

## Moving from Pain to Praise

**Text:** 2 Corinthians 1:8–11, especially verse 8: For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

**Introduction:** Sometimes you can get inside another person’s soul by asking a little question. It’s very personal, but quite revealing: “What is the most painful thing you’ve ever experienced?” Some people tell of a broken arm in childhood, and we realize they’ve not yet encountered much pain in life. Others have endured more pain than we can imagine—not just physically, but life-pain. Such pain changes us, either for better or worse. In this passage, Paul talked about his most painful experience, and I’d like to show you how it changed him.

- 1. What We Faced** (v. 8). Paul used stark language here. “We do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble.” The word *trouble* is often translated *tribulation*. The root idea is that of pressure. What kind of pressure? “We were burdened beyond measure.” He was saying, “I’ve had difficulties in the past, but I’ve been able to measure them. When I was chained, that was a *five* on the pain-scale. When I was beaten with rods, that was *seven*. When I was shipwrecked in the deep, that was *eight*. When I was stoned, that was *nine*. When I was flogged, that was *ten*. But this pressure and pain was off the chart. It was: “above strength.” He didn’t have the inner reserves to deal with it. It was crushing. “I despaired even of life.” Here the great advocate and example of resilience and hope used the word *despair*. What experience in the apostle’s life is he referring to? The older commentators felt it was something that happened in Ephesus in Acts 19, but recent scholars point out that nothing in the Book of Acts equals what Paul described here. By not knowing the specifics, we can better relate it to our own experiences.
- 2. What We Learned** (v. 9). When in pain, we often ask *Why?* But Paul didn’t ask it—he answered it. “We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead.” The Lord brought him to the edge of the grave to teach him to trust the One who can work all things for good even when it seems too late. Our most accelerated times of spiritual growth have been during difficult periods of life. Perhaps if you are in considerable pain today, it’s because God wants to develop your faith in order to accomplish a wonderful result.
- 3. What We Experienced** (v. 10). Having taught him that lesson, the Lord gave Paul a threefold deliverance: *(He) delivered us . . . and does deliver us . . . and He will still deliver us*. The verb “to deliver” occurs here in the past, present, and future tenses. He did and He does and He will deliver. In 2 Timothy 4:17–18, his last extant writing, Paul similarly wrote: “Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom.” Then having written this, Paul was promptly beheaded! Isn’t that interesting? That tells us something about God’s perspective on deliverance. He delivers us all along the way, but one day He’s going to snatch us out of all our pain and pressures and problems.
- 4. Why We’re Thankful** (v. 11). There is something that helps the process along—the prayers of God’s people. “You also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.” Have you ever wondered why God provides for prayer? If He has delivered, is delivering, and will yet deliver, why pray? So we’ll have a part in what He’s doing. When we pray about a situation, we gain a sense of ownership for it, and when the deliverance comes, our thanksgiving rises up to God.

**Conclusion:** If there is pressure or pain in your life today, take it to the Lord Jesus and learn afresh to lay it at the feet of the One who can raise the dead. If you know someone in pain, come alongside as an invisible ally, praying earnestly for them and rejoicing when the deliverance comes. As the old hymn says:

*'Tis the grandest theme through the ages rung;  
'Tis the grandest theme for a mortal tongue;  
'Tis the grandest theme that the world e'er sung,  
“Our God is able to deliver thee.”*