lifting. **Unbearable** burdens are gracious gifts, given by God to all of His beloved children.

For the month of January, I want to confirm this, while bringing us to see the great privileges and blessings that come with unbearable burdens. **And** I hope that in the present or the future, when you are called to bear such a burden of suffering or hardship, rather than beginning to question the faithfulness of God or the authenticity of your salvation because of the *magnitude* of your trial/s, you will rather see this as an evidence of God's faithfulness and a confirmation of your glorious adoption in grace. **And** to that end, you will be prepared to respond in obedience and subjection to the will of God for you.

For this morning then, we will begin by considering how unbearable burdens deepen our faith in the invisible God. **And** from this, we will draw out a few other contextually relevant applications.

I. The Apostle Paul's Unbearable Burden

If I were to ask you to list five "giants of the faith" found in the New Testament (not including the Lord Jesus Christ), surely most (if not all) of you, would include the Apostle Paul in that listing. **And** probably many of you would list him at least in the top three. **Once** Paul was converted, he was used by God to accomplish things for His kingdom that have probably never been matched in all of history. **Paul** was given the difficult task of reaching the heathen, gentile world with the Gospel, for the first time. **And** the suffering that he endured in doing so, was enough to make us all cringe in dumbfound amazement. **He** was a hero of the faith, and that, most of all because he planted his feet firmly in the grace of God. **Paul** never forgot the magnitude of the grace of God shown him in his own conversion.

But we remember such texts as Paul's farewell discourse to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, and we marvel at his courage, faith and passion in the Gospel. "I am on my way to Jerusalem, and I don't know what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit does solemnly promise that wherever I go, chains and afflictions await me. **But** none of these things move me, because I don't count this life dear to myself, so that I might finish my race with joy and solemnly testify to the Gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ." **Wow!** **Words** of a true "hero in grace!" **One** could only wonder how banged up and bruised the Apostle was, by the time he finished his course, for he was promised right from the outset that he must suffer many things for the sake of the Gospel. **Beaten** with rods, robbed, ferociously whipped on a few occasions, stoned and left for dead, shipwrecked and left in the deep...and on and on and on, but like the energizer bunny, he just kept going on, leaving us a tremendous example of how far a living faith will take someone.

But in all of his heroic accomplishments in the faith, there were indeed times when the great Apostle himself was called to bear burdens that were far beyond his strength to bear. **He** was faced with great impossibilities, which he knew he could never escape in his own strength.

Now granted, he knew that every ounce of his Gospel success could be attributed to the grace of Christ alone, but there were times when the reality of his own natural frailty and limitations were brought home to his heart in a most powerful and effective way. **One** such example is found right here in our text. [Read 2 Cor. 1:8-11]

While Paul was forced to defend his own apostolic authority here in this second Epistle to the Corinthians, he had no problem bringing his own weaknesses and frailties to the forefront, if by doing so, it would serve as a means of magnifying the power and grace of God, unto the edification of Christ's church (certainly a lesson we could all learn from, when considering our own weaknesses).

Paul tells the Corinthians (several of which were in the process of questioning the apostolic authority of Paul, in part because of his sufferings), that he did not want them to be ignorant concerning the nature and magnitude of the trouble that had come upon him (and his companions) in Asia. **Paul** wanted his readers to understand thoroughly, that what he had faced was beyond difficult and severe. **In** fact, so severe and overwhelming was this trial; **so** painful and harsh was the resistance that he had faced in Asia, that it brought him to the point of despairing even of life itself. **He** states that he and his companions were "burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life." **Like** the mighty prophet Elijah, after Jezebel had expressed her determination to kill him, the Apostle Paul here wished death upon himself.

Notice, they were "burdened beyond measure, above strength." **The** load of suffering and anguish that they had to bear could not even be measured! **It** was beyond the realm of measuring and had entered the realm of the impossible. **There** was no way out. **There** was no known possibility of a "light shining at the end of the tunnel." **It** was beyond strength. **Paul** was a 150 lb exhausted worm, being called to bench press 800 lbs. **It's** just not possible.

You see, that is the point here. **Paul** wants them to know that the burden that they had to bear while facing this trouble, was far beyond what they could handle. **It** was an unbearable burden.

Let me ask you brethren, have you ever been called to bear such a burden? **Now**, I don't mean an identical burden to that which the Apostle Paul here faced, but a "burden beyond

measure, above strength?" **Maybe** you are facing such a burden right now? **Or** maybe you will be called to bear such a burden in the near future? **A** burden that is beyond overwhelming; **a** burden that is crushing you and weighing you down; **an** impossible burden, with no visible way out from underneath it, no light at the end of the tunnel? **A** burden that is pressing you to despair even of life itself...**you** could almost wish death upon yourself, or maybe, with Job, Elijah and Paul, you have already done that? **Or** maybe you are bearing a burden, but it is not *that* overwhelming...**but** it is painful and disheartening? **You** see, whatever the case, for starters, know that you are not alone. **The** people of God are indeed called to bear *even* impossible burdens for a time, and even "the giants of the faith" have been called to bear such burdens. **We** will see one main reason for this in a moment, but for now, suffice it to say that you are not alone! **Don't** let the "everyone looks so happy and burdenless on Sunday" face deceive you. **Every** true Christian suffers from difficult burdens and trials, and most, if not all, face burdens that they thoroughly realize are far beyond their natural strength to bear. **God** does lay impossible burdens upon His children. **He** puts gill-less souls in the deepest depths of the ocean for a time. **Such** was the case even for the mighty Apostle Paul! **He** despaired even of life itself, and the sentence of death was, in fact, in him. **From** every outward standpoint, his flame was being blown out...he needed a miracle; **he** needed divine intervention. **And** that is exactly what he received. **And** that unto a most glorious end and benefit!

