

## DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. (2 Cor. 11:23-28)

We tend to place failure in the ministry due to one particular point of sin — adultery, money, family problems, etc. In architecture there is what is known as “one-point-failure,” where an entire structure collapses due to failure at one vital point. Once that “one-point” is identified it is relatively easy to understand how failure at that particular point placed the entire structure in jeopardy.

However, it is not always that simple to ascertain what brings about moral failure in mankind and, more especially, within the ministry itself. While a certain situation may stand out in the downfall of a preacher’s ministry and that particular situation becomes paramount, looming above all else, and can be easily mistaken for just a singular event and yet, all the while, missing the contributing elements that brings about death by a thousand cuts.

Paul catalogues a vast amount of situations which he labored under. Paul, as we know, did not buckle under the hammering of those situations but maintained an honorable posture, though under fire, through it all but one thing is brought to light by Paul’s long list of events and that is that a preacher’s ministry is often bombarded by many different life-experiences. It is here, amid the manifold events of life, that some preacher’s, who lack the spiritual fortitude of the apostle Paul, find themselves facing a death by a thousand cuts.

Death by a thousand cuts is a slow death. A death where the vitalness of a spirit-filled life begins to lose its power incrementally. A death where strength ebbs slowly away like a cracked cistern which cannot hold water — where the drip by drip loss is not as noticeable as an open spigot's deluge. It has been witnessed, in the heat of battle, a soldier may become wounded and be totally unaware of his wound until the loss of blood takes its toll. "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not" (Hosea 7:9).

Sometimes that one, so obvious, transgression (adultery, etc) actually had a history — a history of multiple disappointments, conflicts, numerous rejections, seemingly unending financial demands both personal and church related, and a score of just dealing with people whose problems became problems. "You did run well who did hinder?" None of these, or any others, are viable excuses for ministerial failure, but they do show that death can truly occur by a thousand cuts if those cuts are not taken to the Great Physician Who can heal all.

Time and space fail us to be able to elaborate on all the symptoms caused by a thousand cuts — like prayerfulness turning to purposelessness and intimate Bible study time becoming lifeless story time and focused emotional worship becoming indifferent practiced motions. Having learned how to preach without preaching to learn, is also a sign of death by a thousand cuts. The ebbing of spiritual essence from a thousand cuts causes not the panic or concern which a gaping wound might cause — and therein lies the true danger!

Paul survived his many cuts because he was aware of them and sought healing long before his strength ebbed. Life, at times, may resemble a run through a field of thorns and brambles but as long as we allow God to bind up and mollify our wounds we can run with patience the race that is set before us.