

SERMON NOTES & STUDY GUIDE • 1/15/17

MOVEMENT

Our sermon series, **MOVEMENT**, is an exploration of 2 Corinthians. The focus of the series is on the church. The church is not a building. The church is not even a conglomeration of people. The church is a movement, a group of people 'called out' (ekklesia) to meet and glorify God, and to represent His Kingdom to a broken world. The church doesn't sit still; it moves and grows. To be a Christian is to be on the move! Throughout this series we will explore what it means to be a part of this **Movement** of God.

DELIVERANCE TO CAPTIVES • 2 Corinthians 1:8-14 • John Goodale • January 15, 2017

Our movement sermon series encourages us to not settle for less than God's best for us, by just seeking to be comfortable. We are most fully alive and living out God's purpose for us when there's movement and spiritual growth in our lives. At the same time, Christ's followers are also part of His larger movement: we move out into the world, bringing to others the gifts and good news God has given us. Here at First Pres, we want to be a church on the move—but it takes movement in each of us for that to happen. With all this in mind, let's consider today's movement in the area of deliverance.

The story is told of a young boy who attended Sunday School, where they learned about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Afterward, his mother asked what he learned. The boy replied, "The Israelites escaped from Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army came after them. The Israelites arrived at the Red Sea, but couldn't cross it. Pharaoh's army was getting closer, so Moses got on his walkie-talkie. The Israeli Air Force bombed the Egyptians, and the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge that allowed them to cross the Red Sea."

The boy's mom was horrified, and asked, "Is that really what they taught you?" Her son said, "No . . . but if I told you what they taught us, you'd never believe it!"

Today's text begins with another moment where dramatic deliverance was needed. Paul was in such a bad place that he and his companions were driven to the point of despair. Remember, this is Paul, who always comes across so confident and capable. Yet he writes, "We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure" (1:8). The Greek wording suggests that they were utterly without any way of escape.

This sounds like a movie, when the hero has so much going against him, you wonder how things can possibly end well. In this instance, the difference was God, who rescued Paul and his companions and moved them to a better place. This experience led Paul to triumphantly exclaim: "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us" (1:10).

These words are a helpful reminder for us. In the way strong winds blew in our community this week, it can sometimes feel life is blowing hard at us. We live in a

sinful, fallen world that can exert great pressure upon our lives, perhaps beyond the ability to endure. Like Paul, we may find ourselves in despair, wondering if things could really ever get better. Jesus acknowledged what we're up against when He said, "In this world you will have trouble." But then He went on to declare, "But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The good news is that intrinsic in God's character is a desire to deliver His people. To move us from places in life where we're captive and oppressed, to the abundant life He promises. Our earlier Isaiah passage reminds us of God's desire "to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness" (42:7).

Nowhere is this more clear than on the cross, where God provided the greatest deliverance we could ever hope for. Sin separated us from God, preventing us from fully experiencing the relationship for which we were created. Death ended our lives, with no hope of anything more after it did its work. When Jesus gave His life on the cross for our sins, we were delivered from sin and death's power over us. Since that day, God continues to deliver His people from circumstances that choke life from us. Just moments ago we affirmed this characteristic, when we sang of Him as our "strong deliverer."

This promise of God's deliverance is wonderfully good news for us and for the hurting, broken world in which we live. But before we go any further, we need to also be honest. For there are places, even seasons, when we long for God's deliverance—but nothing seems to change. I think of those here whose bodies and even minds are bound by illness, who have cried out for deliverance for years. Others have prayed to be freed from habits or addictions that continue to ensnare them. Some long to be delivered from painful, broken relationships caused by conflict, dysfunction, or abuse. There may be the need for deliverance from financial scarcity or debt, or from fears or anxieties that paralyze us within.

Make no mistake: if you're not waiting on God's deliverance for something, you probably know someone who is. So how do we handle Paul's promise of deliverance in those moments when we don't see it playing out in our lives? When we hear a promise like this that isn't consistent with our experience, one of two things can happen. We may wonder what's wrong with us, that we're not

experiencing God's power like others are. Or we may wonder what's wrong with God, and promises in the Bible sound hollow when we hear them.

Friends, when it comes to God's deliverance in our lives, it's important to realize there are two movements at work. One is God's movement into our circumstances, working to redeem them and to free us from what holds us captive. This is so often what we're looking for, perhaps wondering why we haven't yet experienced it. But there's also our movement towards God: ways we hold fast to Him, even when we don't yet see His promise in our lives. Maybe one reason God won't often provide immediate deliverance, is because He knows that if He did, we might be tempted to skip this second movement. Rather than simply seeking His help to run away from a hard place, He also wants us to run to Him.

Let's consider this movement we make towards God when we're awaiting His deliverance, by looking at four actions that contribute to this movement. The first is to **REMEMBER previous experiences of God's deliverance**. Our perception of God's deliverance tends to be shaped primarily by what we're facing in the moment. Though our current circumstances are just one part of God's larger story of deliverance in our lives, they usually feel like the story.

For this reason, one of the best things we can do now and again is take time to reflect upon previous moments when God delivered us: what we faced in the past that knocked our feet out from under us, and how God saved us. Paul's remembering shaped his confidence in future deliverance, for he wrote, "He has delivered us . . . and he will deliver us" (1: 10a). Remembering God's faithfulness in the past anchors our own confidence in what He will yet do.

Second, **HOPE that God will deliver us, even when we can't yet see it as reality**. In today's society, we've become used to making things happen right now. When we wait weeks, months, or even years for God's deliverance and don't yet see it, we can give up on the possibility. We end up settling for how things are, rather than putting our faith too much at risk by hoping in what God can yet do.

