

“God’s Grace Is Sufficient”
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
2/20/22
Message 18

Introduction

- Title of the Message is: “God’s Grace Is Sufficient”

- **Review - Context for Chapter 10-13**

- **1st Paul has been DEFENDING his Apostleship**
 - He has Challenge
 - The Rebels in the church
 - The False teachers (The Judaizers)
 - He will encourage them to repent
 - Paul will NOT Mince words
 - There is NO Political Correctness taking place
 - Paul will answer his Accusers and destroy their false charges
 - (2 Cor. 10:7, 10–12; 11:4, 20–23)
 - He is NOT afraid to call it EVIL
 - The Judaizers in the church are ministers of Satan who want to destroy the work of God
 - (2 Cor. 11:12–15)
 - The ABRUPT Change in TONE

- As a Matter of Fact Some Believe because of the ABRUPT Change in TONE
 - That Chapter 10 - 13 are a part of another Book
 - That they were a part of the “severe letter” (2:4)
- But I Don’t believe that to be the case
 - The best interpretation views 2 Corinthians as a unified letter
 - With chapters 1–9 addressed to the repentant majority
 - Chapters 10–13 to the minority still influenced by the false teachers.
- **2nd What we can Learn From these Chapters**
 - There will be MANY Lessons
 - **1st God’s Work will ALWAYS have Challenges –**
 - There will always be those who attempt to tear it down
 - This is Nothing new and will continue until Jesus Comes
 - **2nd Paul Leadership**
 - We Will see How to handle these Situations
 - Meekness yet Boldness
 - The AIM is always restoration – NOT REVENGE
 - **3rd Conflict Between Congregations and Pastors**
 - Make sure we are dealing with this conflict Biblically

▪ **4th Last week we see 2 more lesson**

- 1st This Portion of Scripture is an indictment against a Wayward Church
 - Entrainment Driven Church
 - Comfort Driven Church
 - Consumer Driven Church
 - Prosperity – Success Driven Church
 - That if your suffering you are doing something wrong
 - Emotionally / Feelings Driven Church
- 2nd Struggles at times are a part of God's Will
 - There are some who say you should never struggle –
 - That if you're struggling your outside God's Will
 - You're Doing something Wrong
 - Now I know Many times we do create our OWN Struggles
 - BUT there are times when our struggles are because we are in the center of His Will
 - Paul is our example this morning
 - Does anyone remember what were the Lords first words to Paul after his conversion?

Acts 9:15–16 (NKJV)

15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.

16 For I will show him how many things (Great things he’ll do in my name? No! - The success he’ll have as a missionary? No! - How many people he’ll lead to Christ? No! - How famous & popular he’ll become? No!) – *How Many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.*”

- So, This Morning Paul is Going to talk about a Thorn in The Flesh A Messenger of Satan
- The Lesson for us
 - If you’re in a Struggle (Trial)
 - If you’re being persecuted for your faith
 - Take courage from God and Paul’s Life this morning

• ***Now This Morning 5 powerful truths About God’s Grace is Sufficient***

- The REVELATIONS that he was given vs. 1-6
- The REASON behind the attacks v. 7
- The REQUEST he made to the Lord v. 8
- The RESPONSE from the Lord v. 9a
- The REALIZATION of the power he needed v. 9b-10

The REVELATIONS that he was given vs. 1-6

• ***First: It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast v. 1a***

2 Corinthians 12:1 (NKJV)

1 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:

- ***1st Paul reluctantly in describing his vision***
 - Context
 - The “super apostles” among the Corinthian Christians

- No doubt claimed many spectacular spiritual experiences
- Such as visions and revelations of the Lord
- Boasting about their encounters
- Paul has been “Reluctantly Boasting”
 - We see Paul’s in the opening words of this chapter:
 - It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.
 - Paul is tired of writing about himself!
 - He would rather write about Jesus
- True Christian maturity is always thinking of Jesus First and then others

• **Second: Visions and Revelation v. 1b**

2 Corinthians 12:1 (NKJV)

1 It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:

- **1st Paul is NOW going to address the Vision or Journey he had**
 - As we will see Paul is not even sure what happen
- **2nd God Uses Visions Through Out the Scriptures**
 - N.T. Illustrations
 - Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, had a vision of an angel (Luke 1:8-23)
 - Jesus’ transfiguration is described as a vision for the disciples (Matthew 17:9).

