

Series: 2 Corinthians

Title: The Glory of God's People: Glorifying in our Infirmities, Glorifying in Christ

Text: 2 Cor 11: 22-12: 10

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Place: Grace Gospel Church, Apoka, FL (conference)

Our subject is "The Glory of God's People: (Glorifying in our Infirmities, Glorifying in Christ)." The apostle Paul is writing concerning the false preachers who were slandering him at Corinth.

2 Corinthians 11: 18: Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

But what did Paul glory in? He tells us three times:

2 Corinthians 11: 30: If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

It means Paul gloried in his total weakness.

2 Corinthians 12: 5:...yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

2 Corinthians 12: 9: And [the Lord] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness. 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.

Proposition: Believers glory in the weakness of our flesh and in Christ our Strength.

WE ONCE GLORIED IN OUR FLESH

2 Corinthians 11: 22: Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I.

When we were dead in sin, we gloried only in our flesh. This is what the false preachers were doing as they slandered Paul. They were boasting and commending themselves because in their flesh they were Hebrews, of the political nation of Israel and they were the natural sons of Abraham. Every unregenerate sinner—out of religion but especially in religion—glories in their flesh. Paul once did when he was spiritually dead in will-works religion but not now.

Philippians 3: 3: For we are the circumcision, [true Hebrews, spiritual Israel, spiritual seed of Abraham] which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4: Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5: Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6: Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7: But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8: Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ, 9: And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection,

and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11: If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

WE GLORY IN OUR WEAKNESS

2 Corinthians 11: 23: Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more;

Now, by God's grace, we glory in the complete inability of our flesh. While the false preachers declared themselves ministers of Christ by boasting in their flesh. Paul shows he is a minister of Christ by glorying in his infirmities and his total dependence upon Christ. That is Paul's point in listing all of these times that he suffered.

2 Corinthians 11: 23:...in labours more abundant,

Paul is glorying in Christ. Remember, 1 Corinthians 15: 10, Paul said, "*I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*" That is what Paul is doing by listing all these times he suffered. He is showing he was totally weak and Christ was all his strength.

2 Corinthians 11: 23: in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 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.

But there was an even greater mark of being a true minister of Christ which showed Paul's total weakness and total dependence upon Christ more.

2 Corinthians 11: 28: Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. 29: Who [what brother or sister] is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

What is Paul saying by all this?

2 Corinthians 11: 30: If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. 31: The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.

Whereas we once gloried in our flesh—our will and our works—now we say with Paul—"*Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.*" (2 Cor 3: 5)

TWO EXAMPLES

Next, Paul gives two examples to illustrate the weakness of his flesh and how Christ was his strength. The first example is the very first persecution he suffered after Christ converted him.

2 Corinthians 11: 32: In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: 33: And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

This is the difference the grace of God makes.

As Saul of Tarsus he headed toward Damascus worshipping in his flesh, rejoicing in his flesh, with all confidence in his flesh and no dependence upon Christ whatsoever. The governor of Damascus waited on him with open arms ready for Paul to get rid of those pesky Christians.

As the apostle Paul, after Christ converted him that same governor tried to kill him so he departed Damascus experiencing just how weak he was in his flesh, humbled in ridicule and persecution. Yet, Christ proved the sufficiency of his grace by providing him a basket and brethren to let him down by the wall. So he says

2 Corinthians 12: 1: It is not [profitable-expedient] for me [without a doubt-doubtless] to glory [in any ability in me.]

Back in the 80's when Christ first converted me, I had heard the doctrine declaring the total inability of my flesh and Christ my Strength and by God's grace I believed on Christ. I believed God's word that I had no ability to choose God, he chose me by free grace in Christ. I had no ability to fulfill the law and justify myself from my sins, Christ justified me freely by his precious blood. I had no ability to give myself life and faith to believe the things God had freely given to me in Christ, it was by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit.

But soon after converting me, the Lord made me know the doctrine by experience. I went to my friends with this good news, expecting I could convince them with scripture and they would rejoice with me. But I couldn't and they didn't! In fact, my closest friends had such enmity against Christ they would have killed me if they could. And I could not do one thing about it. Yet, Christ proved his grace sufficient because while my so-called friends forsook me, Christ never has and he has provided me many more true friends in my brothers and sisters in Christ.

The second illustration Paul gives was when he was carried up into the third heaven.

2 Corinthians 12: 1...I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2: I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago,...

This was probably when Paul was stoned and left for dead at Lystra. But the point is that this was a time when he was as without strength in the flesh as one could be. He was not even sure if he was dead or alive.

2 Corinthians 12: 2:... (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)

But while he was yet without strength in his flesh, by the strength of Christ:

2 Corinthians 12: 2...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.

Here is the point:

2 Corinthians 12: 5: Of such an one will I glory:

I will glory in one without strength in my flesh, who when I was without strength, Christ strengthened me and lifted me up.

2 Corinthians 12: 5... yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

This is the glory of God's people. I was under the curse of the law, without strength to reconcile myself to God:

Romans 5: 6: [But] when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly...8: But God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

I was dead in trespasses and in sins, without strength, to give myself life:

Ephesians 2: 4: But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5: Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6: And hath raised us up together,[with Christ] and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: 7: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Right now, as believers, we are without strength to persevere in faith—But we are “*Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed*”

But why would Paul tell men that he was helpless to save himself and others?

