

Preserved by the power of God * 2 Corinthians 11:24-30
May 24, 2020 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

At this point in the COVID lockdown, I think we're all getting a little tired. Tired of the uncertainty. Tired of being cooped up inside. A few weeks back, I asked you to show me on a scale from one finger to five where you were at and I think the average was about three. I think we're all getting just a little fatigued.

And so what I want to do this morning is encourage you with this fact – even if we are pressed on every side, we will still be preserved by the power of God. Even if we're pressed on every side, we'll still be preserved by the power of God.

If that sounds like something we heard earlier in 2 Corinthians – good, because it is! I'm pressed but not crushed, persecuted not abandoned – I want to revisit that passage in light of something Paul says later in his letter, to see that indeed, God preserves us through even the worst of perils.

So look quickly at 2 Corinthians 4:8 – and I do encourage you to have your Bible open in front of you this morning, because we're going to flip back and forth.

Paul says 2 Corinthians 4:8 –

8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;
9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed (2Co 4:8-9 NIV).

That's a wonderful thought, isn't it? That in the sovereignty of God, we may be windblown and battered, but the storm will never knock us out. The tent flaps may flutter and the roof get wet, but we'll never blow away. That's a great encouragement for us as we weather COVID-19 and the hardships that come our way in the midst of it.

But is it just a wonderful thought? Is this just Paul's optimistic vision of what could be? Is it too good to be true? And what gives him the authority to say it in the first place? (If he's not taking hydroxychloroquine, what gives him the right to say it works?) ;)

The answer to that is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 11:24 -

24 Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one (That's one less than the maximum beating you could give another Israelite under Hebrew law – Deuteronomy 15).

25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,

26 I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.

27 I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

28 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

29 Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Now go back and look at 4 verse 8 – 'we are pressed on every side but not crushed; persecuted not abandoned.' Paul can say that because he knows that it's true. He has tested this thought in the

crucible of life and found out by his own experience that indeed, even when we are pressed on every side, we are preserved by the power of God. He's been battered, but by the power of God, he's still standing.

And it IS God's power, not his own, that's brought him through. I mean, 2 Corinthians 11, verse 30, Paul says - 30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness (2Co 11:24-30 NIV). Why? Because in my weakness, God is stronger. That's 12, verse 9 – God says 'my power is made perfect in weakness.'

Paul made it through forty lashes minus one, three different shipwrecks and constant danger because he was not relying on his own strength, but on God's. These things were all WAY beyond what Paul could do but they were all well WITHIN could God could handle. Through the power of God, Paul persevered every time.

So I want to encourage you in the weeks ahead, let this pressure drive you deeper into relationship with God. Lean on His strength, trusting Him to bring you through. Draw strength from the knowledge that in our weakness, God is stronger and remember – 2 Corinthians 4:8 in the Living Bible –

8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but not crushed and broken. We are perplexed because we don't know why things happen as they do, but we don't give up and quit. 9 We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going.

Through every pressure/peril/pitfall, we are preserved by the power of God.

BENEDICTION

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."