- The women who came to visit Jesus' tomb had a vision of angels (Luke 24:22-24).
- Stephen saw a vision of Jesus at his death (Acts 7:55-56).
- Ananias experienced a vision telling him to go to Saul (Acts 9:10).
- Peter had a vision of the clean and unclean animals (Acts 10:17-19 and 11:5).
- Peter had a vision of an angel at his release from prison (Acts 12:9).
- John had many visions on Patmos (Revelation 1:1).
- Paul had a revelation of Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:6-11 and 26:12-20).
- Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia, asking him to come to that region to help (Acts 16:9-10).
- Paul had an encouraging vision while in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11).
- Paul had a vision of an angel on the ship that was about to be wrecked (Acts 27:23-25).

○ **3rd Lesson – Does God Still use Visions**

- Yes
 - So we should not be surprised if God should speak to us through some type of visions and revelations of the Lord.
- BUT we MUST be Careful

- Morgan; “How often people have wanted to tell me about their visions! I am always suspicious. I want to know what they had for supper the night before!”
- A Lot of time dreams & Visions can be from an over active imagination
- These Dreams and Vision must line up with God’s Word
- Illustration
 - Personally
 - I had 2 Visions from God as we were making our way over here
 - Both visions were about the sever Spiritual Warfare we would face here and That God’s Hand was upon us

• **Third: I know a man in Christ v. 2a**

2 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)

2 I know a man in Christ *who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.*

- **1st I Know a Man**
 - In The Third Person
 - Paul describes this experience in the third person instead of the first person (he didn’t say, “I myself had this experience”).
 - This makes some wonder if he is really speaking about himself here...
 - But make NO mistake about it in verse 7 he refers to himself
- **2nd Then why does he use the third person at all?**
 - Simple – Reluctant to boast

- When he described his humble experiences in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, he did not hesitate to write in the first person.
- No one would think he was glorifying himself as the “super apostles” did.
- Paul does everything he can to relate this experience without bringing glory to himself.

• **Fourth: Fourteen years ago v. 2b**

2 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

○ **1st So When did this happen?**

- This dating by Paul does little to help us know when this happened
- Why? - Because scholars are not in agreement regarding when 2 Corinthians was written.
- Suggestions have been made that the experience he describes happened during
 - His ten years in Syria and Cilicia (Galatians 1:21-2:1),
 - His stoning in Lystria (Acts 14:19)
 - His time in Antioch (Acts 13:1-3).
- **NOTE - The important thing to notice is that Paul kept quiet about this for fourteen years, and now he mentions it reluctantly**

• **Fifth: Whether in the body v. 2c-3**

2 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

2 Corinthians 12:3 (NKJV)

3 And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

- 1st Paul doesn't really know if he was in the body or out of the body during this vision.

- It seems that in his mind, either one was possible.
- But it seems everyone else knows what happened to Paul...

• **Sixth: Such a one was caught up to the third heaven v. 2d**

2 Corinthians 12:2 (NKJV)

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven.

- 1st The Third Heaven

- This Does NOT suggest different “levels” of heaven
 - Although this is what some ancient Jewish Rabbis believed
 - The Mormons Believe in different levels as well
 - There are three levels of heaven—celestial, terrestrial and telestial—in Mormonism. Only those in the celestial kingdom will live in God's presence
- So What is Paul Talking About...
 - Paul is using terminology common in that day

- Which referred to the “blue sky” as the first heaven,
 - The “starry sky” as the second heaven
 - The place where God lived and reigned as the third heaven
- **2nd So Paul**
 - Was “Caught Up” (harpazō) to the heaven where God lives.
 - Paul had a vision or an experience of the throne of God
 - Just as...
 - Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1)
 - Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1)
 - John (Revelation 4:1-2)

• **Seventh: He was caught up into Paradise v. 4a**

2 Corinthians 12:4 (NKJV)

4 how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words,
which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

- **1st Paul identifies this third heaven as Paradise.**
 - The word Paradise
 - Is taken from the Persian word for an enclosed, luxurious garden often only found among royalty in the ancient world.

