

The Things Paul Gloried In

by A.B. Simpson

A.B. Simpson's sermon emphasizes the various aspects in which Paul found glory, including preaching the Gospel, enduring suffering, and receiving divine revelations.

Scripture: Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 9:14-18, 2 Corinthians 10:14-16, 2 Corinthians 11:7-10, 2 Corinthians 11:23-30, 2 Corinthians 12:5, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Philippians 3:10, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Glory in Weakness", "The Privilege of Suffering"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the things Paul gloried in, particularly his privilege of preaching the Gospel, his willingness to serve without charge, and his acceptance of suffering as part of his ministry. Paul's self-defense against his critics was not for personal gain but to uphold the truth of the Gospel and the integrity of his mission. He found honor in his hardships, viewing them as opportunities for Christ's power to manifest in his weakness. Simpson encourages believers to embrace their own trials and sacrifices as pathways to deeper faith and connection with God.

Transcript

"Of such an One will I glory; yet of myself will I not glory, save in my infirmities." 2 Cor. 12: 5.

It is sometimes necessary even for a Christian to assert his manhood and self-respect. Most of the time Solomon's first prescription is best: "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him." But there are times when his second prescription is necessary: "Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."

The apostle shrank from vindicating himself, but for the sake of the truth and the church in Corinth it became necessary for him to say something in answer to his enemies in that city, who were undermining his influence, ignoring his authority, ridiculing his claims and destroying his work.

In the course of this vindication, which occupies the last part of the epistle, there is a marked change in the general tone of the epistle and a deep sense on his part of being engaged in very uncongenial work. "I am become a fool in glorying," he says, and yet he adds: "Though I should boast somewhat more of our authority which the Lord has given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed." In the course of his vindication he tells us of several things in which he feels he may well glory.

I. The Privilege of Preaching the Gospel in the Regions Beyond

Paul speaks of this in 2 Cor. 10: 14-16: "For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the Gospel of Christ: Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labors; but having hope when your faith is increased that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly. To preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand."

It was his supreme ambition and his great privilege to be permitted to reach beyond the line of other men's labors and be the first to carry the message of salvation to a large portion of the heathen world. This was an honor of which his enemies did not even pretend to boast. Your teacher of error, your higher critic, Christian Scientist and hydra-headed fanatic does not run the risk of carrying his doctrines to the heathen world. He very much prefers to work under the cover and shelter of a respectable pulpit, a professor's chair and a comfortable salary at home, and to propagate his theories among the easily accessible multitudes who have already been brought, through someone else's labors, into the fold of Christ. False doctrine seldom has much missionary zeal behind it, but as the wolf in sheep's clothing it prowls about the shepherd's tent and preys upon the stragglers from the fold.

What a sublime ambition it is to be the first to tell the story of salvation to some poor benighted soul, and perhaps become the father or the mother of whole generations and new tribes and tongues? All honor to the heroic men and women of our own day who have been the pioneers of the Gospel in Uganda, Congo, the Philippines, Hunan, Kwangsi, Tibet and other unevangelized lands.

God, speak to some who are wasting their lives in the narrow competitions of business or Christian work at home and call them to the regions beyond.

II. The Privilege of Preaching the Gospel Without Charge

Again he boasts thus in 2 Cor. 11:7-10: "Have I committed an offense in abasing myself that you might be exalted, because I have preached to you the Gospel of God freely? I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: For that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia."

He almost apologizes to them for having deprived them of the privilege of his support, but he tells them that he is unwilling to relinquish the glory of preaching the Gospel without a touch of heroic sacrifice and holy independence. In the parallel passage, 1 Corinthians 9: 14-18, he explains more fully his attitude on this question: "Even so has the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die than that any man should make my glorying void. For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me: yes, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel. For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the Gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the Gospel, I may make the Gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the Gospel."

He explains in these words that the support of the Gospel ministry is one of God's ordinances, and there would be nothing wrong in his receiving a salary from his people if it were given in a scriptural way, but he says: "I have used none of these things, for it were better for me to die than that any man should make my glorying void." The preaching of the Gospel brings him no reward, for this is simply his duty, but the

preaching of the Gospel without charge and the encountering of the trials and sacrifices it brings is one of the ways in which he is winning his crown. This act on his part was entirely voluntary and God accepted it, and accepts it still from some of His servants, and makes up to them in other ways Himself.

Paul gloried in this not only because it was an opportunity of sacrificing something for his Master, but also because it added a new force to his ministry, and met the reproaches of his enemies that he was preaching for personal aggrandizement or gain. Every missionary in China knows how hard it is to persuade the people that we are influenced by purely benevolent motives in seeking their salvation. They are themselves so thoroughly selfish that they cannot understand anybody giving something for nothing, and when they really discover that the object of the missionaries is purely disinterested the impression is most profound, and is one of the most powerful assets of the missionaries in winning their confidence. There is nothing more important in our Christian work than that we should be free from all men, and that the spirit of self-sacrifice and independence should inspire every servant of the Lord Jesus. We have no business to be any man's echo or hired preacher. Our authority comes to us directly from the High Court of Heaven, and the gifts of God's people lay us under no human obligations, but are simply their own duty to Him whose representatives and ministers we are.