2 Corinthians 12: 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.

They were hearing that Paul's “bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible.” When he visited them, they saw that “he came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom declaring the testimony of God, he was with them in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling, and his speech and preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of [Christ's] Power.” Paul says “And I do not want you to think of me above that which you see and hear of me.” But why? So that your “faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the Power of God!” (1 Cor 2: 5) Paul said, “I will say the truth” about myself and about Christ. It is because Christ makes us “renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, not handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.” (2 Cor 4: 2)

FOUR REASONS WE GLORY IN CHRIST

Next, Paul gives us four reasons we glory in Christ. These are four things Christ brings his people to glory in through each trial. These are four things Christ brought Paul to glory in in each of those times of suffering that Paul spoke about in chapter 11.

One, we glory in Christ's power to keep us humble.

2 Corinthians 12: 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, [what?] the messenger of Satan to buffet me,

I had never connected the trials Paul suffered in chapter 11 with satan being his thorn in chapter 12. But each of those trials was the gift of Christ, permitting satan to sift Paul like he did Peter and Job. Christ permitted Satan to use the Jews and Romans to lash Paul in his flesh 8 different times. Christ permitted satan to send a

hurricane to shipwreck Paul like he permitted satan to use a storm to kill Job's family. Christ permitted satan to use religious men to stone Paul at Lystra where Christ lifted him to heaven. Worse than all, Christ permitted satan to send "*messengers of satan*" into Corinth to give Paul his greatest buffeting. When false preachers led many that Paul thought were true brethren to betray him for a false gospel, your pastor's can tell you, above everything else, that beat Paul black and blue in his heart.

Why did Christ permit satan to do this? Only for Paul's good—"lest I should be exalted above measure." Brethren, no chastening is joyful for the present, but afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. It brings us to rejoice in Christ and his strength to keep us broken and contrite.

Two, we glory in Christ because through trial he brings us to his throne of grace.

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

When I see Paul here, I think of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane praying, "*Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me.*" Christ has experienced the obedience he works in his people. As the servant of God serving for his people, he experienced being totally dependent upon God his Father. He knows "*The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.*" He experienced God the Father sending an angel to strengthen him—as a Man he has experienced the sufficiency of God's grace. So he is a merciful and faithful High Priest toward his poor weak people. He knows how to bring us to his throne of grace and

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

When we suffer, our first impulse is to go to brethren. Your pastor and your brethren are there for you. But when you come to me I will tell you the purpose for which Christ sent the trial—go to Christ!

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.

Three, we glory in Christ because of his grace.

2 Corinthians 12: 9: And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:

The Lord answers our prayer but not in the way we ask him. He does not need to remove the trial. The trial is not our problem, our flesh is the problem. As Brother John Chapman said last night, "You are it!" So he says to you and me personally, "*My grace is sufficient for thee.*"

When you get a thorn in your finger, you hold that finger and care for that one member like it is the only member in your body. So does Christ! He says, "I am not going to take away the trial: I gave it to humble you, to draw you to my throne of grace, to teach you "my grace is sufficient for you." His grace may come in the form of a basket to let you down through a window but however he it comes, his grace is sufficient. Grace chose us in Christ, grace redeemed us by Christ, grace quickened us with Christ, grace preserves us in Christ and grace shall bring us home to glory to be like Christ. So his grace is sufficient for you.

2 Timothy 3: 11: Persecutions, afflictions,...came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra...but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

Philippian 4: 13: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me...

From the day Christ saved me until now, in every trial, without removing the trial, Christ has made it clear through his gospel, in my heart and in his providence that his grace is sufficient for me. I can honestly say, I would not change one trial.

Lastly, by these trials the Lord teaches us to glory in our weakness and in Christ our strength. Christ taught Paul over and over again in each of Paul's trials.

2 Corinthians 12: 9: my strength is made perfect in [your] weakness. 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 [in myself], then am I strong [in Christ].

Brethren, it is one thing to know Christ's Power in doctrine but Christ has Power to see to it that we know it by experience. This is the power Paul longed to know:

Philippians 3: 10: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

What is the power of his resurrection? God is so satisfied with Christ's finished work of redeeming his people that he resurrected Christ and gave him the glory of being Head over all things to the church with all power that Christ might fill all in all. The power of his resurrection is the power of his blood, justification accomplished for his blood-bought people. It demands God not lose one because he will not pour out justice on his people twice. The power of his resurrection is the new testament in his blood—by which “he upholds all things by the word of his power”—by the covenant word of his power. Brother John preached it from Nahum—“*the Lord is a STRONGHOLD.*” Brother Greg preached it from Isaiah, “*By the arm of his STRENGTH*” he saves.

Remember, the impotent man at the gate called Beautiful? Peter told him to arise and he did. How? Peter said,

Acts 3: 16: [Christ's] name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by [Christ] hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

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.

Brethren, do you see how opposite growth in grace is from this world's so-called progressive sanctification? As time when by those false preachers at Corinth gloried more and more in their flesh, boasting they made themselves more and more holy by their law-keeping and less and less sinful. But Christ made Paul glory more and more in his own total weakness and more and more in Christ his Strength. That is the glory of God's people. May Christ be pleased to cause us do the same!

Amen!