

## **“We Ourselves Have Had ...”**

“... the sentence of death within ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead; who delivered us out of so great a death, and will deliver: on whom we have set our hope that he will also still deliver us ...” (2 Cor. 1:9-10).

There have been many to speculate what these “afflictions” were that weighed so heavily upon Paul. Some suppose it was his fight “with wild beasts” at Ephesus, which some assume to have been a literal battle between him and wild beasts (1 Cor. 15:32). Some suppose it was the riot in the city provoked by Demetrius the silversmith and his fellow craftsmen (Acts 19:23-28). The truth is, no one really knows. Paul’s stay at Ephesus had been lengthy and according to his address to Ephesus elders, he had served the Lord there with “tears and with trials which befell me by the plots of the Jews” (Acts 20:19). The opposition of the Jews was constant and such would “wear on one’s nerves.” Whatever the afflictions were, they were enough to make Paul despair even of life.

Without doubt there are low periods in our lives when it seems that everything that can go wrong does. Who has not experienced such? An unexpected breakdown of some appliance is followed by another, and then another! And often time when some tragedy enters our lives it is followed by yet another. And when such ones are “beaten down” then despondency sets in and we feel we are “marked” — we despair of life.

Such times often occur and prove to be a lesson for us. Although Paul’s afflictions weighed down upon him exceedingly beyond his power, and life was a burden to him, he did survive. He lived to tell about it, and from the burden of that experience, he learned a valuable lesson — he learned not to trust in himself but in God who raised the dead. He learned that God was able to deliver him out of so great a death and would further deliver him in future trials.

Daniel three records the “so great a death” the three Hebrew children fell into. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, seemed invincible and their danger was real. His law: “Fall down and worship my golden image or lose your life.” On the other hand, God’s law was also specific. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God ...” (Ex. 20:4-5). Their exile was the result of a national apostasy into idolatry. And, Nebuchadnezzar challenged them with this question: “And who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?” (Dan. 3:15). What would they do? To Nebuchadnezzar’s question their response was direct: “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan. 3:16-18). The Hebrews were men, just as we and as such had all the weaknesses, fears, and trials as we. They did not know what

God would do, but they were willing to do His will and be confident that He would work out all things to their good. And so He did (Dan. 3:21-26).

Just as Paul did not specify what his afflictions were he experienced, he did not tell how God had delivered him out of so great a death. He only assures us that God did. None expect deliverance from our burdens in the miraculous fashion experienced by Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Still, that does not mean that deliverance will not be forthcoming. God has promised that “no temptation hath taken you but such as man can bear; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make also the way of escape that ye may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:12).

It is easy enough to trust in God when everything is fine. The test comes when everything is not fine; when trials and afflictions weigh down mightily upon us. It is in such times that God sees whether our faith is “fair weather faith” or genuine trust that He holds the future and we are content to wait on Him, confident that whatever He chooses to give us, it will be for our good.

The wise man wrote, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not on thy own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy path” (Pr. 3:5). How wise are these words! What peace, assurance, and contentment will they provide us if we will truly believe and follow them.

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