III. Paul Gloried in a Life of Suffering, Toil and Danger in the Service of His Master

What a catalogue of his labors and privations he has left us in 2 Cor. 11: 23-30: "In labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings oft, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my 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; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which comes upon me daily, the care of all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is offended and I burn not? If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern my infirmities."

What a life, filled up with such a catalogue of privation and pain! And yet there is no shade of complaint, there is no pleading for sympathy, but on the contrary these are prized by him as a soldier glories in his scars and counts it his highest honor even to die for his country.

Even in human affairs the strength of a nation's spirit is largely dependent upon the heroic sacrifices of its sons. The Greek soul was kindled to higher valor by the remembrances of Leonidas and the Spartan heroes. Rome cherished the early memories of the accomplishments of her people. England and America count these their richest heritages. And probably the secret of the extraordinary success of Japan arises from the fact that every Japanese soldier is trained from his infancy to count it his highest glory to die for his Emperor.

The story of the Bible is strung upon the same crimson thread of heroic sacrifice. Abraham had to give up his Isaac, Moses his earthly ambition, and Hannah her beloved children before God could give His highest blessing.

David could not sit upon his throne until he had won it by heroic courage and suffering. The very life-blood of Christianity is the spirit of sacrifice. The root of decay begins with self-indulgence and ease. The curse of lukewarmness is destroying the vital power of religion. The greatest need of modern missions is a heroic spirit both in the workers abroad and the supporters at home. Oh, for a revival of the spirit of Moriah

and Calvary's cross!

"O Love that gave Thy life for me,

Help me to live and love like Thee

And kindle in this heart of mine

The passion fire of love divine.

"Make duty joy and suffering sweet

As both are laid at Jesus' feet,

And kindle in this heart of mine

The passion fire of love divine."

IV. He Gloried in His Divine Revelations

What a disclosure he gives us of the high honor confided to him by the Lord! "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago (whether in the body I cannot tell or whether out of the body I cannot tell): God knows such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man (whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell: God knows) . How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." And this was no isolated instance, for he lived in the society of heaven. Again and again the Master's presence was vouchsafed for him in the critical moments of his life, and the Lord stood by him with words of encouragement and promise and with His mighty interposing providences.

What an honor men and women count it to be presented to an earthly king, perhaps once in a lifetime, and it is handed down to many generations as a family record! How the ambitious literary aspirants of the day covet the honor of telling of the friendship of a Gladstone, a Tennyson or some distinguished name, but Paul had the privilege of many an audience with the very Court of Heaven and with the Sovereign of the universe. Indeed, he could always claim such an audience, and by the telephone of prayer connect without limitation with the heart of God. This is the highest honor that God can give to mortals, and "such honor have all His saints."

The apostle refers here to some special revelations from the Lord. God has already spoken to us through His word, and we are not to wait for private revelations to know His will. And yet He does speak to the individual heart, making the things of God intensely real, for "eye has not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." Such revelations as God sometimes makes to the waiting hearts of His children are not intended for other ears. The apostle distinctly says that what he heard was not lawful for a man to utter.

Let us not make the mistake of exposing the secrets of the Lord and confusing the hearts of His humble people with things which perhaps God only meant for you.

V. He Gloried in His Temptations and Their Compensations

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might not depart from me. And He said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, 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. 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."

The revelations which came to Paul were so extraordinary that there was danger of his mind becoming unbalanced, and therefore God gave, as a balance wheel to him, severe temptations. One particular test was permitted which is somewhat obscure in its exact character. It was "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him." It may have been physical, it certainly was partly spiritual, and the effect of it was much humiliation. He asked the Lord for its removal, and he continued to ask again and yet again. But at length the answer came. God would not take away the trial, but would send additional strength through it and would be more to him than if the trial had been removed. Thereupon the apostle accepted it as a blessing in disguise and began to praise God for it, and even to glory in the very infirmities, reproaches and distress which seemed to hinder, but which became the occasion rather "for the power of Christ to rest upon him."

The transformation of trial into blessing is one of the deepest mysteries of God's providence and grace. In the realm of nature we have many illustrations of bringing good out of evil. They say that the song bird will not learn its notes in the sunlight, but its cage has to be darkened, and then, separated from the distracting sights and sounds of the world, it listens to its lesson and it learns its beautiful melody. So God has to put us into the place of silence and gloom to teach us the everlasting song.

It is a well-known secret that electric power is produced by friction. Go to a great powerhouse and there you will see the cylinders revolving against strong pressure, and out of the pressure comes the electric fire. So God develops spiritual power in our lives through the pressure of hard places.

Trial reveals us to ourselves and shows us our weakness and nothingness. Then it reveals Christ to us and shows us His infinite resources until we hear Him saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Trial develops and brings to perfection the fruits of the Spirit, deepening the soil and cultivating the garden of the great Husbandman and bringing forth the sweetness and the strength of His grace. And trial brings to us the power of God and presents to the world the amazing spectacle of a soul elevated above all surrounding circumstances and conditions, in the hardest places, and yet able to say, "Sorrowful but always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing and yet possessing all things."

"It is easy enough to be pleasant

When life goes by with a song,

But the man worthwhile is the man who can smile

When everything goes dead wrong.

"For the heart is tested by trouble

And it grows with the passing years;
And the smile that is worth all the treasures of earth
Is the smile that shines through our tears."

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