

## **"Overcoming Discouragement" - (2 Corinthians 1:8-24)**

This morning I'd like to draw your attention to Chapter 1:14-24, pressed beyond measure, verses 14 through 24. In his book *Prophets: Profiles in Courage*, John F. Kennedy wrote, "Great crisis produce great men and great deeds of courage." John F. Kennedy quoted, "Great crisis produce great men and great deeds of courage." Though I agree with that I also disagree, and the reason why very simply is because it is a decision that you and I must make. If I turn to God in the crisis of my life, then it will build character and it will begin to work in and through my life and great deeds will come out. But if I turn away from Christ, like so many do, and they see the difficulty and they don't understand why God is allowing this to happen in their life, they can become very bitter towards God.

We find in the life of Pilate that there he was standing next to Truth. He knew exactly who Christ was. He even said himself, "I find no fault in this man." But because of his fear, because of the insecurity of his life concerning the position that he held and the threat that this Man might take his position, he turned him over and he said, "I wash my hands of this man." Well, first of all, you can never wash your hands of Jesus Christ. And secondly, everything comes down to what you're going to do with Jesus Christ.

Peter, on the other hand you remember, he cursed the Lord and denied his Lord, and all of a sudden we find that he repented and God used him in the day of Pentecost to bring thousands to Christ. And he stood before the congregation and he said, **"You men of Judah harken to me and turn you from your sins."** (Acts 2.38) So in Pilate, he did not turn. Peter, he did turn. In the life of Pilate, he refused to surrender. In the life of Peter, he totally surrendered. So when you

look at a difficult thing in your life, you must come to realize that you have a decision.

A couple years ago I did a funeral for a young man who committed suicide in our fellowship. He was a great guy. He was an usher, and he had a wonderful wife. A very young wife and had five beautiful girls, I believe. And I remember the day we got the phone call that he took a gun and blew his head off. He was sitting there in the front row, she was sitting with her children and I was doing the funeral. And I remember asking God to show me what in the world to share? And so vividly it came to me that "he simply reached out to the wrong thing." Often times, we can reach out to the very wrong things of our lives. And if I don't reach out to Jesus Christ, I'm going to have problems.

Well, this book begins to talk about the difficulties Paul was having. He had spent 18 months in the Church of Corinth. He had built it up, and he had dealt with it in a very wonderful way, and they loved him in a very special way. But after he spent his first letter correcting them, they begin to turn on him, and they begin to speak against him. They challenged his authority. Came against his love. And they begin to say things that were very, very spiteful. And yet, we find Paul willing to deal with the situation. We read in 2 Corinthians 1:8, **"For we would not brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, (In other words, we were beyond and we could not take any more.) insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourself, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, (past tense) and does deliver, (present tense) in whom we trust (and then the future tense) that he will yet deliver us."**

So the circumstances were beyond his ability. He understood that he could not deal with anything anymore. He even goes on to say that he had this sentence of death within himself. In other words, there was like a contract on his head. You remember the 40 men who took a vow that they would kill Paul before they would eat, or before they would drink. How he was beaten at Lystra. How he was chased out of Ephesus, and almost killed because of the riot taking place. And every city he went to, he was rejected, and yet we find Paul standing incredibly strong within his own life. Maybe you find yourself this morning at that very same place. You're at the very end of everything. You have tried to do everything you can, and you have come to the end of yourself. The relationship is over. The love is gone, and though you desire to see God work, it's almost impossible. And yet, Paul said that God was able to raise the dead. God is able to change the situation if you look to Him in a very special way.

And so I find in this passage that we begin to see that there is a way out. And one of the things I've noticed far beyond everything else is found in 2:14, he goes on to say, **"Now thanks be unto God, which always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the savior of his knowledge by us in every place."** Now notice the word "but thanks be unto God." How could Paul be thankful? How in the world could he ever rejoice in people turning against him? How can you be thankful and give God credit when things are beginning to go haywire within your life? When there are people who are speaking against you? When your reputation is being questioned? When people are making accusations against your life? How can you be calm and have that understanding and be able to say before God, "thanks be unto God?" And I believe the answer is found in one word, and we pick that up this morning in 2 Corinthians 1:14, a very powerful word. He says, **"for our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the**

**grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundant toward you.”** Let me read it in a different translation. **“We can say with confidence and a clear conscience that we have been honest and sincere in our dealings. We have been dependent upon God’s grace and not upon our earthy wisdom. That is how we have acted towards everyone and especially towards you.”**