• **Eighth: And heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter v. 4b**

2 Corinthians 12:4 (NKJV)

4 how he was caught up into Paradise and **heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.**

○ **1st In describing this heavenly vision**

- Paul doesn't relate anything he saw, only a shadowy description of what he heard.
- He doesn't bother at all with breathless descriptions of what he actually experienced.
- Instead, he says nothing of what he saw, and says only that he heard things not lawful for a man to utter.
- NOTE:
 - When we think of this, we realize how different Paul is from most of those who describe their so-called "visions" of heaven today.
 - There is nothing self-glorying, self-aggrandizing, or foolish in the description of his experience.

• **Ninth: Boast In God vs. 5-6**

2 Corinthians 12:5–6 (NKJV)

5 *Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities.*

6 *For though I might desire to boast, I **will not be a fool**; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.*

○ **1st Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities:**

- Paul waited 14 years to say anything about the incident
 - And when he finally did he said it reluctantly.
 - He did everything he could to take the focus off himself (such as writing in the third person).

- But “Paul himself” really could only boast in his infirmities, which was exactly what he did in 2 Corinthians 11:23-30.
- **2nd Though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool:**
 - Again, contrasting himself with the “super apostles” among the Corinthian Christians.
 - They would not hesitate to boast about the kind of vision Paul had.
 - In fact, they would write books, make tapes and videos, and go on speaking tours about such a vision!
 - And if they did, each of them would be a fool.
 - Paul will not be a fool, so he will not boast in this vision.
- **3rd Lessons**
 - Why was Paul given Visions
 - **1st So OTHERS Might Benefit**
 - He was given visions for you and me so that we would benefit from what the Lord showed Paul.
 - **2nd God Would Show & Encourage Paul**
 - Where to GO
 - Comfort

The REASON behind the Attacks v. 7

- **First: The presence of Paul's thorn in the flesh v. 7**

2 Corinthians 12:7 (NKJV)

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

○ **1st And lest I should be exalted above measure v. 7a**

- Paul's vision was so impressive that it would have been easy for him to be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations.
- He could have gloried in himself or caused others to glory in him because of this experience.
- So In order to keep Paul HUMBLE – the Lord sent a trial

○ **2nd A thorn in the flesh was given to me v. 7b**

- To prevent being exalted above measure, Paul was given this.
- In this, Paul reveals the real reason for telling of his heavenly vision:
- NOT to glorify himself but to explain his thorn in the flesh.
- *Spurgeon; "He says, 'There was given to me.' He reckoned his great trial to be a gift. It is well put. He does not say, 'There was inflicted upon me a thorn in the flesh,' but 'There was given to me.'"*

○ **3rd What is a thorn in the flesh?**

- When we think of a thorn
 - We think of a somewhat minor irritation.
- But Paul was letting us know it was MUCH MORE
 - The Greek Word (Skolops)
 - Means:

- Trouble, what causes pain formally, thorn in the flesh
 - It describes a tent stake, not a thumbtack.
- A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me:
 - In a strange way, the thorn was given – ultimately given by God – but it was also a messenger of Satan.
 - Satan probably jumped at God's permission to afflict Paul and did so with malice towards the apostle.
 - But God had a purpose in it all and allowed Satan's messenger to successfully keep Paul from being exalted above measure.
- We don't really know exactly what this thorn was:
 - Calvin - thought spiritual temptations.
 - Luther - temptations & persecutions.
 - Roman Catholics - say sexual temptations.
 - Disfigurement (like hunchback, epilepsy, malarial fevers, or severe headaches).
 - A speech Impediment
 - Ophthalmia (inflammation of the eye)
 - From Gal.6:11 See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!
 - Former Sins Hunting him
 - A Person – Adversary

