

What's Left When Everything's Taken Away? (2 Timothy 1:8-12)

Big Idea: When everything's stripped away, those who trust Christ still possess a complete transformation initiated by God, and a deposit that can never be taken because it's guarded by God.

Imagine if everything you're normally used to was taken away from you.

Imagine losing your job. If you're working, I know you've worked hard to get that job. You've spent years gaining the qualifications and experience. Imagine one day getting notice, being called into a meeting with your supervisor, or even worse, getting that email, and being told you're no longer needed. Talk about a blow. For a lot of us, a big chunk of our identity comes from our jobs. It would be very tough to lose our jobs.

Imagine losing your health. Imagine getting a phone call from the doctor's office. The tests had come back, and they need to see you. Imagine hearing your doctor tell you bad news: that you have a condition, that you need treatment, and that she couldn't guarantee how well the treatment would go. There are few things as important as our health, and it's hard to imagine losing that.

Imagine losing everything. It's hard to imagine, but I've seen it happen. I've seen people lose their marriages, lose their jobs, friendships, and have to rebuild their lives from nothing. It would be devastating.

Why am I saying this? My intention isn't to depress you. My intention is to focus your intention on an important question: **if everything is stripped away from you, what do you have left?** If you lose the ordinary things that you're used to – your job, your health, your marriage, your friendships, your standard of living – who are you? What do you have left?

I came across a poem this week that asks this very question in the light of the current pandemic. It's called ["We've All Been Exposed."](#)

We've all been exposed.

Not necessarily to the virus

(maybe...who even knows).

We've all been exposed BY the virus.

Corona is exposing us.

Exposing our weak sides.

Exposing our dark sides.

*Exposing what normally lays far beneath the surface of our souls,
hidden by the invisible masks we wear.*

Now exposed by the paper masks we can't hide far enough behind.

Corona is exposing our addiction to comfort.

Our obsession with control.

Our compulsion to hoard.

Our protection of self.

Corona is peeling back our layers.

Tearing down our walls.

Revealing our illusions.

Leveling our best-laid plans.

Corona is exposing the gods we worship:

Our health

Our hurry

Our sense of security.

Our favorite lies

Our secret lusts

Our misplaced trust.

Corona is calling everything into question:

What is the church without a building?

What is my worth without an income?

How do we plan without certainty?

How do we love despite risk?

Corona is exposing me.

My mindless numbing

My endless scrolling

My careless words

My fragile nerves.

We've all been exposed.

Our junk laid bare.

Our fears made known.

The band-aid torn.

The masquerade done.

So what now? What's left?

Clean hands

Clear eyes

Tender hearts.

What Corona reveals, God can heal.

Come Lord Jesus.

Have mercy on us.

I can relate to that. Who are we when everything has been stripped away, when the condition of our heart has been exposed? What's left? It's an important question to ask. It's a question many of us are being forced to answer right now. It's a question all of us will eventually face if we aren't already.

And it's why we're starting to look at a letter written by a man who had to face this question. Let me introduce him to you. His name was Paul. He was one of the most important leaders in the early Christian church, a man who started out opposing Jesus, but who then helped spread the news of Jesus across the Jewish ethnic barrier throughout the whole Roman world at the time.

By the time that Paul writes this letter around 67 A.D., he's lost everything.

Imagine for a moment an old man who is alone. He is in failing health. He is isolated from family and friends. And he is so poor he cannot afford a winter coat. He changed careers in mid-life, but there is no pension plan or medical benefits with his own start-up organization. Not only that, his new enterprise seems to be faltering. Oh, and one more thing: he is incarcerated under capital charges. If found guilty, he could lose his life. And it looks like he will be found guilty. ([Mark Dever](#))

That's his situation as he writes this letter. He lost everything: his freedom, his comfort, many of his friends, and soon after he wrote this letter, his life. Shortly after writing this letter, he was executed as a martyr in Rome. Legend has it that Nero had him decapitated.

Paul's writing to his protégé, Timothy. And verse 8 gives us part of his agenda: "Do not be ashamed." Why would Timothy be ashamed? I can think of a couple of reasons.

- Paul had been unfriended. Have you ever been friends with someone who's lost everything? It's amazing how many friends disappear. Paul had lost most of his friends. Later on in this letter, Paul says, "At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me" (2 Timothy 4:16). This man who had built into the lives of so many people was now abandoned by many of them.
- His faith was culturally unacceptable. Sometimes it's cool to say you're a Christian. Sometimes it makes you stand out like a freak. Sometimes it can even cost you your life. Paul was in the latter category. He was about to lose his life for believing in Jesus. It takes a lot of guts to stand up beside someone who's about to lose their life and say, "I'm with them."

Timothy had some very good reasons for being ashamed of Paul, because Paul had everything stripped away from him. He had nothing left except for one thing, and that one thing made everything worth it.

What is the one thing that Paul had after everything else was gone? Paul knew what God had done for him:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light

through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me. (2 Timothy 1:8-12)

Here's what Paul knew he had even when everything had been stripped away, and what we can have to that can't be taken away no matter what else is removed from us.

First: He's Given Us A Complete Change

I read a [book](#) last year that offers you some advice if you own a car.