The key word in Paul’s life is the word conscience, and I believe that when you have a good conscience you’re able to stand before criticism and you’re able to stand for a broken relationship and not move. The word conscience comes from two Latin words. One means “to be with,” and the second means “to know.” And so the definition of a conscience is the inward faculty that knows with our spirit and approves when we do right, but accuses when we do wrong. It is inborn within man. He knows what is right. He knows what is wrong. It is grounded in the personality of a man. What standard does it listen to? Only one, God’s standard. Someone has said that conscience is like a worm that never dies. It’s a flame that will never be quenched. In other words, the conscience is not the law of God, but it bears witness to the law. The best way to understand it, it is a window. A very simple window within your life. Jesus said concerning the window in (Matthew 6:22), **“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be dark, how great is that darkness!”** God has given to each of us a conscience. As that window remains crystal clear, it helps me make good decisions within my life. It warns me when I go contrary to the word of God. It will convict my life when I begin to live in sin. And when I live in sin, or become disobedient to God, I will begin to tint the very window that God desires to be clean. As I continue the sin, Satan will continue to tint. Then one day, I’ll look

through this tinted window, and I'll never be able to make great decisions within my life. And the only way out of this situation is to "repent," and have God once again make the window crystal clear. So, your conscience is that window. And Paul stands before this Church and he says very simply, "I testify before God that I have a pure conscience before God." And Paul was one that said, "I have used this to stand before you."

I'd like to share four things with you this morning that I think might help you to get over the difficulties you're going through within your life. Maybe you're going through a time of broken relationships, and you really don't know how to solve them. Or maybe things are going haywire within your life, and you really have not been able to keep your eyes upon the Lord. Or maybe someone has really hurt you in the Body of Christ, and all you can think about is what they've done to you. I believe with all my heart in these verses Paul gives to us one of the great keys of his life. And we find it in verses 14 through 24. And first of all he says, "**a good conscience will cause you to live in the glory of God.**" So number one, when you have a clear conscience, you will live in the light of His return. When you have a good conscience, you will live in the light of His return. Notice verse 14, "**As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.**" Now underline the word, the day of the Lord Jesus, because what he is saying is that he believes that Christ was coming back. Paul lived under this incredible desire to see Christ. We find that even John wrote, "**he that has his hope purifies himself.**" (I John 3:3) So the men of the New Testament believed in the coming of Christ. I believe that Christ is coming. I believe that He is coming at any moment, and the moment that I think not, the Lord's going to come. Two will be walking, one will be taken. Two will be sleeping, one will be taken. Two will be working, one will be taken. In a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, God is going to call his Church

up and there the Marriage of the Lamb is going to happen. And we're going to be married to the Lord and enjoy the marriage feast before the Lord. But because I believe in the coming of Christ, and because my conscience is pure before God, I do believe He's coming. So here's the message. I don't have time to mess around with broken relationships. I need to fix them. I need to believe that God is bigger than the problem I'm going through. I believe that today I'm going through difficult times, but tomorrow I'll be standing in the very presence of Jesus Christ, and God knows my heart. And God will vindicate my heart, but today others do not. So it gives me the hope in my life. If I look at situations and understand that Christ could be coming back, then I want to live in such a way that we can work together, fellowship together, and begin to put our differences aside and believe in the coming of Jesus Christ. It changes the way I live, how I believe and what I want to do. I don't have time for bitterness. I have no time for resentment. In other words, if God wants to heal, I want to be healed. If God wants to use me, I want to be used. And the reason why is because Jesus Christ is coming.

And the Bible tells me, "**Blessed is that man when the Lord comes he finds his servant doing, doing the will of God.**" (Matthew 24:46) Bitterness is not the will of God. Resentfulness is not the will of God. Harboring ill feelings is not the will of God. Being angry is not the will of God. The will of God is that you put in perspective your life with the coming of Christ and you need to die and begin to see how God is going to use you to free somebody up, or God's going to use you to minister because you know in your heart Christ could come at any moment. So when my conscience is pure, boy I see God. He's all over the place. Yes, He's working in ways I don't understand. No, I don't understand why people are having a difficult time with me. Yes, I'm struggling in some areas, but because He's coming I believe that my eyes are fixed upon the Lord. And I believe that if we could fix our eyes upon Christ, so many of these petty things would be gone.

We would begin to get a vision of Christ and our lives would change. And those lives around us would change in a wonderful way.