- MacArthur –
- Possibly, the best explanation for this demon was that he was indwelling the ring leader of the Corinthian conspiracy, the leader of the false apostles. Through them he was tearing up Paul's beloved church and thus driving a painful stake through Paul.
- Further support for this view comes from the context of chaps. 10–13, which is one of fighting adversaries (the false prophets).
- The verb translated “buffet” always refers to ill treatment from other people (Matt. 26:67; Mark 14:65; 1 Cor. 4:11; 1 Pet. 2:20).
- Finally, the OT describes Israel's personal opponents as thorns (Num. 33:55; Josh. 23:13; Judg. 2:3; Ezek. 28:24).
- All That to SAY we DON'T Really know
 - Why?
 - So you can fill in your thorn – that God uses to keep you HUMBLE

The REQUEST he made to the Lord v. 8

• First: Paul's prayer regarding the thorn in the flesh v. 8a

2 Corinthians 12:8 (NKJV)

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

○ **1st Paul Took His Burden to the Lord**

- Straight to the source – God in Prayer

- Note: Paul did exactly what he told others to do in a time of trouble.
- Paul believed for himself what he wrote in Philippians 4:6

Philippians 4:6 (NKJV)

6 *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;*

▪ Lesson

- It seems in our day Christians seem to run to every other source before they run to God
- Guzik; *“It is interesting to consider what a counselor without a Biblical perspective might have said to Paul. Imagine that Paul tells the counselor about his great infirmity, his troublesome “thorn in the flesh,” and how Paul feels weak and powerless to continue on against it. We might imagine that the counselor would say, “Well Paul, what you need is a positive mental outlook to meet this problem.” Or he might say, “Paul, the power is within you to conquer this infirmity; you should look deep within the inner man to find the resources for success.” Perhaps the counselor would then tell Paul, “What you really need a support group of caring individuals.” The counselor might suggest Paul take medication for depression. Or he might even seek to challenge Paul by saying, “Paul, if you really had faith, you would be delivered from this thorn in the flesh.” Some of this advice might be good in different circumstances, but Paul will take his problem to the Wonderful Counselor, and He has something different to say.”*

• **Second: I pleaded with the Lord three times v. 8b**

2 Corinthians 12:8 (NKJV)

8 *Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.*

- **1st Paul repeatedly prayed about this thorn in the flesh**

- 3 Times
 - Does this mean ONLY 3 times
 - Or A Hebrew figure of speech that really means much more than three times
 - I Don't Know...
- What we do know
 - Pleaded with the Lord:
 - Paul's prayer on this matter was passionate.
 - We wonder if he wasn't surprised when the prayer was not answered the first or second time.
 - That he did not Get the Answer he wanted
 - But he got the answer he needed

The RESPONSE from the Lord v. 9a

- **First: And He said to me v. 9a**

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)

9 And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

- **1st God had a response for Paul.**
 - The answer was not what Paul initially hoped for or expected
 - BUT God still had a response for Paul.
 - We often close our ears to God if He responds in a way we did not hope for or expect.

- **Second: My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness v. 9b**

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)

9 And He said to me, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”** Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

- **1st God’s Answer**

- Instead of removing the thorn from Paul’s life
 - God gave and would keep giving His grace to Paul.
 - The grace God gave Paul was sufficient to meet his every need

- **2nd Do You Believe God’s Grace is sufficient?**

- If NOT – Maybe You’re are Holing onto yourself
 - We really don’t believe God’s grace is sufficient until we believe we are insufficient.
 - For many of us, especially in American culture, this is a huge obstacle.
 - We are the people who idolize the “self-made man” and want to rely on ourselves.
 - But we can’t receive God’s strength until we know our weakness.
 - We can’t receive the sufficiency of God’s grace until we know our own insufficiency.
- My grace is sufficient
 - How did God’s grace make the difference?

