

**Down But Not Out
2 Corinthians 2:12-13
Part 5**

I would like to begin this morning by reading to you a letter that I came across in the course of my study this week written in 1911 by a man telling his friend that he had just resigned the pastorate.

My dear Jim: I am through. Yesterday I handed in my resignation, to take effect at once, and this morning I began to work for the _____ Land Company. I shall not return to the pastorate. I think I can see into your heart as you read these words and behold not a little disappointment, if not disgust. I don't blame you at all, I'm somewhat disgusted with myself. Do you recall the days in the seminary when we talked of the future and painted pictures of what we were to do for the kingdom of God? We saw the boundless need for an unselfish Christian service, and longed to be out among men doing our part toward the world's redemption. I shall never forget that last talk on the night before our graduation. You were to go to the foreign field and I to a "church."

We had brave dreams of usefulness, and you have realized them. As I look back across twenty-five years I can see some lives that I have helped, and some things which I have been permitted to do that are worthwhile; but, sitting here tonight, I am more than half convinced that God never intended me to be a minister. If He did, I am not big enough and brave enough to pay the price. Even if it leads you to write me down as a coward, I am going to tell you why I've quit ...

In these years I have found "only a few" earnest, unselfish, consecrated Christians. I do not believe that I am specially morbid or unfair in my estimate. So far as I know my own heart, I am not bitter. But through all these years a conviction has been growing within me that the average church member cares precious little about the kingdom of

God and its advancement, or the welfare of his fellow men. He is a Christian in order that he may save his soul from hell, and for no other reason. He does as little as he can, lives as indifferently as he dares. If he thought he could gain heaven without even lifting his finger for others, he would jump at the chance. Never have I known more than a small minority of any church which I have served to be really interested in and unselfishly devoted to God's work. It took my whole time to pull and push and urge and persuade the reluctant members of my church to undertake a little something for their fellow men. They took a covenant to be faithful in attendance upon the services of the church and not one out of ten ever thought of attending prayer meeting. A large percentage seldom attended church in the morning, and a pitifully small number in the evening. It didn't seem to mean anything to them that they had dedicated themselves to the service of Christ.

I am tired; tired of being the only one in the church from whom real sacrifice is expected; tired of straining and tugging to get Christian people to live like Christians; tired of planning work for my people and then being compelled to do it myself or see it left undone; tired of dodging my creditors when I would not need to if I had what is due me; tired of the frightening vision of penniless old age. I am not leaving Christ. I love Him. I shall still try to serve Him. Judge me leniently, old friend. I can't bear to lose your friendship... Yours as of old, William

Clearly this man, in his pursuit of Christ and His desire to minister in the name of Christ, had been beaten down and so much so that he after twenty-five years of professional ministry decided to quit. And why had he decided to quit? He decided to quit because he felt like a failure. He worked hard and he labored in the name of Christ, but in the end he felt that the vast majority of his work and his labor had been in vain.

Now I do not know whether or not this man should have ever entered the pastorate, maybe he shouldn't have, but I do know this that if any of us will wholeheartedly commit ourselves to follow Christ and seek, as best as we

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can to minister in His name, in whatever capacity we may choose to do so, our lives will not have been lived in vain, for in living our lives in this way we will not only be led in triumph in Christ but also we will become the sweet aroma of the knowledge of God in this world. And hopefully it is this understanding that will prevent us from being knocked out even though we may from time to time be knocked down by the potential stresses, strains and disappointments of ministry.

I believe the Apostle Paul in **2 Corinthians 2:12-17** provides us an illustration how this very thing can be done. Let me read **2 Corinthians 2:12-17**. “**Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, (13) I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. (14) But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. (15) For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; (16) to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (17) For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.**”

This morning we will begin to examine these verses. And as we examine these verses, I believe that we will learn from the life of the Apostle Paul certain basic truths about ministry that will help us to persevere even when facing the stresses, strains of disappointments of it. And why is this important? Because in persevering we honor the Lord, serve others and find personal fulfillment.

So, what is the question that we will be seeking to answer as we examine these particular verses? What do we learn from the Apostle Paul about ministry from 2 Corinthians 2:12-17 that will help us to persevere when faced with difficulties?

