

Title: The Gift of Suffering
Text: 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10
Date: March 14, 2021
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2 Corinthians 12: 1: It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2: I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. 3: And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) 4: How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 5: Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. 6: For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but *now* I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me *to be*, or *that* he heareth of me. 7: And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Have you ever thought of trials and afflictions as a gift from God? Paul said, “*There was GIVEN to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.*” This thorn in the flesh was a gift given by God to Paul. Satan could only buffet Paul by God’s permission, even as he could only buffet Job by God’s permission. But the messenger of Satan to buffet Paul was a gift of God given to him.

It was on purpose. It was according to God’s purpose. God had taken Paul up to the third heaven and given Paul abundant revelation. He said, he was “*caught up into paradise; heard unspeakable words, not lawful for a man to utter.*” Think of how that would lift us up in pride.

So the buffeting was for Paul’s benefit, “*lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*” The thorn could have been something physical in Paul’s flesh. But certainly the things he suffered buffeted him and kept him humble and dependent upon the Lord Jesus. All of this was a gift from God to Paul. He said,

2 Corinthians 11: 24: Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. 25: 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; 26: *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; 27: In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. 28: Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

It takes so very little for a child of God to become exalted above measure. Therefore, as a gift God gives us trouble to abase us. He keeps his child humble. Rather than blame second-causes Paul consider it a gift from God and thanked God.

DRAWN TO THE THRONE OF GRACE

2 Corinthians 12: 8: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

This is one of reason trials are a gift. By trials, the Spirit of God draws us to Christ's throne of grace to ask help in time of need.

Hebrews 2: 18: For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Hebrews 4: 15: For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16: Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

GRACE SUFFICIENT

2 Corinthians 12: 8: For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Another reason the suffering is a gift of God is because by our weakness God teaches us his grace is sufficient. We usually do what Paul did. He came to the throne of grace. But Paul admits that he was not asking for grace. He wanted the thorn removed. That is logical. We think, "I have this thorn. Take it from me and I will be alright." That is the pride we are being abased from.

The Lord did something better for Paul than removing the thorn. Christ taught Paul that God's grace is sufficient. We cannot know the sufficiency of God's grace so long as we have strength to save ourselves. Christ says, "*My strength is made perfect in weakness.*" If we would know Christ's strength then it will only be by the Lord making us know our weakness.

Men (men and women) do not like to be called weak. We do not like for someone to say, "You are such a weakling." Why don't we like that? What was the Lord saving Paul from?—"Lest I be *EXALTED* above measure." By nature we are proud. Therefore, our sinful nature makes us not like to be abased. But it is only abasing to our proud flesh. We must be made to know the weakness of our flesh. But Christ said, "*My grace is sufficient for you.*" The only way we are going to know Christ is our Strength is by Christ making us know we have no strength in ourselves. In ourselves we are weakness. But Christ said, "*My strength is made perfect in weakness.*"

CHRIST OUR STRENGTH

The trial is a gift because through it God teaches us Christ is our Strength. How were God's people redeemed? How was our sin purged? It was through weakness.

2 Corinthians 13:4...[Christ] was crucified through weakness,...

In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ said, "*The flesh is weak.*" He was crucified through the weakness of our flesh. Christ took flesh, which was in every way like ours, except for sin. He was touched with all our infirmities. Since he was in weak flesh, Christ was dependent upon the power of God the Father. It was part of Christ being God the Father's obedient servant on behalf of his people. By taking our weak flesh he was capable of suffering and

dying through the weakness of the flesh. What did Christ experience? What did he manifest through weakness? He manifests his perfect faith by which Christ perfected obedience for his people. Through weakness Christ's saving strength is manifest.

Hebrews 5: 7: Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; 8: Though he were a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

Christ experienced—as our Head as a Man like unto his brethren—the weakness of our flesh. He learned by experience as a Man how weak the flesh is. He learned as the Representative of his elect, as a Man, what it is to depend entirely upon the Father for strength. He experienced the shame of the sin of those for whom he laid down his life. Christ knows what it is to be judged of men and despised and rejected as a Man. He knows the tempting of the devil as a Man like his brethren. He suffered it all in the weakness of our flesh. It was by the things which he suffered that he learned what it is to suffer from our point of view.

His strength was *made perfect in weakness*. Be sure to get this. Through his weakness we clearly see the strength of God to save his people by his power in justice and mercy. Christ's saving strength—by which he saves his people from our sins—was made perfect to Paul through Paul's weakness. So it is through our weakness that we see Christ alone is our strength of salvation.

