



POWER IN WEAKNESS!

The Epistle of 2 Corinthians

Is Grace Enough?

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Message #15 of 17 – S892

Sermon given on April 19, 2020

remotely from Lancaster home



Sunday Morning Service

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Is Grace Enough?

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

Opening Comments

- For you watching online, welcome – we are glad to have you with us
- Turn to **2 Corinthians 12**
- Today we continue our journey through **2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness!**
- When we started 2020, no one could have predicted that our lives would be so radically changed
- No one was predicting that we would be doing church remotely
- The COVID-19 crisis is an unwelcome reality in all our lives
- The impact ranges from inconvenient to unbearable, and for some it is life-altering
- Many people, myself included, have transitioned to working from home
- And sadly, all of us probably know someone who has been laid off as a result of the coronavirus quarantine orders
- The COVID-19 crisis is the reality of the world we live in
- A crisis is usually unwelcome – though they are not always bad
- Sometimes a crisis, like a crisis in a marriage forces us to make the changes we should have made long ago
- We can change to change our circumstances
- It is hard to see any good coming out of this crisis – out of our control
- But God's Word tells us that we should expect good out of it

Romans 8:28

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

- I have this annoying thing that I say when I am confronted with a reality that I cannot change

It is what it is!

- When I say that it is a confession that this is a circumstance that I cannot change
- That causes me to examine myself and ask if I need to change in response to this crisis

- Sometimes when faced with an unwelcome ‘It is what it is! Crisis all you can do is pray – and that might be all God would ask you to do
- And sometimes you are faced with something unbearable
- And all you want is for it to be taken out of your life
- The Apostle Paul is going to tell us about something very painful in his life that he begged God to take away
- What Paul did after God told him no is essential to how we face the ‘It is what it is! Moments in life
- Let’s pray and then get into our text
- **Pray**

Teaching

- **Is Grace Enough?**
- In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul is continuing his defense of his ministry and his role as an apostle of Christ
- **2 Corinthians 12:1**
- One of the things people like Paul’s detractors would do is describe transcendental spiritual experiences they had to show how super-spiritual they were
- Then, just as now, people were fascinated with supernatural spiritual experiences
- People want a spectacular heaven splitting open kind of experience to base their faith upon
- That is what the ‘signs and wonders’ movement is all about
- These are ‘pastors’ and ‘churches’ who prey upon those who are weak in their faith by promising supernatural experiences
- The problem with a faith that is built on supernatural experience requires greater and more supernatural experiences
- And that is not how faith is built **Romans 10:17**
...**faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**
- Real faith, the kind of faith that helps through a crisis is faith built upon the Word of God and is not based in the supernatural
- So, Paul says let’s talk about visions and revelations
- A vision is a supernatural image that is communicated by God to your mind

- They carry a message that always lines up with Scripture and points you to a deeper faith in Christ
- There are several accounts of visions in the Bible
- And people still get them today – I have and I know others who have
- Revelations involve God revealing something that was previously hidden and undiscoverable by man
- The last book of the Bible is the Revelation (of Jesus Christ)
- It is God’s final words to mankind before Christ returns set up His kingdom on the earth
- As Christians, we should always be skeptical of anyone who says they have a new revelation from God
- Joseph Smith said he had a new revelation and the world ended up with the cult of the Mormons
- It is likely that Paul received more visions and revelations than anyone since Moses
- He tells us about one of them
- **2 Corinthians 12:2-4**
- It is not clear why Paul speaks in the third person here but it is clear that he is speaking of his own personal experience
- ‘caught up to the third heaven’ – ‘caught up’ = same Greek word in **1 Thessalonians 4:16-17**

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

- This is where we get the doctrine of the Rapture of believers
- ‘caught up’ = snatched, sudden and forceful
- ‘to the third heaven’ **R. Kent Hughes**

Biblical cosmology views the heavens as threefold. The first heaven is the atmosphere. The second heaven is the place of the stars. And the third heaven is the abode of God.

- In verse 4 the third heaven = ‘Paradise’
- You Bible students should note that Paradise is capitalized indicating it is a proper name of a place
- This word is only used three times; here, once in Revelation 2:7 and in one of the seven things Jesus said from the cross **Luke 23:42-43**