Do you own a car? If you do, is it a reasonably good one? If it is, I have good news for you...

The next time you are thinking about replacing your car, don't. Instead, wait at least a year, or maybe two or three. In the meantime, rather than selling it, take it to a good valet service from time to time and have it thoroughly cleaned, inside and out. This will cost you about £50-£100 each time, but you will have a much better car. Not just a cleaner car, but a better car - as well as looking nicer, it will drive more smoothly, accelerate more quickly and take corners more precisely. Shiny cars are also simply much more enjoyable to drive.

What he's talking about is a car makeover. Makeovers are amazing. You feel great after getting a makeover, from what I've heard. Some of you would settle for a haircut right about now.

But Paul isn't talking about just a makeover. He's talking about a brand new you. Paul's all alone in prison, but he says God has "saved us and called us to a holy calling," and that Jesus has "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." This is much more than a slight change or a makeover. If you have come to Jesus, he has completely pardoned your sins and offenses, and accepts you as righteous in his sight through Jesus. He is also at work in your life, progressively transforming you through his Spirit until you become like Jesus. And he has give you life so that even when you die, you will not die. You will live with Christ and will one day be given a new body in a brand new world. He's changed your past, you present, and your future. Everything has changed.

You can take away everything – literally everything – from your life. You can lose your job, your friends, your money, but nobody can take this away. He's given us a complete change. What's left when everything's stripped away? The complete transformation of your life. If you are in Jesus, you're a completely new person.

What else do we have when everything's stripped away?

Second: He's Taken the Initiative

If this new identity depended on our initiative, we'd have to worry. If it depended on us contributing to it, we'd have to worry about whether we'd contributed enough.

But Paul says something that goes completely against how we think in this passage. He says that our complete change is not a result of our own initiative, and we contributed nothing to it. It came "not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began" (2 Timothy 1:9). It was God's idea, not yours. He did it, not you.

Salvation comes from God and God only. He thought of it; he initiated it; he planned it all and chose us before we were even born. It doesn't come from us living moral lives; it comes by God's grace and *results* in us changing to obey him. It's all of God's grace and initiative, accomplished by what Jesus did for us by bearing our sins and rising from the dead. We only have to receive it with empty hands of faith.

From our perspective, it looks like we chose God. But if we could see the full perspective, we'd realize that God chose us before we ever chose him. He was at work in our hearts drawing us to him.

I love what Charles Spurgeon says: "Other doctrine is slippery ground, like the slope of a mountain composed of loose earth and rolling stones, down which the traveller may slide long before he can even get a transient foothold; but this is like a granite step upon the eternal pyramid of truth; get your feet on this, and there is no fear of slipping."

What's left when everything's stripped away? Complete transformation that is a result of God's initiative. We did nothing to earn it. We just receive it.

But there's one more thing.

Third: We Have a Deposit that Can't Be Taken Away

Paul had lost everything: his freedom, his possessions, his friends, everything. But he had one thing left that couldn't be taken away. The Romans couldn't take it away. Even death couldn't take it away. As long as he had it, Paul knew he was fine.

What was it? He refers to it as a deposit, something entrusted to him. We'd better get used to this phrase because Paul uses it a lot in this letter. It's the idea that the

message of Jesus, the gospel, has been entrusted to us for safekeeping. It's like the idea that it has become our most valuable possession, something that we must guard with our lives.

But here's the paradox. We must guard it, but at the same time it's being guarded by God. Paul wrote: "But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me" (2 Timothy 1:12).

They could take away his life, but they couldn't take away the good news of Jesus. Paul was guarded by Roman soldiers, but he had something with him guarded by a higher power that would not fail come hell or high water or coronavirus or anything else. They could kill him, but they could never destroy the good news that will transform lives until Jesus comes back one day. We've all been given a deposit, our most valuable possession, and nobody can take it away from us because it's being guarded by God himself. They can take away your condo, your car, your money, and everything else, but they can never take this away from you.

You learn a lot about someone when you take everything away from them. I've been learning a lot about myself lately, and I haven't even lost that much compared to Paul. One day all of us have to face the question: what's left when everything is stripped away? It's happening to all of us in small ways right now, but it will happen to all of us one day. One day we'll leave behind everything: every relationship, every accomplishment, every possession.

The only answer that will help you on that day and on every day until then is this: That God has completely transformed us in Jesus, irreversibly, and has given us something that can't be taken away no matter what happens to us.

When everything's stripped away, those who trust Christ still possess a complete transformation initiated by God, and a deposit that can never be taken be-

cause it's guarded by God. And that was enough to give Paul confidence in his dying days. And it's enough to give us confidence no matter what else is taken away from us.

We've all been exposed. What's left? This is. And if we have it, it's all we need no matter what else happens to us.

Father, thank you that what you gave to Paul, you've given to many of us. And if we have it, it's enough no matter what else happens to us.

Thank you that it's also available to anyone who turns to you with the empty hands of faith to receive this gift and to follow you. By your grace, please draw anyone listening who has not yet received this gift through the power of the Holy Spirit. May they turn to you now in repentance and faith so they too can experience this complete transformation. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.