We learn from the Apostle Paul that no matter how gifted we might be as a minister, the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry at times can become overwhelming (2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**. “**Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, (13) I had no**

rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”

So let us begin by considering how these two verses fit into the context of **2 Corinthians**. These verses serve as a transition from his defense for failing to come to them as he stated that he would, starting all the way back in **2 Corinthians 1:12**, and his defense of his boldness and the afflictions he had suffered as an apostle of Christ that will continue all the way through **2 Corinthians 7:16**. Therefore in light of this thought these two verses are actually a very pivotal point in this epistle.

So how does he begin this transition? Paul begins this transition in **verse 12** by referring to a particular visit to Troas. So when, in the grand scheme of Paul’s life and ministry, did this particular visit occur?

This visit occurred after several different negative interactions with the Corinthians, which included not only his **“sorrowful visit”** alluded to in **2 Corinthians 2:1** but also his **“severe letter”** that he alluded to in **2 Corinthians 2:3**, a letter that he entrusted to Titus to deliver to the Corinthians while he himself was wrapping up his ministry in Ephesus. We know this based on **2 Corinthians 7:5-13**.

So why was he visiting Troas? His visit to Troas served a two-fold purpose. Paul was visiting Troas, first of all, “for the gospel of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:12). Isn’t that what the verse says? Let us go back to **verse 12** and see if this is not so. **“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ.”** So why did Paul visit Troas according to **verse 12**? First of all, Paul visited Troas “for the gospel of Christ,” or in other words, he came to Troas with the express purpose of establishing a church.

So now let me give you a few facts about Troas in relationship to Paul in order to support what I just shared with you.

Paul had passed through Troas before on his second missionary journey according to **Acts 16:8-11**. On that visit however the apostle apparently did not found a church. In fact, it was on this initial visit to Troas on his second missionary journey that he received what has become known as the **“Macedonian call,”** which he immediately responded to according to **Acts 16:10**. Therefore having responded immediately to the **“Macedonian call”**

in **16:10** it is very unlikely that he even had the opportunity to proclaim the gospel in Troas on his first visit and therefore had no opportunity to establish a church. So, what he was unable to do on his first visit to Troas he had now purposed to do on his second visit.

And how did the citizens of Troas receive Paul? He was received extremely well! Let us once again go back to **verse 12** and continue to read. **“Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord.”**

Now notice that last phrase, **“when the door was opened for me in the Lord.”** This is a phrase that Paul often used to describe ministry opportunities that he believed that God had provided him at various times and in various places.

So let me ask you a question. How did Paul know that the Lord had opened a door of ministry opportunity in Troas? Or in other words, how did Paul know that the Lord had opened a door for Him to preach the gospel in Troas? And I believe the answer would have to be Paul knew that the Lord had opened the door for him to preach the gospel in Troas, because not only was he able to proclaim the gospel, but people must have even been responding to the gospel. So in light of this, did Paul’s visit to Troas “for the gospel of Christ” result in a church being founded as he had initially purposed? I believe the answer would have to be yes, that purpose was, in fact, realized. But remember what I shared with you. Paul’s visit to Troas involved a two-fold purpose. So, what was this second purpose?

Paul also visited Troas in order to rendezvous with Titus who Paul believed would provide him a report on the Corinthian church and how they had responded to his “severe letter.” Unfortunately this second purpose was not realized and it was a source of intense concern.

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 2:13** and see if this is not so. **I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia.”**

Paul candidly in 2 Corinthians 2:13 highlighted, for the Corinthians the high level of concern that he had for them while he waited for a report from Titus in Troas. And he did this in several ways.

He, first of all, highlighted for the Corinthians the high level of concern that he had for them in 2 Corinthians 2:13 by specifically telling them about his troubled spirit. Look at the very first part of the verse, **“I had no rest in my spirit.”** What an amazing thing! The Lord had opened up for Paul this wonderful door of ministry opportunity in Troas. The gospel was being proclaimed and people were coming to faith in Christ, and yet even in the midst of this Paul’s spirit was not at rest. And this is what he specifically told them.

