

# PRODIGAL

## CHURCH II

A SERIES IN 2 CORINTHIANS

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### PRODIGAL CHURCH (SEASON 2) - Through Many Tribulations

#### Sermon Study Guide 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 – Week of January 9, 2022

**Acts 14:21-22** <sup>21</sup> When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that **through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God**

Lesson: To suffer well for Christ, we need to increase our pain tolerance. In order to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might” we must work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Fighting sin on a daily basis (self-denial) and serving God and people increases our pain tolerance.

#### CONTEXT

In order to expose the folly of the false teachers (“super-apostles”), Paul employs their tactic of boasting. Could he boast in his pedigree and training? Of course, he could. However, those aren’t the “wins” that matter. What matters is how much we sacrifice for the Lord and His mission. Paul “boasts” in his weaknesses and suffering, which reveal God’s strength and power to sustain.

**2 Timothy 3:10-13** <sup>10</sup> You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, <sup>11</sup> my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

**2 Corinthians 11:16** I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.

*Commentary: The Roman Culture valued strength and success. Paul’s enemies, who he earlier branded “super-apostles” boasted in their worldly “wins”: money, power, influence, commendations, letters of recommendation, credentials, etc. Paul is about to intentionally boast about his “wins”—wins his enemies would find*

#### BIG IDEA

We worship a Lord and Savior who is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Jesus did everything to procure our salvation—we’re saved by grace through faith. However, once we’re saved, Jesus calls us to follow Him. God has appointed Christians to salvation, and He has also appointed suffering for His servants (a servant is not greater than his master). All who faithfully follow Jesus Christ in this life will suffer. We must be prepared to suffer well for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should not seek suffering, but we also shouldn’t be surprised when we do suffer. We must resolve today to remain unflinchingly faithful in the face of any adversity.

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

##### Baptism Seminar

Sunday, January 16, 1 PM  
For more info and to sign up,  
[brookline.mosaicboston.com/baptism](http://brookline.mosaicboston.com/baptism)

##### Membership 101 Class

Sunday, January 23 1 PM  
For more info and to sign up,  
[brookline.mosaicboston.com/membership](http://brookline.mosaicboston.com/membership)

absolutely foolish. Paul is about to boast in a catalog of his suffering for Christ. It's like he's saying: "oh, you like the résumés of the false-teachers, here's my résumé." By doing so, Paul is dismantling the Corinthian church's idolatry of sophistication. Paul had no problems with being considered a "fool."

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Lesson: Be careful that in your attempt to contextualize the Gospel, and make the Gospel more attractive to unbelievers, you don't sacrifice the Gospel and biblical fidelity at the altar of "sophistication."

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Cross references:

- 1 Corinthians 1:26-31 <sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; <sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."
  - 2 Corinthians 12:6 though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool, for I would be speaking the truth; but I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.
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**2 Corinthians 11:17** What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool.

*Commentary: Paul reluctantly boasts in his sufferings because he doesn't want to talk about himself. He'd much rather talk about Jesus. However, since the false-teachers waged personal attacks, he defends his integrity, while simultaneously undermining their influence, and shepherding the church.*

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Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 9:4 Otherwise, if some Macedonians come with me and find that you are not ready, we would be humiliated—to say nothing of you—for being so confident.
  - 1 Corinthians 7:12 To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.
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**2 Corinthians 11:18** Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast.

*Commentary: The big-shot "super-apostles" boasted in their worldly accomplishments. Paul had more.*

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Cross reference:

- Philippians 3:3-4 <sup>3</sup> For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh— <sup>4</sup> though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more:
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**2 Corinthians 11:19** For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!

*Commentary: Tremendous use of biting sarcasm. The "super-apostles" passed themselves off as philosophers and theologians—wise men. But they didn't know God, nor His Gospel. Thinking themselves to be wise, they were fools. The Corinthian church, thinking themselves wise as well, were acting foolishly. Paul publicly calls out folly when necessary. In effect, he says, "You're so smart, you put up with fools while they exploit and plunder you."*

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Cross reference:

- 1 Corinthians 4:10 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

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**2 Corinthians 11:20** For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face.

