

2 Corinthians 12:2-10
Strength in Weakness
Sunday July 15th, 2018

Ya, know? Even Jesus had a bad day. In fact if you think about it he had a lot of bad days. In the Gospels I believe they began with Jesus' fighting off Satan after 40 days of fasting. The story today, though, I believe was a particularly bad day for Jesus. Here he was in his home town in his home town Synagogue and "They took offense at him!" In fact in the Gospel of Luke it says they took such offense at him they tried to throw him off a cliff and kill him.

But Jesus carried on, because in the next few verses it describes how he chose the 12 disciples. And then Jesus moved on by sending out the 12. Then after the death of his cousin John the Baptist, he prayed. Jesus **carried on, moved on, and prayed** to God the Father the source of his strength.

Jesus' worst day, though, was the day he was crucified. It was also the day of God's greatest demonstration of power. It was Jesus weakest day dying in the humiliation and shame of the cross. But it was Jesus' most powerful day because God demonstrated his total power by forgiving all sin through Christ's sacrifice.

Jesus in absolute weakness perfected, completed, or fulfilled God's plan of salvation. As Jesus said before he died, "It is finished!" And then along with the one thief he moved on to Paradise.

In the section of 2 Corinthians that our scripture comes from today Paul mentions many of his bad days: being flogged, ship wrecked twice,



hungry, naked, imprisoned, plotted against by Gentiles, fellow countrymen, and false brothers. The list goes on and on. It is Paul boasting about what he has endured in the service of the Gospel. Many scholars believe these sufferings were Paul's thorn in the flesh.

Now our section begins with his boast about 2 visions or revelations. Paul uses the 3rd person to talk about himself. The first vision is about how he was caught up into the 3rd Heaven and the 2nd about how he was caught up into Paradise. He was caught up into the very presence of God and Jesus Christ. (Here is one of the places we get the idea of layers in heaven. Most today just collapse it all down into one place Heaven or Paradise.)

But Paul brings up these visions that happened 14 years before as a way of saying to his adversaries he's had grander visions and more profound revelations than they, but they don't matter what is important is the demonstration of God's grace in his weakness and failures.

You see Paul in this part of 2 Cor. was addressing adversaries in the Corinthian church who were saying you could ignore Paul and his teaching because they had better visions. Paul is not so subtly saying visions don't matter what matters is seeing God's grace work in your life, and **the best time to see God's grace and power in your life is when you are the weakest.**

In fact Paul is saying visions and revelations shouldn't matter that much, because God gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from getting too conceited over all the visions he has had. The implication then is that his adversaries' visions didn't matter either.

What Paul is saying is I've carried on despite my thorn and weakness, trials and tests, just like Jesus when he had a bad day. That demonstrates God's grace and power in my life more than any vision or revelation.

Our take away from this is that we need to carry on, move on and pray just like Jesus and Paul did, as we face our own life's weaknesses, failures, insults, trials, tests, difficulties and calamities. God's power, grace, and glory are revealed when in our trials we carry on. We demonstrate to ourselves and the world our faith and then the miracles happen that did not happen in Jesus' home town happen in our lives.

When we cling to Jesus despite the hurt and pain and discouragement that our own trials bring, we will experience the truth of verse 9, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”**

Have you ever thought of how that reconciles with the verse, also by Paul, **“I can do all things through him who strengthens me?”** Philippians 4:3

We often use this as an excuse to work ourselves to death, or encourage some other person to work themselves to death, because we emphasize and focus on **“I” not God**. We get so focused on “me, myself and I” that God and reliance on God’s grace and power is actually ignored; so what happens is we run our lives or even our churches over a cliff.

But it is at those times that God’s grace is truly demonstrated in the ruins of what we have done with our lives or the ruins that they have become. God pulls us out of that mess, out of our weakness and brings us to completeness even perfection for remember, **“My power is made perfect in weakness.”** God brings perfection, completeness or fulfillment and it is finished.