- How did God meet Paul's need?
- How Will God meet our needs?
- How will God's Grace meets our needs?
- **1st God's GRACE = Acceptance and pleasure in us**
 - When we receive His grace, we enjoy our status of favor and approval in God's eyes.
 - G-R-A-C-E God's Riches At Christ's Expense
- **2nd God's GRACE is available all the time.**
 - When we sin or fail, it does not put us outside the reach of God's grace.
 - Since grace is given freely to us in Jesus, it can't be taken away later because we stumble or fall.
- **3rd God's GRACE is the very strength of God.**
 - God loves to show His power through His goodness and grace.
 - Grace is not weak or wimpy. Instead, it is the power of God to fulfill what we lack.
- **4th God's GRACE = Jesus.**
 - Isn't His love, His favor, enough?
 - Remember too that Jesus suffered thorns, so He cares and He knows.
- **5th God's GRACE is sufficient for YOU."**
 - I'm so glad God didn't say, "My grace is sufficient for Paul the Apostle."

- We might have felt left out.
- But God made it broad enough. You can be the “you” in for you.
- God’s grace is sufficient for you!
- Spurgeon; “This sufficiency is declared without any limiting words, and therefore I understand the passage to mean that the grace of our Lord Jesus is sufficient to uphold thee, sufficient to strengthen thee, sufficient to comfort thee, sufficient to make thy trouble useful to thee, sufficient to enable thee to triumph over it, sufficient to bring thee out of it, sufficient to bring thee out of ten thousand like it, sufficient to bring thee home to heaven... O child of God, I wish it were possible to put into words this all-sufficiency, but it is not. Let me retract my speech: I am glad that it cannot be put into words, for if so it would be finite, but since we never can express it, glory be to God it is inexhaustible, and our demands upon it can never be too great. Here let me press upon you the pleasing duty of taking home the promise personally at this moment, for no believer here need be under any fear, since for him also, at this very instant, the grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient.”

The REALIZATION of the Power he needed vs. 9b-10

- **First: Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities v. 9b**

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV)

9 And He said to me, “*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” **Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

- **1st Through his infirmities**
 - God made Paul completely dependent on His grace
 - God Made Paul Completely dependent on His Strength

- This allowed God to work through Paul – Making Paul Stronger
- **2nd POWER OF CHRIST may Rest upon me**
 - My strength is made perfect in weakness
 - The weaker the human instrument, the more clearly God's grace shines forth.

• **Second: I take pleasure in infirmities v. 10**

2 Corinthians 12:10 (NKJV)

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- **1st Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities...**
 - Paul does not resign himself to his fate; he welcomes it.
 - Paul rejoices that God has forced him to rely on the grace and strength of God all the more so he can say, "when I am weak, then I am strong."
- **2nd In reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.**
 - In all the things Paul Suffered
 - Reproach, Needs, Persecution, Distress, - It was all for JESUS
 - For when I am weak, then I am strong:
 - There is SUCH a PEACE when we come to this place –
 - Just simply RESTING on JESUS
 - Knowing what we're going through is His PLAN and He will strip us of ourselves and fill us with Himself

- That is why we are STRONG when we are weak

Closing

- **Some Final Thoughts on Our Struggles**

- **First: The Lord knows how WHAT WE NEED**

- If we have only blessings, we most likely will become proud
 - So He permits us to have burdens as well.
 - To Strip us of ourselves and to fill us with Himself
 - So Rejoice!

- **Second: Understand Different Types of Sufferings**

- **1st Sometimes we suffer simply because we are human.**
 - Our bodies change as we grow older, and we are susceptible to the normal problems of life.
- **2nd Sometimes we suffer because we are foolish and disobedient to the Lord.**
 - Our own rebellion may afflict us!
- **3rd Sometimes we Suffer because God is building godly character**
 - Die to Self – Come to an END of Self – to LIVE everyday for the Glory of Jesus

- **Third: How Will you Respond?**

- 1st Bitterness (believing you don't deserve it)
- 2nd Blame (God and others)

- 3rd Burden (trying to endure it)
- 4th Belief (that God is going to remove it)
- 5th Blessing (God will use it for His glory)

- **Fourth: God's Grace is MORE THAN SUFFICIENT**

- *Show Picture*

- *Wiersbe; "God did not give Paul any explanations; instead, He gave him a promise: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We do not live on explanations; we live on promises. Our feelings change, but God's promises never change. Promises generate faith, and faith strengthens hope.*