*Commentary: The sophist and itinerant philosophers of that day were known for taking advantage of their less-educated audience. Paul never intended to make disciples of himself, only disciples of Jesus. Enemies of the Gospel always seek to make disciples of themselves, with the intention of enslaving.*

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Cross references:

- Galatians 2:4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—
- Galatians 4:3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.
- Galatians 4:9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?
- Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.
- 2 Corinthians 7:2 Make room in your hearts for us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have taken advantage of no one.
- 1 Corinthians 4:11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless,

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**2 Corinthians 11:21** To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.

*Commentary: "we were too weak for that!" = "too weak" to take advantage of new Christians. Meaning, Paul had no intention of taking advantage of anyone. All he wanted was what's best for the Corinthians. In effect, he's saying, "I was too weak to enslave you, devour your resources, and abuse you."*

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Cross reference:

- 2 Corinthians 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."

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**2 Corinthians 11:22** Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I.

*Commentary: The false teachers made a big deal of their authentic Jewish background. Paul, a disciple of Gamaliel, a Pharisee of Pharisees, could play the same card, just better. He had the "right" ethnic, religious, and education background.*

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Cross references:

- Romans 11:1 I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin.

- Philippians 3:5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;
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**2 Corinthians 11:23** Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.

*Commentary: If Paul had played the same worldly game as his detractors, he could have boasted in how many churches he's planted, how many people he's preached to, how many places he's traveled, how many miracles he's performed. Instead, the Apostle Paul elaborates on his suffering for the Name and Mission of Christ as proof that God had protected his chosen servant. Whereas the false teachers interpreted Paul's suffering as a sign of weakness and abandonment by God, Paul viewed the suffering as a gift from God.*

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Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 3:6 who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.
  - 2 Corinthians 10:7 Look at what is before your eyes. If anyone is confident that he is Christ's, let him remind himself that just as he is Christ's, so also are we.
  - 1 Corinthians 15:10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.
  - 2 Corinthians 6:5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger;
  - Acts 16:23 And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely.
  - 2 Corinthians 1:9-10 <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup> He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again.
  - 2 Corinthians 4:11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
  - 2 Corinthians 6:9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed;
  - Romans 8:36 As it is written,  
"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;  
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."
  - 1 Corinthians 15:30-32 <sup>30</sup> Why are we in danger every hour? <sup>31</sup> I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day! <sup>32</sup> What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."
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**2 Corinthians 11:24** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

*Commentary: 40 lashes was the maximum allowed in the law of Moses. The Jewish authorities of that day gave 39, because of the rabbinical principle of fencing the law, so even if you miscounted one, you wouldn't break the rule.*

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Cross reference:

- Deuteronomy 25:3 Forty stripes may be given him, but not more, lest, if one should go on to beat him with more stripes than these, your brother be degraded in your sight.
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**2 Corinthians 11:25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea;

*Commentary: The rods were the Roman form of beating, so Paul was beaten both by the Jewish and Roman authorities. Though, as a Roman citizen, he should have been legally protected from physical beatings, local petty-tyrants didn't always obey their own laws. The beatings and lashings weren't just painful, but meant to humiliate and dishonor. Paul boasts in something meant to humiliate, because the esteem of Christ was infinitely more precious to him than the esteem of people.*

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Cross references:

- Acts 16:22 The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods.
- Acts 14:19 But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.
- Acts 27:41 But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf.

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**2 Corinthians 11:26** on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;

*Commentary: Residents of the Roman empire travelled extensively, thanks to the Pax Romana (the Roman peace) and the transportation infrastructure built by the Romans including a sprawling road system and thousands of ships sailing the Mediterranean. It's been calculated that Paul would have traveled nearly 10,000 miles making the missionary trips outlined in the New Testament. Although possible, travel was neither easy, nor safe, especially when the traveler carried such a controversial message.*

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Cross references:

- Acts 9:23 When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,
- Acts 13:50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.
- Acts 14:5 When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them,
- Acts 17:5 But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.
- 1 Thessalonians 2:15 who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind
- Acts 18:12 But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,
- Acts 19:23 About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way.
- Acts 20:3 There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.
- Acts 20:19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;
- Acts 21:27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,
- Acts 21:31 And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort that all

Jerusalem was in confusion.

