

**"Paul's Defense of his Apostleship"**

**Part 11**

**2 Corinthians 12**

**Introduction:** Last week in our study of 2 Corinthians we were looking at Paul's experience which he records in chapter 12. Paul had been caught up to the third heaven where he was permitted to hear unspeakable words which were not lawful for man to utter. This experience had happened 14 years prior to Paul's writing of 2 Corinthians but he had never spoke of it before this. It was not something which Paul boasted of and it was not something which he desired to be known for. But in the text we are looking at he was pressured into speaking of the experience as he was defending his apostleship.

To keep Paul humble after his experience of being caught up to the third heaven God permitted Paul to be given a thorn in the flesh.

**Notice 2 Corinthians 12:7**

We do not know for sure what the "thorn" was but many have speculated. Some say the thorn was the mutiny he was facing at Corinth, some say it was a problem with his eyes. Whatever it was it was something which Paul desired to see removed and it was not something small. The word "thorn" here is not referring to a splinter but it is referring to a stake, very similar to a tent stake.

**Notice 2 Corinthians 12:8**

Paul went to the Lord three times and asked Him to remove the thorn. This now brings us to where we stopped last week.

**I. The Strength of Grace**

**Part 2**

**Notice 2 Corinthians 12:9**

God would not remove the thorn but instead he gave to Paul a promise which he could lean on and the promise was that God's grace would be sufficient as he lived with the thorn.

Last week we stopped here by considering how God sometimes answers our prayers by saying, "NO". Sometimes it is His will that we live with the "thorn".

But this now raises a question in my mind, **"Can I be sure that God's grace will sustain ME as I face the trials in my life?"** To answer this question let us look at some verses and then let us look at some Biblical examples of grace in people's lives.

**2 Corinthians 12:9**

<sup>9</sup> And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient **for thee**: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

I put this verse here and I bolded and underlined the words "FOR THEE" because I want you to see that this verse is applicable to every believer's life. God did NOT say, "My grace is sufficient for Paul." He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee" and so we are all included in that statement.

**2 Corinthians 9:8**

<sup>8</sup> And God is able to make all grace abound toward **you**; that **ye, always having all sufficiency in all things**, may abound to every good work:

**Psalm 84:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: **no good thing will he withhold from them** that walk uprightly.

<sup>12</sup> O LORD of hosts, **blessed is the man** that trusteth in thee.

Now let me show you the sufficiency of God's grace as seen in the lives of other people. We will not exhaust the applications but we shall touch on several that may apply to our lives.

**1. Grace enables us to stand in the face of opposition.**

**A. Moses**

**Exodus 3:9-12**

<sup>9</sup> Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

<sup>10</sup> Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

<sup>11</sup> And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

*12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.*

#### **Exodus 4:10-12**

*10 And Moses said unto the LORD, O my LORD, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.*

*11 And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?*

*12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.*

Moses did not see himself as having what was needed to stand before Pharaoh but it was grace that would equip him and give him the boldness to stand before the most powerful man in the world.

#### **B. Jeremiah**

#### **Jeremiah 1:4-10**

*4 Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying,*

*5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*

*6 Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.*

*7 But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.*

*8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD.*

*9 Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.*

*10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.*

It was grace that equipped Jeremiah to stand before the Nation of Israel and speak the words of judgment.

### **2. Grace enables us to endure the mistreatment from others.**

#### **A. Joseph**

**Genesis 39:7-8, 12-21**

*7 And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.*

*8 But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;*

*12 And she caught him by his garment, saying, Lie with me: and he left his garment in her hand, and fled, and got him out.*

*13 And it came to pass, when she saw that he had left his garment in her hand, and was fled forth,*

*14 That she called unto the men of her house, and spake unto them, saying, See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice:*

*15 And it came to pass, when he heard that I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled, and got him out.*

*16 And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.*

*17 And she spake unto him according to these words, saying, The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me:*

*18 And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out.*

*20 And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison.*

*21 But the LORD was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison.*

**Genesis 41:1**

*And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river.*

Joseph was falsely accused and was placed in prison where he was forgotten for two years. It was God's grace that sustained him in the midst of being mistreated by his brothers and then falsely accused by Potiphar's wife. We know that it was all for a purpose.