The Bible describes seasons of captivity that were agonizingly long: years, decades, even centuries. What kept God's people going during these times was hope in His love and faithfulness--that God would one day act to deliver them. Paul reinforces the role of hope when he writes, "On him we have set our

hope that he will continue to deliver us" (1:10b). Unresolved places of pain and captivity tempt us to turn away from God; hope keeps us turned to Him. Continue asking for God's deliverance, even if you don't yet see evidence of it. Hope that God will do it.

Third, **TRUST in God's deliverance, even if it looks different than what we're asking for**.

Paul is Exhibit A for this. In this same letter to the Corinthians, he later writes of what he calls a "thorn in flesh" that was tormenting him. Paul pleaded with God three times to be delivered from it. If anyone's prayer was answered, you'd think it would be Paul; yet God didn't deliver him in the way he asked. However, if you read Paul's description in chapter 12, you'll sense that Paul considered the response he did get of even greater value.

Paul's source of confidence in today's passage is "God, who raises the dead" (1:9). He's referring to God's resurrection of Jesus. Remember that this was a different deliverance than what people were looking for at the time—but God knew what they needed. Would we trust that God may deliver us in ways beyond what we're looking or asking for?

Finally, **FIND STRENGTH in community while waiting for God's deliverance**. It is hard to put our faith on the line, and ask for God's deliverance when we're not sure when or how we'll experience it. That's why we need the encouragement, perspective, and words of hope from a faith community around us. You won't find the words "I" or "me" anywhere in verses 8-11. However, you will find the words "we", "our" and "us" 15 times in those four verses! Paul refers beautifully to the importance and blessing of Christian community by saying "you help us by your prayers" (1:11). Community is always important, but this is particularly true when we're between praying for and experiencing God's deliverance.

During my first 11 years here at First Pres, I was privileged to work with our Divorce Recovery Workshop. Thousands of people came to our church for it during that time, seeking to pick up the broken pieces of their lives after divorce. Each workshop, I saw two beautiful things happen. First, I watched God's process of deliverance during the seven weeks of this workshop, as people began to develop a sense of hope for the future, dealt with emotions in healthy ways, and got their feet under them again.

The second moment of beauty came at the end of each workshop, when some participants turned

around and offered to help lead the next workshop. As God moved them to a new place in life, they took an experience they'd never wanted, and decided to walk with others who were also going through the same devastating experience.

This reminds us of another movement when it comes to deliverance: an outward movement towards others who're also captive and hurting. You see, our places of pain and limitation, hard as they are, can provide a bridge to others who are also struggling with similar areas. They'll relate less to our saintliness or success than they will our seasons of hardship, and God's deliverance in them. That's because the latter enables them to see their own story of weakness and pain in our story, and to discover hope and strength that we've found in God.

Pastor Rick Warren once wrote: **"The very experience you regret or resent most in your life may be the very thing that God wants to use as your ministry to help and encourage others. God doesn't just use our strengths. He uses our weaknesses and even failures, too."**

Look for those around you who may be struggling with pain or loss like you've experienced. Be willing to walk with them, and to share your own story in a way that points to God's deliverance in your life—and the possibility for them.

Remember, and celebrate regularly God's track record of deliverance in your life. Hope that you will experience deliverance you haven't yet seen, and continue asking God for it. Trust that God is at work to deliver you, even if it might look different than what you're asking for. Place yourself in community that can strengthen and encourage you while you await God's deliverance.

And in the midst of all these things, look around for others in captivity and hopelessness. Allow the good news of what God has done and is doing for you to become words of hope and possibility for them.

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STUDY GUIDE

"Deliverance to Captives" • 2 Corinthians 1:8-14

Start It

- Hopefully you weren't impacted too badly by this past week's wind storm—goodness, it was strong! Sometimes it can feel like life is blowing hard at us, and we find it hard to find our footing or even know how to get to a better place. In such moments, we long for God's movement into our lives, to deliver us. But there's also an equally important movement on our part towards God, that enables us to hold fast to Him even when we don't yet see His deliverance. Maybe one reason God won't often provide immediate deliverance is because He knows that if He did, we might skip this movement towards Him.

Study It

- Read 2 Corinthians 1:8. Note the words Paul – usually so strong and self-assured – uses to describe how and he and his companions felt about the circumstances they were in. What have been similar moments in your life, when Paul's words could describe how you've felt? If this isn't a current period, can you think of someone you know who might use these words right now to describe their circumstances?
- Read 2 Corinthians 1:9-10. Paul's remembrance of God's deliverance in the past gave him confidence in God's future deliverance. Take a few minutes to reflect on moments in your life, when you despaired and felt pressure, and were delivered by God. How can remembering His faithfulness in moments provide encouragement when God's present deliverance isn't immediately obvious?
- In the last part of verse 10, Paul speaks of "our hope that (God) will continue to deliver us." Weeks, months or even years between when we pray for and experience God's deliverance can tempt us to turn away from God; hope keeps us turned to Him. How can you fuel a hope in God's deliverance, however delayed, rather than settling for how things are?

Pray It

O Holy God, how great is Your faithfulness in my life, and wonderful Your desire to deliver Your people! Give me faith to trust Your deliverance in present places of pain and bondage by remembering Your previous acts of deliverance. Show me others who are also struggling, that I might be Your encouragement to them. Amen.

Live It

We tend to feel most comfortable conveying our strong side to others—yet they're most likely to learn of God's deliverance by hearing of our places of pain and bondage, and how God has delivered us. Think of someone who may be going through a hard experience that you've also had previously. Share your experience, and how God met and delivered you—and trust His ability to speak into their story, through your story.