Hebrews 5: 9: And being made perfect, being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

Through Christ's weakness the Spirit makes us behold the strength of his perfect righteous-obedience on behalf of his people by which he honored the law in perfect love. Through his weakness we behold the strength of his obedience by which Christ accomplished and manifest that Christ is all our Righteousness. Through Christ's weakness, dying in the room and stead of God's elect on the cross, we behold the strength of Christ's justifying blood that saved us from the wrath of God. He made perfect—he accomplished, manifest and made known to—that Christ alone is our salvation through his weakness by shedding his blood unto death. The strength of his victory over death for us was made perfect in his weakness by him being buried in a tomb on our behalf then rising again the third day.

Hebrews 5: 9: And being made perfect he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

He is the Author of eternal salvation to them that are made so weak that we see we have no strength in ourselves. He is the Author of eternal salvation to them who depend upon his grace and strength to save us like as he obeyed the Father.

But how are we going know his grace and strength to save us? Only when we are made to behold our weakness. It is through our weakness that he makes it clear to us that Christ alone is our Strength. Then, in like manner as Christ lived in dependence upon the Father's power, by the Spirit of God, we are brought to live in dependence upon Christ's Strength alone.

2 Corinthians 13:4 For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

So to keep us from being exalted he gives us suffering. To keep us from trusting in our strength, Christ gives us the messenger of satan to buffet us. He gives trials, infirmities, afflictions, distresses for Christ's sake and many other afflictions and chastenings. He gives things impossible to remove. They are things we must suffer. Then he graciously says, "I am not removing the thorn. But my grace is sufficient. Through your utter weakness you are made to see that I am your only strength—your only Salvation!"

As long as we are in this flesh, we will experience its weakness within and without. But Christ gives us suffering so unbearable that were it not for Christ keeping us looking only to him we would surely fall away. This is to teach us "*My grace is sufficient for you: for my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness.*" Remember, he lived (and now lives as the risen glorified GodMan) by the power of God his Father. Now all power is his as the GodMan in heaven. Now, he is one who knows what we suffer in all points as a Man (yet without sin). And Christ is he who has all power to be our Strength, our only Strength. Do you see why suffering is a gift?

REJOICING IN CHRIST'S POWER

2 Cor 12: 9: Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10: Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

Brethren, if we cannot enter into how Paul could say that he gloried in these painful things, remember, Paul could not either, at first. He asked for the Lord to remove that which made him suffer. It was not until Christ made it manifest to him that Paul had no strength that Paul was made to see that he, himself, was utter weakness. But through Paul's weakness Christ made it manifest that Christ was his only strength. It is Christ's strength and power alone that made Paul rejoice in his infirmities. Christ's power resting on Paul was so much more valuable to him than anything else that it made him rejoice in his suffering.

Our flesh is grass. In our flesh is no good thing. In our flesh is no strength, only weakness. Our sinful flesh is dying. We are carrying around a body of death that is very much alive and fighting against us. It is an old nature of sin that contributes nothing to our salvation. But remember,

Romans 5: 6: When we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.

It is when we begin imagining we have strength in our flesh—some achievement we have arrived at—that Christ must remind us again of our weakness. Paul says his problem was the danger of pride through the abundance of revelation. More than likely Job's problem was pride through the abundance of carnal riches given to him. The apostles Peter's problem certainly was pride; he said, "These others might forsake you but I won't; I love you too much." But after the trial Christ asked, "Peter, lovest thou me more than these other apostles?" Then Peter answered more humbly, "Lord thou knowest." Jonah's problem was pride because he had preached against Nineveh and he could not humble himself to go preach mercy to them and see God save his elect among them. David's problem was pride once God had given him peace round about—it was then that he spotted Bathsheba.

Christ gave them each the messenger of satan to buffet them. But the affliction was light compared to what Christ suffered on the cross. The affliction was light compared to what

Christ worked for them through the buffeting in making each know Christ alone was their strength.

2 Corinthians 4: 17: For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; 18: While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

When Christ makes us know we are weakness then Christ makes us know that he is our Strength. Without him we can do nothing. He meant exactly what he said. But we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. But only through Christ. Then we can even rejoice in our weakness, even when Christ does not remove the thorn. That is how sufficient Christ's grace is!

We see this in Paul in his latter days. He said, "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." (Php 4:11) Where was he? In prison! Forsaken of almost all the brethren. Facing execution. Uncertain if he would live or die! It was in that state that he wrote the strongest meat in the epistles the Spirit used him to pen. We read those things Paul wrote and do not enter into the half of what they mean. We are usually too busy setting ourselves up as judges of the second causes and miss the spiritual lesson Christ taught Paul. But if Christ gives us the gift to have our senses exercised by suffering to the degree Paul suffered then Christ will make us enter into this strongest of meat. Even then we will confess that our affliction is yet light in comparison to what Christ suffered for us. So what was Paul's contentment? Christ! That is why he wrote, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain!"

Amen!