

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 6TH-7TH, 2024 // 2 CORINTHIANS

WEAKNESS PERMITTED (2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10) CONTINUING TO BOAST

In contrast to the so-called "super-apostles" (SAs), Paul has boasted in sufferings, not in his strengths. But if they want to go toe to toe with Paul, he can pull out something that only a very few people can claim...he's had a heavenly vision.

- **Boasting in anything but Jesus is foolish**, but Paul will boast to protect his ministry.

EYE HAS NOT SEEN, EAR HAS NOT HEARD

Paul humbly uses the third person as he describes his vision. The "third heaven" refers to God's throne as does "paradise." This occurred 14 years earlier which would have been before Paul's first missionary journey. He saw and heard things that at the time were just for him.

- God knew what Paul needed at that time.

THE EVIDENCE IS CLEAR

Paul could have made a bigger deal about this vision, but only he experienced it. So only he knew if he was telling the truth. What everyone could see was the work that Paul did in Corinth, the Corinthians themselves being living testimonies of Paul's effectiveness as an apostle.

- **Our walk gives credibility to our talk, our talk gives clarity to our walk.**

WE ARE WEAK, HE IS STRONG

Paul could have pridefully boasted in his vision. To keep him humble, God permitted a thorn in the flesh from Satan. Too much attention has been on what the thorn was and not enough on the purpose of it.

- **Paul asked three times for Jesus to remove the thorn but Jesus said no, and that settled it for Paul.**

GRACE IS GREATER

The grace of Jesus was the greater gift for Paul—greater than the removal of all the weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties. Jesus' grace was where real strength could be found and demonstrated.

- **Unlike some who believe God doesn't want His people ever to suffer, how we suffer in Christ is a powerful testimony.**

SO...WHAT WAS THE THORN IN THE FLESH?

- Some say it was Paul's trauma from all the suffering he had caused as a persecutor.
- Some say it was opponents both inside and outside the church.
- Some say it was some type of demonic oppression.
- Some think it was a physical ailment, particularly Paul's eyesight.

POWER (2 CORINTHIANS 12:11-13) PAUL'S OPPONENTS

The SAs called Paul inferior to them because of his physical deficiencies, his lack of rhetorical ability, and his sufferings, including beatings and imprisonments. Paul knew he wasn't less than them, but knew he was less than Jesus, and that was okay.

- **Do the things we boast in really matter eternally?**

THE PROOF OF PAUL'S CALLING

Paul was used by Christ in a powerful way through apostolic signs: signs, wonders, and miracles. And Paul was empowered by the Spirit so he could overcome his physical shortcomings and see the Corinthians saved to the glory of God.

- **We should have no greater joy than seeing people come to faith in Christ.**

A DISTINCTIVE DECISION

One of the ways Paul distinguished himself from the SAs was his decision not to receive payment from the Corinthians, though he could have. The SAs took advantage of the Corinthians and Paul would not allow himself to appear in any way like the greedy false teachers. Paul sarcastically asks for forgiveness for this wrong.

CONCERN (2 CORINTHIANS 12:14-21) PAUL'S PREVIOUS TRIPS TO CORINTH

Paul wants to come to Corinth a third time. The first time was when he started the church. The second visit was the "painful visit" (2 Corinthians 2:1). For this third trip, he would once again not receive any money from the Corinthians, because a father shouldn't be dependent upon his children.

- **We gladly sacrifice for those we love.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRITY

Paul, Titus, and "the brother," each carried themselves in a manner that was above reproach. Yes, they asked for money from the Corinthians, but not for themselves but for the suffering saints in Jerusalem.

- **Our integrity as followers of Jesus is an important part of our resume. Do our actions back up our words?**

PAUL'S CONCERN

Paul's concern is that the Corinthians are living in such a way that their behavior demonstrates they really aren't Christ followers. If he arrives and finds them acting in unChristlike ways, they may find him bringing God's judgement.

- Our love for people may call us to speak the hard truth in love.

SAY NO TO THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

If the Corinthians have been led astray by the SAs so that they have ignored Paul's teaching and are living out the works of the flesh, especially as they relate to each other, Paul will be forced to declare them unrepentant and not a part of Christ.

- Practicing the works of the flesh probably indicates a lack of salvation.

IT ALL TIES TOGETHER

What will keep the Corinthians in humble repentance and away from the works of the flesh is what Paul has shared: the grace of Jesus in our weakness through the power of the Holy Spirit. That's how they are built up in Christ for His glory and their good.

- Living this way is the proof that we are truly in Jesus: **grace through faith by the Spirit.**

HOW'S OUR TESTIMONY?

- Do we make much of Jesus and His grace in everything we do so that He gets the glory in all things?
- Has our suffering hardened us towards Jesus or made us depend on Him more?
- Have we learned to be satisfied with however Jesus answers our prayers knowing His ways are always good?

KINGDOM-MINDED LIVING

- **Do we worry and toil over temporary things more than we live for the eternal?**
- Have we discovered the joy of telling others about Jesus through the gospel?
- Do we grieve over our sin leading to true repentance with the Spirit's help?
- Does our walk with Jesus in the Spirit make us content in all situations?