

When Trouble Comes

1. Warm-up Question: Jeff shared a favorite memory of singing the “B-i-b-l-e” song when he was a kid in Sunday school. Do you have a favorite or not-so-favorite memory from being in church as a kid?
2. Jeff told how he learned to love the Bible as a child and still treasures it today. But not everyone has had that experience. If you were to pick one word to describe your relationship with the Bible, what would that word be? Explain your word choice.
3. Jeff said we’re a church that “takes the Bible seriously, not stupidly.” Being serious about the Bible, he said, means taking the time to study the context of what it says. It also means realizing that the Bible includes both negative and positive examples – and that we can learn from both as we are guided by God’s Spirit. Let consider an example. Read Psalm 137, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. In your view, is this passage a positive or negative example?
 - b. If it’s a positive example, what is the positive lesson? If it’s a negative example, what’s the negative lesson?
4. As a church that takes the Bible seriously, Sunday’s sermons always look to, and arise out of, the Scriptures. On Sunday we launched a study of the New Testament book of Second Corinthians, a book that helps us envision what life looks like when we allow Jesus to crash into our hearts and teach us a whole new heavenly way of moving and being in the world. Paul begins the book by reminding us of something we already know – life on earth is full of hardship. Read II Corinthians 1:1-10, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Ernest Heming way is said to have written the shortest complete story in the English language – a story that consists of just six words. “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Think of one of the saddest thing you’ve ever seen or experienced. If you were to write that story in six words or less, what would the words be?
 - b. In II Corinthians 1:8, Paul says, “We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. . . .” In chapter 11, Paul lists some of his afflictions: five times he received 39 lashes with a whip, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times he was shipwrecked, and for a night and day he was adrift at sea. Imagine if you were to compose a similar list. Take a moment to think of the worst 3 or 4 things you’ve experienced. Then share your list. Don’t tell the stories. Just briefly list off your 3 to 4 worst experiences in Paul-like fashion. What would your litany of woes look like?

5. In II Corinthians 4:8, Paul says, “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.” Despite his afflictions, Paul never gave up and continued to thrive. How is that possible? Paul shares three key perspectives that, when woven together, can make us (as people of faith) invincible. ***Perspective #1 – Believe that the One who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise you up, again and again, in this life and the next.*** Paul was able to face overwhelming circumstances with strength “because we know that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus. . . .” II Corinthians 4:14.
 - a. Think of a loved one you’ve lost, and what that felt like. Remember how you felt at their funeral. Then imagine that, as you walked out of the funeral to the parking lot, there stood your loved one – fully alive, big smile, and bright eyes. How would that experience change you?
 - b. The early Christians saw Jesus die, grieved for three days, then encountered him alive again. That stunning experience defined their faith ever after. From that point forward, they knew that no defeat is ever final for a person of faith. When have you experienced that principle at work in your own life, i.e., an unexpected come back from a terrible defeat?
 - c. Are you in the habit of seeing the hardships of your life through the lens of II Corinthians 4:14, i.e., the One who raised Jesus up will also raise me up? If so, how does that help? If not, what keeps you from seeing through that lens?

6. ***Perspective #2 – Realize that life’s hardships have the potential to powerfully form and shape your eternal soul into something more beautiful.*** Paul said, “We do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.” II Corinthians 4:16.
 - a. Geologist Dr. James Clark uses the analogy of how clay forms staurolite (stone crosses) when under great pressure. Tell us about a time when something painful in your life made you a more beautiful person.
 - b. Why is pain and struggle such a potent force in growing our souls? Why can’t there be an easier way?

7. ***Perspective #3 – Realize that your suffering will enable you to console others who face similar suffering.*** Paul said, “Blessed be the God . . . who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God.” II Corinthians 1:3. When we’re in trouble, we draw the greatest strength from those who’ve been there,

done that. When have you experienced that principle at work, either as someone who needed to be consoled or someone who was able to console?

8. Which of the three perspectives Paul shares will, if internalized, most help you face hardship with more grace, strength, and sense of purpose?

Psalm 137

¹ By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. ² On the willows there we hung up our harps. ³ For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

⁴ How could we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither! ⁶ Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

⁷ Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem’s fall, how they said, “Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!”

⁸ O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us! Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

II Corinthians 1:1-10

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, ⁴who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. ⁵For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. ⁶If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. ⁷Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

⁸We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again.