

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The word of God for our consideration this morning is found in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10.

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

So far out text. Dear fellow redeemed.

What do you glory in? Do you take pride in anything? I believe the initial reaction of the sanctified mind would be an emphatic no. But it might be the kind of ‘no’ that would be intended to cover being uncomfortable about the fact that we all at times will wrongfully glory and take pride in things. Often times in ourselves.

The Lord caused Paul to realize that this attitude would be catastrophic for Paul and for his ministry. Therefore Jesus taught Paul and Jesus through these words tells us that **“My grace is sufficient for you.”**

Although we could all sit around and swap stories about the lofty things in life we have accomplished or the things that have happened to us. When we consider the things that happened to the Apostles and specifically to Paul, we quickly become humbled.

In the verses previous to our text for today Paul says this, **“And I know such a man -- whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”** 2 Cor. 12:2,3

How’s that for an experience? Even before Paul saw the day of his physical death he was caught up into Paradise. On top of that he heard the name of God, Jehovah being spoken. A name that the Jews would not speak because of laws created by the Scribes and Pharisees. Instead of saying Jehovah, they would say Yahweh.

This would’ve been a great honor for any Christian. It would’ve been a double honor for a Jewish Christian who then heard the name Jehovah being spoken.

With this in mind we have the background for our text today. The Lord knew that for Paul this and other revelations might become a point of pride for him, Paul says, **“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.”**

Paul begins by saying **“And lest I should be exalted.”** The whole point in Paul revealing this to the Corinthians is found in this one phrase. Those who had crept in to the church in Corinth were trying to destroy the Apostleship of Paul which in turn would destroy his ministry in Christ Jesus.

The Jews looked upon people with infirmities as having a demon. No one would be so constrained by whatever it was Paul suffered from if it didn't have something to do with his sins. This would've been a very convincing argument for the false teachers and Paul needed to address it.

But when Paul says, **“And lest I should be exalted”** he is stating why he is suffering from whatever it was that he was suffering from.

I say 'whatever' because the scriptures don't emphatically state what Paul's exact condition was. The opinions on this go on for pages. What Paul does say is enough, **“A thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.”** Paul in a very real way had an angel of Satan, an angel who followed Satan in his revolt against God, come to him and physically accost him. It was very much like the experience that Job suffered through, **“And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life." So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.”** Job 2:6,7

The word that is translated 'buffet' in our text for today means to 'box on the ear'. It is the same word used when Jesus was beat during His trial with the High Priest. Paul in a very real way had an evil angel come to him and physically abuse him. Knowing this was another of Paul's revelations.

For Paul it was important for him to know this because of his relationship with the Corinthians and with the Lord. For the Corinthians so that he could explain his condition and with the Lord so that Paul wouldn't put himself before Jesus.

And that is why we have our thorns in the flesh. So we don't put ourselves before the Lord and know that just like Jesus said to Paul, **“My grace is sufficient for you.”**

We don't have the advantage that Paul had in having the Lord Himself reveal to us what things in our lives are the thorns. And it's interesting to see that even Paul doesn't give us an exacting detail of what his was. Could it be that for some of us not having certain skills in life is a thorn? Something that brings us low so that we don't elevate ourselves and put Jesus second? For myself I think it might be the things that I long for. The things that “I” think would be a good thing for me to have. What would that result in? Exactly right, pride in myself. I would begin to think that I'm the one having an effect on people through the things that I can do.

It might be that for the prophet David the situation he had with Uriah and with his wife was his thorn. For the Apostle Peter it may have been the denial three times of his Savior. Things that when they began to get to puffed up would come and jab them in the side and be that thorn.

But even in all of this my dear friends we have nothing to fear because as Jesus reminds all of us today, **“My grace is sufficient for you.”**

Although we don't have anything to offer of ourselves, Jesus did and does. If we rely upon ourselves for the salvation of our souls then we are to be pitied. We confess with Isaiah, **"But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. 7 And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You; For You have hidden Your face from us, And have consumed us because of our iniquities."**

Thank God that He came and washed our filthy rags in His blood and cleansed us from all unrighteousness. Thanks be to God that our iniquities have been taken away by Jesus coming and fulfilling the entire Law for us. Thank God that He satisfied the Father's demand that blood be spilt because of our sins because **"without shedding of blood there is no remission."**

That's the simple message that Jesus relayed to Paul and is now relating to us, **"My grace is sufficient for you"** because, **"My strength is made perfect in weakness."** If we rely upon ourselves for anything then the weakness that Jesus is here describing is absent and the strength of God is not dwelling in us. If we say that we are the source for the good things that actually come from God then we are placing ourselves in God's place. Instead of weakness we find pride and arrogance, we find sin where weakness and dependency should be.

But when we have that attitude which can only be given to us by the Holy Spirit through faith by the word of God we confess as Paul did, **"Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 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."**

Paul previously spoke of a particular thorn in his life. But when Jesus revealed to him the blessing of having this one thorn he began to see thorns in many places in his life. In our lives we can then see as Paul did that infirmities or weaknesses are blessings.

Therefore infirmities themselves such as the sicknesses we have, that may last a lifetime are a blessing from God.

We can see that reproaches, that is when we endure insults, injury or hardship for the Kingdom of God is a blessing.

We can see that when we are in need, when we basically get by we don't rely upon those things but upon Christ's grace.

We glory in persecutions because the world looks at the faith you have in Christ as being intolerant and narrow-minded.

And if there is anything else, it is described when Paul says distresses. The word means "pressing together". It describes any situation in life that presses hard against us.

All these things have one goal in mind. For us to look away from ourselves, our power and skills and to look upon Jesus because He reminds us today that **"My grace is sufficient for you."** Amen.