And why was he so concerned for the Corinthians? He was their spiritual father. He was the one who had proclaimed the gospel to them. He was the one who had remained with them for 18 months and had continued to seek to build them in up in Christ. Even after he had left them to continue his ministry, his ministry to them never ceased. He continued on with them. Seeking through letters and visits, not only to sustain them, but to build them up in Christ. And even when he went to them on his “sorrowful visit” seeking to protect them from false teachers and was attacked, he did not cease to be concerned for them. He was desperately concerned for them believing that if they did not renew their loyalty to him and manifest that loyalty by excommunicating the incestuous man that had caused so much trouble the church of Corinth, that the church itself was in danger of being swept away, and the thought of this was overwhelming.

So, how overwhelming was it for Paul? We see how overwhelming this was for Paul in the way he chose to respond to his inner turmoil, which leads us another way that Paul highlighted his high level of concern for the Corinthians. So, what was this other way?

Paul also highlighted for the Corinthians the high level of concern that he had for them in 2 Corinthians 2:13 by choosing to leave Troas and the door that the Lord had opened in order to search out Titus in Macedonia.

Let me now read for you the rest of **2 Corinthians 2:13** and see if this is not so. **“I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them [the citizens of Troas], I went on to Macedonia.”**

Paul was one very troubled guy. Paul, in fact, in the midst of all these wonderful things that were taking place in Troas, was so filled with agony and desired so greatly to know how the Corinthians had responded to his

“severe letter” that he turned his back on the door that God had opened for him in Troas in order to intercept Titus in Macedonia knowing that was, in fact, the way that Titus would have to go if he were on his way to Troas.

So hopefully we now see how these two verses, **2 Corinthians 2:12-13**, form a transition from his defense of his changed travel plans that started way back in **2 Corinthians 1:12** and his defense of his boldness and the afflictions he had suffered as an apostle of Christ that will continue all the way through **2 Corinthians 7:16**.

In other words, Paul, in essence, in these two verses was saying to the Corinthians, “If I have in the past changed my travel plans I did not change my travel plans in order to serve myself but it was in order to serve you and if I have suffered and been afflicted as an apostle of Christ it has also been because of my deep concern for you.”

What Paul described for the Corinthians in **2 Corinthians 2:12-13** was a very dark period in his life. He loved the Corinthians so much that his heart was torn apart by concern for them. In fact, Paul’s high level of concern for the Corinthians during this period of time described in 2 Corinthians 2:12-13 actually led to Paul becoming depressed (2 Corinthians 7:5-6).

Let me now read for you **2 Corinthians 7:5-6**. “**For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. (6) But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus.**”

So had Paul been beaten down? Absolutely! He was so beaten down in seeking to minister to others that he actually became depressed. Isn’t this exactly what the implication of **2 Corinthians 7:6** tells us?

So let me ask you a question. What is the first thing we learn from the Apostle Paul about ministry in **2 Corinthians 12:12-17**? We learn from the Apostle Paul that no matter how gifted we might be as a minister, the stresses, strains, and disappointments of ministry at times can become overwhelming (2 Corinthians 2:12-13).

And I certainly have personally experienced this in my ministry here in this church. And I know this you will at some time or another will experience it

as well. It will come as it came into Paul's life. And yet even that he was knocked down from time to time by the stresses, strains, and disappointments often times associated with ministry, he will never be knocked out even in the spite of his weakness as he looked to the Lord for His strength and comfort.

And if there is any doubt about this let me read for you the words of Paul in **2 Corinthians 4:7-11**. **“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; (8) we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; (10) always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”**

Did Paul struggle in his spirit as he, in his pursuit of Christ, sought to minister in the name of Christ? Absolutely! Have I have struggled? Absolutely! Will you struggle from time to time? Absolutely! But even so, if we are a true disciple of Christ, we will respond as such in the time of our need. We may be knocked down but we will not be knocked out. And this is the truth!

And this leads us to our prayer: Though we from time to time might be knocked down as a result of the stresses and strains of ministry, may we by the grace of God not allow ourselves to be knocked out as we look to God for comfort.