Now Paul mentions praying 3 times for his thorn in the flesh to go away. Most who have suffered in life will think, “Only 3 times?!!! I’ve asked God 3000 times to rescue me!!!” Well in the numerology of the Bible the use of the number 3 was to say, “Many times.” Paul was saying I asked God many times to release me from this.

Well 3 actual times in my life I’ve wound up completely exhausted physically, mentally and spiritually to where I had to take long break from ministry in order to recover. Overwork is my thorn in the flesh that has functioned like a Greek tragedy, one of my greatest strengths is also one of my greatest weaknesses. But I have learned that I am not God. Life goes on without me. God’s will gets’ done without me. I have learned that it is God’s power that works and succeeds, not my strength, and intellect, and stubborn fortitude.

Today's focus verse **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in your weakness."** Is a verse that is very precious to my life and faith experience. You see the year before I crashed for the 3rd time this verse kept popping up in all sorts of places. I would see it in bookstores, wall plaques, devotionals, and random places.

This verse pursued me in a time of growing misery in my ministry until I crashed. It was God's way of warning me of what was coming and God's way of promising me it was all going to be okay for I learned in no uncertain terms God's truth, **"My grace is sufficient for you,..."**

My friends, I can tell you that God's grace is sufficient for you! I have experienced it and lived it. No matter what you are going through today cling to that! God's grace is enough.



God's grace will carry you through. God will walk with you through whatever your valley of the shadow of death is. God's grace is enough, and in the disaster that you are in or will be in in life, if you carry on, and move on with God in prayer and worship, God's power will be made perfect, God's power will perfect your life.

God took care of almost all the problems I was facing in terms of health and ministry while I stepped aside for the 3rd time. I couldn't have been weaker than not being present at all in a ministry setting and God took care of things.

Most of you know my dad is 98 and in hospice care. Here he is on his 98th birthday on April 27th of this year.



He is totally bedbound now and is so weak he can't even really feed himself without help.



My mom is 94 and they share a small 8 by 10 room with a bathroom attached that my dad can see, but not get to. They also just shared their 65th wedding anniversary in June.

My mom often asks me the question, “Why am I still here?” “Why are we still here?” Her life is so limited. Dad’s life is so limited. Ultimately I can’t answer that question, but I know she still witnesses to people. She also helps others when she can. Part of our purpose in life is to serve others, which can often be uncomfortable and perplexing to us, but we are here to serve and love others.

So maybe they are still here because their condition helps me understand in a very personal way the trials of aging. They also encourage me in my life.

I now understand the line in verse 5 of Stand by Me which we will sing today **“When life becomes a burden.”** Until the last few years I never really understood what that phrase on a heart level meant. I used to think when I was younger, “how could life ever become a burden?”

As our bodies get weaker with age we learn to rely more and more on God and God’s strength. We realize that despite the organ recitals: “Ooh my back, my knee, my heart, my stomach.” That there are parts of us that work rather well and God can use them to his glory.

And we learn in a much deeper way it’s not what we do for God that matters to God. We matter to God.... despite all our weaknesses and in fact because of our weaknesses God sends us more and more grace.

And yet we still want to do something for God. Like small children on their parents' birthday we bring to God our scribbled cards and unrecognizable pictures. But all along we as parents' simple want to be with our child. We want that relationship.

Well God wants us in relationship with him and each other more than anything else. That is a lot of what church is about.

I know I have told this story before about old John at Kavanaugh UMC the first church I served full time. When I first met John he was 104. He came to church every Sunday and sat in the first pew right in front of the pulpit. John was pretty much blind and deaf and one day a person asked him what I would consider a rude question. He said, "John, why do you bother coming to church you can't see anything and you can't hear anything?" John straightened up and said, "To show whose side I'm on!!!"

We honor God with what we got, not what we are missing; so carry on, move on and pray. And know and experience to the depths of your being verse 9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

And like Jesus we are weakest at our death. When we die we will experience God's power and grace the most. We will be caught up with Paul and the thief on the cross into Paradise.

In Jesus' name amen.