II. The Apostle Paul's Faith is Deepened by His Unbearable Burden

Verse 9- "Yes, we had the sentence of death within ourselves, *that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead...*"

The burden was unbearable; **the** situation was impossible; **the** sentence of death was in them, so that they were forced to look outside of themselves and toward the invisible God who is able even to raise the dead! **Do** you see the message here, brethren? **The** Apostle and his companions, by means of the impossible nature of their trial, were forced to fix their eyes solely on the living God for their deliverance. **Now** brethren, in order to appreciate the great blessing that accompanied the Apostle's unbearable burden here, we have to factor in some very

important details concerning our fallen nature, and how God is bringing us to overcome it, according to His original design for us.

You see, we were created in such a way that we would be dependent upon our Creator and that we would always realize this dependence. **We** were meant to understand not only that we belong to God, but furthermore, that without Him we can do nothing. **Our** dependence upon food, drink, shelter and oxygen help point us in this direction, but the fall has marred our understanding of this reality. **One** of the great consequences and travesties of the fall of man, in fact, is that by means of the disobedience and rebellion of our first parents, we have begun to assume independence from God. **Now** (for the sake of His elect), God has graciously put up with this corruption, holding us together in spite of our self-dependent desire to be God, but He aims to rightly restore (in His people) what ought to have remained from the beginning, namely, a recognition of our God dependence. **God** wants us to trust in His invisible and yet very present reality, for all things and at all times. He aims to strengthen our faith in this regard.

And brethren, the fact of the matter is, that this restored God-dependence is a life long work; **it** is in fact the very essence of our sanctification. **The** increasing of our faith is a growing process. **Such** was the case even for the Apostle Paul and every other "giant of the faith" as well. **You** see, we are naturally self-dependent because of the fall. **We** crave the ability to know all things and to control all things, because we do not trust God to be God. **And** in order for God to overcome this natural hardness in us, He must repeatedly bring us to the edge of the cliff, as it were; **to** the place where we feel the reality of our own weakness and frailty, forcing us to trust in His invisible reality and not in ourselves. **And** when He delivers us, we are convinced beyond the shadow of any doubt, that indeed, this deliverance has come from God.

You see, brethren, apart from the impossible burdens, we would never increase in faith. **We** would never grow in our God-dependence. **We** would never progress in our sanctification. **But** by means of them, our faith is given eyes, as it were, and we behold the mighty power of our invisible, almighty God! **The** sentence of death is in us; **we** are forced to face the anxiety of our realized helplessness and our inability to control our circumstances. **And** by this means, our faith is deepened. **Our** hope and confidence begin to be shifted away from ourselves and toward the reality of our invisible God, who raises the dead. **And** by this means, our humanity; **our** proper humanity is restored. **We** learn to step out onto the ledge with nothing to hold onto,

confident that the invisible God, whom we profess with our lips, will indeed hold us up...because He is faithful. **And** brethren, therein lies the great blessing of unbearable burdens! **Indeed** they are gracious gifts from God Himself; **they** are gifts of love, bringing His children closer and closer to the end of their sanctification, namely Christ likeness and a closer walk with Him.

Indeed, we are given unbearable burdens, so that when we are incapable of bearing them in our own strength, we turn to the living God, where we find a fountain of supernatural strength, and it is right there that we find ourselves living the glorious paradox of bearing a burden that is unbearable, unto the deepening of our faith in the living God! **And** so, brethren, when you are tempted to say, "Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, this also happened, making an already difficult situation, impossible," stop and worship God! **For** He loves you so much; **too** much to leave you in the place where things are still manageable. **Thank** God for His perfect timing and for the unbearable load, and cast yourself in His arms, recognizing that your trouble is a grain of sand to the One who even raises the dead. **Rather** than complain, trust Him and remain faithful, and watch! **Watch** God part the Red Sea, bringing you to the other side in His perfect timing.

III. The End of the Story

[Read 2 Cor. 1:9-11]

- 1) God delivers them from so great a death! (vs. 10a)
- 2) Their faith and God dependence are deepened! (vs. 10b)
- 3) The faith of the Corinthians is strengthened as their prayers are answered on behalf of the Apostle and his companions! (vs. 11a)--motivation to pray all the more.
- 4) God is praised and glorified by all, for manifesting His great power and glory, in bringing about this great deliverance! (vs. 11b)
- 5) In their suffering, they are able to experience manifestations of God's comfort! (vs. 3-7) --trials provide this wonderful benefit.

6) They are better able to comfort others with the same comfort that they themselves have received from God! (vs. 3-7)--trials make us better ministers and servants of the Body!

Indeed, unbearable burdens are God's gracious gifts to His redeemed children!

The Gospel

Amen!!!