So number one, when you have a clear conscience, you will be living in the light of His return. But the second thing I find in this passage is found in verses 15 all the way through 18. When you have a clear conscience, you will be serious about the will of God. When you have a clear conscience, you're going to be very serious about the will of God. Notice in verse 15, **"And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit; And to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you,"** (In other words, he's saying I was going to come by and see you - I was going to continue and on the way back I was going to see you again - that's that second benefit.) **"and of you to be brought on my way toward Judaea. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness? Or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay? But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea but nay."** And you're saying yea and nay, what in the world are you talking about? Very simply Paul understood the importance of God's will within his life. He said to these Corinthians, "I'm going to be spending the winter with you, if God permits." He wrote that "if God permits." "And if possible I will see you on my way out, and I'll catch you on my way in." But when things fell apart, when Ephesus sought to destroy his light, the riot that was caused because of the burning of the books. When he had a contract on his head and they were seeking to destroy him, his plans change. Now listen to me very carefully. You can plan the very best you can, but sometimes God will change your plans. And if you're not flexible, you're going to miss the will of God within your life. Paul was willing to live in the will of God and answer to God and not to man. And if you're seeking to please man, you're not going to be the servants of Christ. So you must

make a decision today in your life. Who are you going to be faithful to? It's not that you're going to be rude. It's not that you're going to be mean. It's not that you're going to break promises. But if God changes directions in your life, you might have to hurt someone. Let me give you an example. You're going to marry this gal, and you can't wait to marry her. And all of the sudden it's a week away. Everything is ready. And all of a sudden you find out she doesn't know Christ. I don't know how that could happen. Unless she was really beautiful and you were really dumb. And all of the sudden, you start to pray and she said, "Well I'm not a Christian. I'm an Atheist." Do you go through with the wedding or do you break it off? Well, absolutely you break it off. But many times I would say more than I would like to admit, people go through it because they don't want to offend their parents. They don't want to look bad before their friends, and so they keep a wicked commitment. Instead of saying, "You know, we need to stop this and reevaluate because this is our whole life ahead of us." Or instead of standing and calling every single person and saying we're not getting married because things are not working out, they go through with it, and they're not in God's will. And they spend years out of God's will. This is all I'm saying. If you have a clear conscience before God, you are going to be seeking the will of God above every other will in your life. You're going to want to do what God wants you to do, and not what people want you to do. And though the people hated Paul, Paul was willing and able to love them because he knew he was in God's perfect will. Why? Because God changed the plans. And God will change plans in your life. And if you're not flexible, you're going to be broken. Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be broken. And so you need to be honest, not lie, but tell the truth. All of a sudden, you're tired, you're exhausted, and you just can't get out of bed. Call them and tell them you don't feel good, but don't lie about it. And so with a clear conscience, I can answer before God. And so I find very important, seeking the will of God.

The third thing I find very interesting is found in verse 19 and 20, when you have a clear conscience, you will glorify Jesus Christ. When you have a clear conscience, you will be glorifying Jesus Christ. Notice in verse 19, **“For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timothy, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea. For all the promises of God in him are yea, or yes, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”** Now I just want you to notice here he says that he was preaching Jesus Christ. When I have a clear conscience, the one thing I want in my life is the preeminence of Christ. Malachi tells me, **“they that love the Lord spoke often of Him.”** (Malachi 3:16) You see, when my conscience is tempted, I do not see God. When my conscience has been tempted because of sin or rebellion, I do not really consider the will of God within my life. When my life has been tempted and Satan has dirtied the window of my conscience, then the name of Christ is not on my lips. But if I have a clear conscience before God, then I will say to you that I see Christ and He’s coming. And I desire to be found in the will of God. And I want to talk about Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And that’s what Paul’s secret really was. But let me give you one more and we’ll end here.

He said the fourth thing is found in verses 21 through 24, **“When you have a clear conscience, you will be on good terms with the Holy Ghost.”** This is so cool - This is for me, maybe not you. When you have a good conscience, you are on good terms with the Holy Ghost. What do I mean by that? The word to resist or the word to quench or the word to despise, the Bible declares that we have despised the day of good things, that we have resisted the work of the Holy Spirit, that we have quenched the work of the Holy Spirit. Because He’s a person, because He’s part of the Godhead, because He has come inside of me to be the Comforter and wants to come along my side, when we are in good terms He

changes my life and He uses it for the glory of God. But if I'm constantly fighting Him, constantly going against the conviction, the guilt is going to destroy my life. It's going to bury me to the point that I will not do what God wants me to do. And so I read four interesting little things about the Holy Spirit in verse 21 and 22. Notice it says in Verse 21, "**He will establish you.**" And the word establish basically means "the guarantee or to fulfill your life." It's a business term that means that He will honor the contract He has made in your life. That the day that you accepted Christ, He came into your life and He stamped your life and He now guarantees it. I like that commercial and the guy says, "And I guarantee it". About the suits... I just guarantee it. That little statement has made him millions. "I guarantee it." Well, what are you going to guarantee? It just sounds good. But the Holy Spirit is saying to you, I have guaranteed your life before God.