Then he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

- Heaven is a real place – where God dwells – where all true believers are destined
- There are not many people in history who can say they were ‘caught up’ to heaven and allowed to see and hear what could not be uttered by man
- Paul heard things that he was not permitted to repeat – we are not told why – this is the only record of that experience and it is very sparse
- **2 Corinthians 12:5-6**
- Paul didn’t like talking about it because he didn’t want to cause people to think Paul was more than what he did and said
- Whenever I think of Paul, I am blown away by his faith
- It is hard for me to imagine anyone who walked closer to Jesus than Paul – and yet he wasn’t perfect
- He was vulnerable to the same human weaknesses that anyone else is
- And after having experienced an extraordinary amount of visions and revelations he was particularly vulnerable to pride
- But pride in this servant of God would have destroyed his ability to serve God the way God wanted Paul to **Proverbs 16:18**
Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.
- God is doing a great work through Paul and God didn’t want Paul’s human weakness to get in the way
- And so, God sent something into Paul’s life that was unwelcome but absolutely necessary
- **2 Corinthians 12:7**
- There are several things to note about this verse
- First, we don’t know what the thorn was – people have been guessing for two thousand years
- But, the word ‘thorn’ tells us that whatever it was – it was painful – chronically painful
- Notice also the word ‘buffet’ = strike with fist, beat, cause harm, torment
- Needless to say – Paul’s thorn was not uncomfortable – it tormented him constantly

- Also, notice that the thorn was given to Paul
- We might presume that it came from Satan – messenger of Satan
- Turn to **Job 1**
- Paul, by any standard of Christianity was a righteous man
- He was serving God with his whole life – suffering for the gospel more than anyone of his generation
- Being used by God to radically impact the culture he lived in
- Thousands of years earlier another righteous man went through something hard
- **Job 1:1-3; 6-12**
- God allowed Satan to test Job’s faith
- The book of Job teaches us that Satan cannot touch a child of God without God’s direct permission
- Turn back to **2 Corinthians 12**
- Paul’s thorn in the flesh was not a test of his faith
- It was sent to keep his faith pure
- God knew that He had given Paul so many visions and revelations that the natural human part of Paul would struggle with pride
- And so, God used a messenger of Satan to buffet Paul
- To guard Paul’s heart from the ministry-ending sin of pride
- Paul’s thorn was not pleasant – it was hindering his ability to do the ministry as he wanted to, and he wanted it gone
- **2 Corinthians 12:8**
- This faithful servant of God was being tormented by a messenger of Satan
- So, he did what any of us would do, he begged Jesus to take it away
- Three times – that reminded me of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane
- **Matthew 26:39**
- He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”
- Jesus was tormented by the knowledge that he would soon bear the sins of the whole world
- But Jesus knew that, even though it tormented Him, taking our sins to the cross was the only way we could be saved

- Jesus also knew that this thorn in the flesh was the only way Paul could remain useful to God – and so, Jesus told Paul – ‘No!’
- **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**
- Jesus wasn’t punishing Paul, He was protecting him from himself
- Jesus wasn’t angry with Paul, Jesus loved Paul all the way to the cross
- Jesus is telling Paul that he doesn’t need what he is asking for
- ‘My grace is sufficient’ – what you have from Me is enough
- ‘grace’ = kindness, gifts, good will, favor
- Paul’s thorn made him weak – it made life harder for him
- But he came to realize that it was upon this God-ordained weakness that the power of God could rest
- Paul acknowledged that God’s power was infinitely greater than his own
- So, he willingly accepted the ‘thorn in the flesh’ so that God’s power would rest upon him – was the only way that it could
- He didn’t enjoy the ‘thorn’ but he rejoiced in what it accomplished in him and through his ministry
- Hard things are going to come into our lives
- Today, it is the coronavirus and all its fallout
- Tomorrow, it might be something else
- A crisis can make us feel weak, out of control, helpless, and maybe hopeless
- I would like to share three things with you as we prepare to close
- When you find yourself in a crisis:
- First – **Identify the source!**
- Crises come from many different sources
- Sin – your own sin can create a crisis in your life
- Your marriage - crisis may come because you are treating your spouse in a selfish, ungodly way – repent
- Temptation – resist the devil and cling to God
- God may be testing or purifying your faith – trust Him and cling to Him
- Things like the coronavirus, disease, illness are a result of the Fall – sin infected all of creation
- Do your best to identify the source – seek counsel – get into Word

- Second – **Ask God to take it away!**
 - Nowhere in the Bible does it say we have to grin and bear it when faced with difficult things – talk to your Father in heaven about it
- James 4:3**

Yet you do not have because you do not ask.

- And you keep asking until you get an answer
- Jesus told Paul no! He didn't need to ask again after that!
- God knows what you need and want, and His plan is to do good to you
- Third and finally – **Accept God's grace!**
- Jesus told Paul, 'My grace is sufficient for you!' – it is enough
- You don't need what you are asking for
- God is able to meet our every need and to take away every pain and to wipe away all our tears – none of that is promised in this life
- Paul told Jesus what his pain, needs, and wants were – Jesus said no – Paul accepted that what Jesus had already done was enough
- Accepted the weakness caused by his personal crisis and made room for the power of God to rest upon him
- Your crisis is not the end of you – it is the beginning of God
- Your crisis is the fertile ground that God will use to grow great faith and do miraculous works
- Your crisis is the foundation upon which God will do something great
- God's grace – the grace He has already given you – is sufficient – it is enough
- Ask for more, but accept your weakness as the resting place of God's power and say with Paul, 'when I am weak, then I am strong'
- **Pray!**