- Acts 23:10 And when the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him away from among them by force and bring him into the barracks.
  - Acts 23:12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.
  - Acts 25:3 asking as a favor against Paul that he summon him to Jerusalem—because they were planning an ambush to kill him on the way.
  - Acts 27:42 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape.
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**2 Corinthians 11:27** in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

*Commentary: Paul poured himself out in every way imaginable on behalf of the Gospel. He held nothing back and "left everything on the field."*

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Cross references:

- 1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
  - 2 Thessalonians 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.
  - 1 Corinthians 4:11 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless,
  - Philippians 4:12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need.
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**2 Corinthians 11:28** And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

*Commentary: Paul has just described a litany of suffering, any one single of these predicaments would have caused most modern Christians to quit in despair and self-pity. Instead of despairing, Paul emerges victorious because he trusted that God had a purpose for the pain—the spread of the Gospel and expansion of the Kingdom of God. As he suffered physically, he also suffered emotionally and spiritually with concern (anxiety) for all the churches (pastoral heartache). Paul was concerned with planting churches and seeing those churches grow in health and maturity. We must also be concerned with both church planting and church vibrancy.*

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Cross reference:

- 1 Corinthians 7:17 Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.
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**2 Corinthians 11:29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

*Commentary: Paul had a huge pastoral heart of empathy—when his people were weak, he felt with his people. When people suffered, he suffered. When people fell from the faith, he burned with indignation over their souls. The second question literally reads, "Who is entrapped into sin, and I do not burn?"*

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Cross references:

- 1 Corinthians 8:13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.
  - 1 Corinthians 9:22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.
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**2 Corinthians 11:30** If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

*Commentary: Paul knew, when he is weakest, God is strongest.*

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Cross references:

- 2 Corinthians 10:10 For they say, "His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account."
  - 2 Corinthians 12:5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses—
  - 2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.
  - 1 Corinthians 2:3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,
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**2 Corinthians 11:31** The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

*Commentary: Paul preempts the story he is about to share with an oath. He uses the oath to make sure his detractors are listening.*

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Cross references:

- Romans 15:6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - Romans 9:5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.
  - 2 Corinthians 11:11 And why? Because I do not love you? God knows I do!
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**2 Corinthians 11:32** At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me,

*Commentary: Paul concludes his catalog of suffering by describing one particularly humiliating experience as a young Christian when he was forced to flee for his life from enemies in Damascus. The account is given in Acts 9. Shortly after his conversion, the great Saul, who had come to Damascus to persecute the church, was placed in a fish-basket like a child, to escape his former Jewish colleagues. The hunter became the hunted. The dissident had to be eliminated. Thankfully, God had other plans. Before Paul recounts how he was lifted to up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12), he is reminded of how he was lowered in a basket in the middle of the night. God's power was demonstrated in Paul's weakness.*

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Cross reference:

- Acts 9:24 but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night in order to kill him,
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**2 Corinthians 11:33** but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

*Commentary: Paul headed toward Damascus as a proud Pharisee, seeking to find and kill Christians. Instead, Jesus met him and saved him. Jesus also called him to a life of suffering for the sake of His Name. The proud Pharisee, now a follower of Jesus, was humbly lowered in a fish-basket like a lowly criminal. Paul ends with this story to show that weakness was at the heart of his calling from the very beginning. Paul embraces his suffering for Christ, to show: Jesus is King, and worthy of our greatest sacrifices.*

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Cross reference:

- Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."
  - Acts 9:25 but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.
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**Read 2 Corinthians 11:16-33.**

1. What part of the text or sermon stuck out to you the most?
2. Who are the “many” who boast according to the flesh (v18)? Why does Paul “boast” about the things that show his weakness (v30) in comparison in this section?
3. By separating himself from those who boast according to the flesh and his use of sarcasm, what is Paul trying to teach to the Corinthian church about suffering for the faith?
4. Pastor Jan mentioned that it is a worthwhile exercise to list out the ways that you have suffered for the faith. How have you suffered for the faith?
5. How has Christ sustained you in the midst of suffering?
6. How does Paul’s list of sufferings (v.23-28) make you feel about the inconveniences that you encounter while serving Christ?
7. How did the sermon influence your understanding of Christian “weakness” and “meekness”?
8. What do we learn about God from all of Paul’s sufferings?
9. What can we learn about Christian leadership while thinking about Paul’s sufferings (in addition to Christ’s life and death on the cross)?