**CAST DOWN BUT UNCONQUERED**

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ***We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed***— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you” (2Cor.4:7-12).

In this passage, Paul is telling about some of the things he endured as a preacher of the gospel. The “treasure” (v.7) to which he refers is the gospel – i.e. “the knowledge of the glory of God” (v.6). As they preached that gospel, they suffered opposition and persecution (v.8-9). Specifically, he said, “We are hard-pressed… perplexed… persecuted… (and) struck down.” Indeed, they suffered much for preaching the gospel! But it occurs to me that Paul’s words are applicable to ALL CHRISTIANS; and to the VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES in which we might find ourselves. In this article, I want to look at verses 8-9, and make some modern applications.

**“We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed.”** In the Greek, there is a play on words. Literally, the idea is something like, “we are crowded, but not cramped.” As you can see, this could not be literally true; if one is crowded, then he is, by definition, cramped! ***But what Paul is getting across with this play on words is about having a proper perspective: Christians look at things a little differently than everyone else!*** It’s about having a “can do attitude” in the face of hardship. I may be “hard-pressed,” but I will not “give in” to defeat! Think of the various circumstances in your life where you have felt hard-pressed; and yet, you soldiered on in the face of hardship. One glaring example is all of this mess we’ve been through with the coronavirus. Ordered to stay at home, to socially distance, to avoid touching your face; the corresponding loss of freedom, as well as economic hardship. Yet, throughout all this, I have noticed that people are still nice at the store; and when I walk around the neighborhood, my neighbors still smile and say “Hi.” That’s a living definition of “hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed!”

**“We are perplexed, but not in despair.”** Again, we see some word-play. Literally, it goes something like this: “we see no way out, but we’re not giving up.” It is this “can do” attitude that gets most people through the trials of life! Think about this: Why did God allow this virus to come among us? Why did people we know personally get the virus? Why did some actually die from it? It is perplexing indeed! At times, with the constantly evolving and changing news, it seemed as though there was no way out of this nightmare. But we did not give up! We keep praying and doing our best to remain faithful to God. Indeed, times like this can test our faith, and God is watching to see how we’ll respond. Let us respond with faith and hope, for there is a better day ahead! (Rm.8:18-25)

**“(We are) persecuted, but not forsaken.”** The word, “persecuted,” clearly refers to harm done to Christians for their faith. And yet, in spite of those unbelievers who pursued the persecution of Christians, God hasn’t abandoned them! They are very much on the mind of God, and under His providential care. This did not (and does not) mean that they (we) would escape persecution. ***But it does mean God is watching; and He will reward us according to our works (Rv.12:10-11; 14:12-13).*** In our day, that harm may not be bodily harm; instead, it may only be the stress of ridicule. But regardless of what from your persecution takes, know that God will not forsake you!

**“(We are) struck down, but not destroyed.”** The various trials of life can strike us down – dispiriting and discouraging us. Perhaps the striking down is quite literal (i.e. physical violence); or perhaps it is only mental anguish (i.e. ridicule). Nevertheless, God will NOT allow you to be totally destroyed. ***Now, GET what I (and Paul) just said!*** ***It is not that we won’t suffer; it is only that our suffering will not result in our eternal destruction.*** Jesus said it like this: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy BOTH soul and body in Hell” (Mt.10:28). Paul’s words are eternally encouraging in the face of hard times!

--Lanny Smith