

Sufficient Grace

2 Corinthians 12:7-8 "So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me."

- **Background:** Would you like a little background/reminder before we jump into this? So here's what's happening at this point in the letter. Paul is defending his apostleship. You can read the full context in chapters **10-13**, but we obviously can't cover it all with limited time. But some "super apostles" (actually, false apostles) sought to undermine Paul to the saints at Corinth, and it's working to a degree. They are challenging his sincerity, authority and motives. Unlike Paul, they are a boastful people. Paul begins to defend himself by sarcastically "boasting" in himself. One passage that you're familiar with is ch. **11:21-30**, but we may forget the context of his statement. After he boasts of his weaknesses, he goes on to talk about visions. He was given revelations 14 years prior that he couldn't share. *Think about that for a moment.* How would you feel if God allowed you to peek into paradise and told you things for your ears only? How would that make you feel? It's definitely something to boast about. Or should it be? That's going to be important to consider for our text. Now, I say it's revelations given to him, because it fits the context and sarcasm of the passage. Plus, in verse 7, he connects himself to the revelations.
- **The Thorn:** We all want to know what it is and that seems to be the main focus of most Bible students. "What is the thorn?!?" Why is that?
 - Because humans want to relate . . . and we like a little drama. It sounds very intense. We've got visions, revelations and some thorn in the flesh! It's reading like a thriller now! We've also got Satan in the mix. And we have a pleading with God!
 - We tend to skip over the "conceited" part, so we'll consider the rest, but we're coming back to it because it's kind of the point of the passage.
 - So, what was the thorn? Well, I don't know, but here's something to consider: isn't it beautifully ambiguous? Because you're wanting to know what it is to relate, but sense he doesn't tell you . . . you get to fill it in. You get to relate to it in the best way possible. If it were too specific, you may find yourself feeling divorced from the whole lesson. Yet, in reality, we've all had thorns and pains. So, like Paul's visions, we don't need to know to get the point.
- **Pain:** It caused him pain (whether that's physical or mental).
 - You ever feel pain? Ever had something that you begged to go away?
 - Paul knew something about thorns and pains.
 - Think about it this way: Paul endured times isolation and anxiety. Regret and disappointment. He was whipped, beaten, stoned and imprisoned. He was threatened and slandered constantly. He went without a place to lay his head or food to eat. He went without shelter and was exposed to cold and dangerous travels on land and sea. But THIS thorn, if that's not what he's referring to, is what got him. What about humiliation? Notice how Paul had not forgotten about his exiting Damascus (**11:30-33**). And he was begging God, "Please . . . let this leave me."
 - You know pain like that? **Three** times he pleaded. You ever beg God to take something away?

- If God will take it away, then we can really get something done, right? Paul's ministry can be stronger! Paul can fire on all cylinders, right?

2 Corinthians 12:9a "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.'"

- **Sufficient Grace:** Ever wonder how Paul felt about Jesus' answer? Does Jesus' answer disappoint you? Does Jesus' statement feel parallel to "Go in peace, be warmed and filled?"
 - It's a little funny how we gravitate towards stories or movies focusing on underdogs who, because of their tenacious spirit and inner strength, persevere through the most difficult storms. We love watching those movies. We just don't love living them.
 - Ever struggle seeing the goodness of something difficult in the moment? Well, you're not alone. Paul didn't immediately see it either and was better at seeing the spiritual side than most.
 - What is Jesus' grace? At what cost? You'll know how much you think of Jesus' grace by the decisions you make in life. Who do you cling to? Who do you mimic? And by the way - do you view Jesus as a loser or winner? Failure or victorious?
 - I know this much. What you see in Jesus is NOT a man running from His weaknesses, but embracing them. I don't see Jesus running FROM the cross, but TO the cross. Like a lamb that is lead to the slaughter. He willingly went to the cross, brethren. So, when we try to run FROM, remember that Jesus ran TO. Imagine a sea of people running away from the cross, but in the midst of them you see a man calmly wading against the current with His cross. You see Him crucified on the hill outside Jerusalem. You hear the two criminals criticizing him and begging to be saved from the pain. Because that's what humans do - we run from pain. Yet, Jesus stayed on the cross. Finally, you see the change of heart from one of the thieves. He's accepted his punishment. He's content to stay by Jesus. He's promised a place in paradise with Jesus. Now consider the sea of people who run away from the cross. One by one, many begin to turn around and head towards suffering themselves. They finally learn the lesson. They bare their own cross and walk towards the pain in order to join and be like Christ.
- **Power in Weakness:** When we are strong, people see our strength. But when Christ's power gives us strength in our weaknesses, everyone sees Jesus.
 - So, will you do whatever it takes to find strength without Jesus? Will you try to rid yourself of all weaknesses? What will you rid your weaknesses with? The world? Is that the message we want to leave our children with? Is that the example we leave our loved ones and the world?
 - I know, it's asking much, isn't it? But then again . . . we've asked much from Christ. How much did He give? Remember **Romans 8:31-39**?

2 Corinthians 12:9b-10 "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

- **Therefore:** Sounds so simple. So matter of fact. Do you know how much time, effort, humility, sacrifice and trust it takes people to get to a "therefore" mindset?
 - Contentment only comes with understanding. If we don't understand the reason, there's nothing to boast about. There's nothing to hold on to.
 - It is, what it is: I say that all the time, but maybe we'd be better to remind others - "His grace is sufficient." It's not as though our lives and trials have no meaning. There is meaning. Let's

remind those around us that life isn't random. It's not some time to simply grit your teeth through, but an opportunity to understand and appreciate God's grace. It is indeed sufficient.

- **Weakness:** Jesus had it. Yes, Paul will go on to write, "For He was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God."

- He pleaded with the Father three times.
- He faced the thorns.
- He became the source of strength to all sufferers.
- In my daily readings this week I covered the life of Joseph. What a story. Betrayal, lies, imprisonment, loneliness, and reconciliation. When he finally reveals himself to his brothers, despite all his trials, he comforts them and explains all he endured was God's plan and was for the benefit of his family. Wow.
- Jesus isn't divorced from you. He didn't leave you to yourself. Instead, He came to join you in suffering. Why? Does it not strengthen you? Jesus went through everything He did to help you. This whole thing was allowed by God to strengthen Paul, not kill him. Jesus took that on.