So the first thing I see about the Holy Spirit is, He guarantees my life. Now "He which establishes" means to guarantee. He assures me that God is going to work out that which He has begun; He's able to complete. God is going to keep you for the Day of Christ. God is working through the Holy Spirit to establish my life. Number two, I find in verse 21, "**He will anoint you.**" Notice he says, "**in Christ, and has anointed us, is God.**" (2 Corinthians 1:21) Now in the Old Testament, there were three groups that were anointed. There were the priests, there were the prophets, and there were the kings. And they were anointed for two reasons. Very important. They were anointed to be "set aside", and they were anointed "for." Sometimes we feel like God has brought us out of the world, and we're not doing anything. But He brought us out of the world that He might bring us into Christ. So God has established you. He is now "setting you aside" and setting you "for something else" to be an instrument in God's hand. That God is pulling you out of the world. God is establishing your life. God is beginning to use you in a very powerful way. And God is doing that work because of that clear

conscience. And then the third thing I find is found also in verse 22, "**Who has sealed us.**" The word seal means, "to claim." It's an old word that we understand that when you would go and begin to cut down some logs you would stamp the logs with your own personal seal. Then you would go back home, and you would wait and when it was time to go get the logs, you would send somebody and they would show the seal and they would match it up to the logs, and then they would take the logs back with them.

So Jesus Christ sent His Holy Spirit, and He has sealed your life. As a down payment, in other words, He's coming back. I like that song, "Signed, Sealed and Delivered". He's going to get you there one way or the other. So He is building you up. He is pulling you by His side, and He has claimed you as His personal property. So no one better mess with you. No one better be goofing with you because if they goof with you, they're going to have to mess with the Lord. And that's a good thing to know that God is with you. And God will protect you. And God will watch over you because Paul said, "**the Lord stood with me this day.**" When the ship was going down, the Lord said, "He stood with Paul." And when Paul was in prison, the bible declares "and God stood with Paul." And God is willing and able to stand with you.

And lastly, he says in verse 22, "He will fill you." Notice who has sealed you and given you the earnest. Now the word earnest doesn't mean the guy, Ernest. But the word earnest comes from an old word that means earnest money. If I was going to buy a house, I would put a down payment on it. And there would be more money coming down the road. So God has filled your heart with His Holy Spirit and there is more power and more energy and more life in the realm of the Spirit because it is the work of the Holy Spirit. So when I have a good conscience before God, when my life is right in the very things of God, I can honestly look up

and know that Christ is coming. So the things I'm going through, I'm not going to let them bother me. His will is number one in my life, and I want to be obedient to that will. I need to hear which way God wants me to go, and how He wants me to live my life and where He wants me to work and where He wants me to live. I need to hear that. And when I have a clear conscience before God, I will be able to speak about the great things of my Lord. But the most exciting things in me is when you have a great, great confidence and you are right with God, the Holy Spirit will work in your life to establish you, to anoint you, to seal you and to fill you. And God will bless you in a wonderful way.

So I think in my own personal conviction, Paul looked at the pain he suffered. He was able to take the beatings. He was able to take the rejection. He was able to take it all because he had a pure conscience before God. What a wonderful way to live. No more double standards. No more secrets. "What I am, I am by the will of God." Very simple life. He says, "The simplicity of my life was I was honest with God."

**Closing Prayer:** Father, we thank You for the honesty, the simplicity, that Lord, our lives are not complicated. Lord, we don't need to blow things out of proportion. That Lord, we can look to You to change every avenue of our life. We pray tonight and today and tomorrow and next month that Your will would be predominate in our lives. That God, we would sense You through a day. That we would hear Your voice throughout our days. And that we would speak about You. And we would know without a shadow of a doubt, that You are establishing us. And Lord, you are anointing our lives. God, You have claimed us and You are willing to fill us with even more. So how could we go wrong? Father, we'll stand before broken relationships. And God, we will stand before the tide of this world because we know our redeemer lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.