

Day 99, Acts 20:1-6 & 2 Corinthians 1

by David Servant

Paul's letter to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, is a testament to God's comfort and the power of prayer in the midst of challenging situations.

Scripture: Philippians 4:7

Topics: "Paul's Ministry", "God's Mercy"

Description

David Servant delves into the background of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, shedding light on the circumstances that led to the writing of 2 Corinthians. Paul's initial severe letter to the Corinthians, written with tears, was followed by a more comforting and encouraging letter after receiving a positive report from Titus. Despite facing danger and despair in Asia, Paul found comfort in God's mercy and credited the prayers of the Corinthian believers for his deliverance. Paul's decision to send a letter instead of visiting Corinth a second time was to spare them and maintain the credibility of his message about Christ.

Transcript

It is helpful to know something of the occasion of this letter in order to understand the letter itself. Everything, however, is not so clear. I suspect that Paul had no idea that his letters would be studied for hundreds of years by future Christians, otherwise he would have worked harder at making them easier to understand by those of us who were not part of his intended readership.

After his three-year sojourn in Ephesus, where he penned 1 Corinthians, Paul traveled along the coast of the Aegean Sea back to Macedonia and Greece. At some point he briefly visited the Corinthian believers. That visit didn't go as well as he had hoped, and after his departure, he wrote a letter to the Corinthians that was quite severe, penned "with many tears" (2:3-4). Fearing that his severe letter may have done more damage than good, Paul headed back towards Corinth. On the way there, he eventually met up with Titus who informed him that his letter had, for the most part, accomplished the intended result. Paul wrote 2 Corinthians after receiving Titus' encouraging report (2:12-13; 7:6, 13). This means, of course, that 2 Corinthians is actually 3 Corinthians! (Actually, 2 Corinthians is at least 4 Corinthians, because Paul wrote a letter to the Corinthians that predated 1 Corinthians; see 1 Cor. 5:9).

Paul began this letter by focusing on God's mercy and comfort. Because of Titus' good report, he had been comforted, and he wanted to comfort the Corinthians who were no doubt troubled about their relationship with him. In keeping with that theme, Paul related his experience with God's comfort when he was recently in Asia, where he and his band "despaired even of life" (1:8). Paul must have been referring

to the uproar and riot in Ephesus, of which his ministry was the cause, that we read about in Acts 19:23-40. Apparently there was more danger that surrounded that incident than Luke's account in Acts reveals. Regardless, Paul enjoyed "the peace that surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7) in the midst of a very stressful situation. That comfort is available to you, but faith is what activates it.

Paul credited the Lord with his deliverance from those who would have killed him, but he also credited the prayers of the Corinthian believers (1:9-11). It is encouraging to know that our prayers help keep God's front-line servants safe from harm.

There was apparently some misunderstanding on the part of the Corinthians regarding Paul's intended traveling schedule as it related to his coming to visit them. We don't know all the details so it isn't easy for us to sort out. We do know that when Paul was in Ephesus, he "purposed in the spirit" to journey to Macedonia and Achaia and then on to Jerusalem and Rome (Acts 19:21). That is the exact course he ultimately followed. According to what we read today, he intended to go through Corinth twice, but the second visit never occurred, and so Paul explained why.

He did not want the Corinthian believers to think that he was charting his own course or vacillating in his intentions, an indication that he was "purposing according the flesh" (1:17). It seems Paul was even more concerned that his loss of credibility regarding his traveling intentions might cause the Corinthian believers to doubt his message about Christ. So he first addressed that issue, affirming that the message preached by himself, Silvanus and Timothy was fully trustworthy. And then---without resorting to swearing with an oath, but calling on God as a "witness to his soul" (1:23)---Paul explained why he didn't visit Corinth the second time as he had intended. It was to spare them. Rather than visit, he decided to send a letter instead.

Perhaps you've found yourself in a similar situation, when writing a letter to someone seemed like a better thing to do than speaking to them face-to-face. A letter gives them time to think about their reaction before they respond. A letter rather than a face-to-face encounter can be an act of wisdom and love. But not always! Every situation requires its own evaluation.

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