**Genesis 45:1-5**

*Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.*

*<sup>2</sup> And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.*

*<sup>3</sup> And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.*

*<sup>4</sup> And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.*

It was grace that allowed Joseph to extend forgiveness to his brothers and to understand that it was all a part of God's plane to get him where He could use him.

### **3. Grace enables us to endure the spiritual attacks from our enemy.**

#### **A. Job**

We all know the story of Job and how he lost his family and his health all because of a spiritual battle which he was not aware of. But we often overlook his response to his loss.

#### **Job 1:20-22**

*<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,*

*<sup>21</sup> And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

*<sup>22</sup> In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

#### **Job 2:9-10**

*<sup>9</sup> Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.*

*<sup>10</sup> But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.*

In the midst of the loss of his family and his health Job praised God and this was only possible because of God's grace.

We could look at many other examples but from these we can clearly see that God's grace is sufficient for all we face no matter what the circumstance may be. As we get back to our text there is another question which I want to raise concerning suffering, "Why does God allow His children to suffer?"

I believe we can get some answers for this question in what happened to Paul.

**1. It was to keep him from self-exaltation.**

It would have been very easy for Paul to become exalted in his own mind concerning what he was privileged to experience and then to tell the story so that others would glory in him. Notice the words of Poole:

*"Paul was not immune to the danger of pride. No one is. "The best of God's people have in them a root of pride, or a disposition to be exalted above measure, upon their receipt of favours from God not common to others."*

**Proverbs 11:2**

*<sup>2</sup> When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.*

**Proverbs 16:18-19**

*<sup>18</sup> Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.*

*<sup>19</sup> Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.*

The opposite of pride is a humble spirit. Whatever the "thorn" was it was something that really humbled Paul but it was to prevent him from becoming prideful due to the revelations.

**Application:**

There are things which come into our lives which we have no control over and they are not situations we would never choose to live through but they serve a purpose. They are often used of God to keep us humble. Maybe it is something your family is dealing with. Maybe it is a physical disability. Maybe it is a financial struggle. Maybe it is a job loss. These can all be used as tools by God to keep us humble. We must remember that even the most spiritual person has the potential of falling to pride.

**2. It was to make Paul an example to others of God's grace.**

Whatever the "thorn" was it seemed to be visible to all others who could see Paul. So, as they watched him deal with the "thorn" he would become a model on which God would be able to demonstrate to those watching how sufficient grace really was.

**Application:**

We must remember that we are here on this earth to manifest to the world the love of God and to make Him known through our lives.

**Matthew 5:14-16**

*<sup>14</sup> Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.*

*<sup>15</sup> Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.*

*<sup>16</sup> Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*

We must understand that God will often use us to be models of His grace. People around us watch how we deal with the problems, storms, and the trials which come upon us and it is in the midst of these times that God will use us as models of His grace so that others may see His sufficiency in us.

**3. It is so that the power of Christ would flow through Paul.**

**Notice 2 Corinthians 12:9**

As Paul faced the "thorn" he was in a situation where he had to rely upon the Lord and it was then that he was a vessel through which the power of Christ could flow. The "thorn" stripped him of self-dependence and made him more dependent upon the Lord. Let me show you the results of this.

**1 Corinthians 2:3-4**

*<sup>3</sup> And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.*

*<sup>4</sup> And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:*

**Conclusion:**

We will stop tonight by looking at Paul's attitude concerning the "thorn".

1. It was a gift - **2 Corinthians 12:7** It was GIVEN to him.
2. He would glory in that which manifest his weakness - **2 Corinthians 12:9**
3. He would accept that which manifest his weaknesses - **2 Corinthians 12:10**