

**THE WEEK OF
April 19th, 2010**



**Jesus
Vs.
The Giant Despair
Part 1
2 Corinthians 1:8-11**

"For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us, you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.."

II Corinthians 1:8-11

We're beginning the last segment in our series, "Jesus Vs..." And this last segment brings us face to face with one of the most destructive and debilitating struggles we face as men: "The Giant Despair". The name for this chapter, in case you're wondering, comes from an allegory (something similar to a parable) written by John Bunyan. Pilgrim's Progress, written over 300 years ago, is an allegory of the Christian life and follows the struggles and triumphs of a man named "Christian". Along the way, among other trials, Christian, with his friend, Hopeful, unexpectedly find themselves on the property of an unpleasant character named "Giant Despair". It's such a normal part of our life, despair, but we very often fall into the misconception that to be a strong Christian means that we do not experience struggles that seek to lead us to despair. Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church dispels this falsehood: "...we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren...we were burdened beyond measure...we despaired even of life." Even Paul, the "Great Apostle" of the Faith, struggled deeply with despair. It's an emotion that is also known by another name: Hopelessness. Why, we should ask, would God allow us to deal with despair and hopelessness, like Paul did? What is it that God will do through these dark hours to fulfill the promise of Romans 8:28-29? The answer is also found in the words of this same letter that Paul wrote. "Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead..." So how did Paul deal with emotional despair? By recognizing that in his greatest time of weakness, as in any other time, "God's grace is sufficient". And God is more interested in our spiritual maturity than our physical comfort. Ironically, though, this reality brings great comfort.

**Read the Proverb and the section of Psalm 119 that corresponds with the calendar day example:
*If it's the 1st day of the month, read Proverbs 1 and Psalm 119:1-8 (Aleph)***

Mon: II Corinthians 1:8-11, Paul

Tue: Genesis 22:1-19, Abraham

Wed: John 4:46-54, A Nobleman

Thu: Matthew 26:36-46, Jesus

Fri: Philippians 4:6-8, Perspective

Discussion Questions for Bible Café:

1. Think of a time when you struggled with despair. Did you respond like Paul in II Corinthians 1? If so, how? If not, what could you have done differently?

2. What are the things that happen in our lives that tempt us to despair? What is the difference between the emotion of despair and being in despair? What does Paul give as one of the most important sources of strength for him as he and his friends were struggling? (see verse 11 of chapter 1) How do we follow Paul's example in this way?

Prayer Requests of your Bible Café brothers (on back):