

BACK FROM THE BRINK

TEXT: 2 Cor. 1:8-10

THESIS: How to respond when you are walking under the Shadow of Death.

INTRO.: A. The phrase "*shadow of death*" is used 20 times in the Bible! Hezekiah is a prime example of someone who walked in that shadow and was rescued at the last minute. After feeling the cold breath of the man's "*last enemy*" on his soul he was led **back from the brink** for an additional 15 years.

ILLUS.: How many of you have been in death's shadow? You have had a close-to-death experience and have felt the chill of coming that close to our "*last enemy*"?

B. Paul had taken several visits to the "*valley of the shadow of death*" and here recounts how to respond when you are visited by the Grim Reaper. By the time he wrote this he knew exactly how to respond. Death obviously held no fear for him. "*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.*" **Phil. 1:21** He had learned from his many visits in the valley of the shadow of death to simply trust the One Who brought him **back from the brink** and thus was able to raise him from the dead as well.

ILLUS.: My wife and I have both visited the "*shadow of death*" personally and our son walked into that valley and is now in heaven. During the time of his visit to the valley and beyond, we heard the song "*It Won't Rain Always*" and that has been a blessing to us. The words have been an encouragement again and again.

***"Someone has said that in this life, some rain is bound to fall
And each one shares a tear, and trouble troubles us all.***

*But the hurt won't hurt forever, And the tears are bound to dry,
And it won't rain always, the clouds will soon be gone.
The sun that goes in hiding, has been here all along.
And it won't rain always, God's promises are true.
The sun's gonna shine in His own good time and He will see you through.
The sun's gonna shine in God's own good time and He will see you through.*

TRANS.: Paul has come **"BACK FROM THE BRINK"** on numerous occasions and he recorded his response for us in this poignant passage...

I. "PRESSED OUT OF MEASURE" – BUT "*DELIVERED*" (Past) vv. 8 & 10a

A. Discouraged but Delivered:

1. Paul admits that he was *"pressed out of measure..."*
 - a. The words mean he was bearing a burden too heavy for him to carry alone
 - b. He needed help from some source outside himself

ILLUS.: Have YOU ever been there?! Are you there now? How do you handle what life throws at you? *Lost your job? Lost a loved one? Lost a friend? Lost your health?* Remember YOU are not lost!!! We as His children are never lost, nor ever can be lost! He is our Resource, just as He was Paul's! The only reason Paul even mentions HIS troubles here, is so he can be a help and comfort to others. Cf. vv. 4-7!

B. Troubled but Delivered:

1. Paul had “trouble” – who doesn’t? – but his trouble was life-threatening
2. The “trouble” he referred to here - ***“which came to us in Asia”*** – was probably referring to the riot at the Temple of Diana, or even the many death threats he received as a result of his preaching and bold stand for the Lord, *especially among the Jews*

ILLUS.: Truly, “trouble troubles us all” as the song says. It will always find us, and if you are not experiencing trouble at present, yours is “in the mail”!

There are three ways to handle trouble and suffering:

1. Believe that everything depends on **FATE**: solution? **Give up!**
2. Believe that everything depends on **US**: solution? **Give in!**
3. Believe that everything depends on **GOD**: solution? **Give praise! Cf. v.3**

II. “DESPAIED OF LIFE” – “DOTH DELIVER” (Present) vv. 8 & 10b

A. Despairing but Trusting:

1. Paul admits that he even got to the place where he ***“despaired even of life”***
 - a. Paul confesses that he was at the end of his resources
 - b. He was as low as he could go, humanly speaking!

B. Weak but Praising: ***“above strength” cf. v.3***

1. Paul admits that he had no strength of his own

2. He was waiting for God's strength to "kick in" and was already feeling His power: "***doth deliver***" (present tense)

NOTE: It should be obvious from the context that Paul is not writing about his problems to add to the burdens of those to whom he was writing, but rather to encourage and comfort them by explaining about how the Lord *was delivering* and would continue to deliver him!

If all I do is complain about my problems and not praise the Lord for His solutions and strength, then I just add to your hurt. That should never be our intention. We should always "***Praise the Lord – anyhow!***" (A sign posted on the refrigerator of a wheelchair bound couple in our church.)

III. "THE SENTENCE OF DEATH" – "***WILL YET DELIVER***" (Future) vv. 9 & v.10c

A. Dying but Looking for Deliverance:

1. The answer to trouble is trust! v. 9,10
2. Paul was absolutely under a death sentence, but He knew the One Who could (and is assured that he would) be delivered either in life or in resurrection!
 - a. He knew the answer to his trouble was not in himself, but "***in God which raiseth the dead***" v.9b
 - b. Paul knew that a death sentence was not serious for the believer! Death was a promotion to glory!

- c. Paul knew that he would be delivered either from the death sentence or from death itself! Either way he would come **"BACK FROM THE BRINK"!**
- d. It was Paul who wrote: **"O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?"** in the great resurrection chapter - 1 Cor. 15:55

B. Tearful but Not Fearful:

- 1. Paul was feeling the **"last enemy"** creeping up behind him and his tears were not for himself, but for those he would leave behind.

Philippians 1:21-26 *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. 23 For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: 24 Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith; 26 That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.*

- 2. Paul had a "living will" and a living legacy; he knew his ministry was a blessing to others
 - a. His departure in death would leave so many saints without his strength and example
 - b. His premature death would have left us without most of the N.T.!!!

CONCL.: This is how Paul faced trials, trouble and even his possible termination! How are YOU doing?! What is YOUR problem? YOUR trouble? How are you handling it?

Unsaved, are you ready to go through the "*valley of the shadow of death?*" Only our Savior can pull you "**BACK FROM THE BRINK!**" Trust Him NOW!