

Day 110, 2 Corinthians 12

by David Servant

Paul's weakness was an opportunity for God to show His strength, and we can trust in God to manifest His power in our lives.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 12:7-12, Galatians 5:19

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Godly Humility"

Description

David Servant preaches about Paul's struggle to win back the hearts of the Corinthian believers from false apostles, highlighting Paul's humility despite receiving heavenly revelations and a 'thorn in the flesh' to prevent pride. The 'thorn in the flesh' was not sickness but an angel of Satan tormenting Paul, leading him to depend on the Lord and manifest Christ's power in weakness. Paul's weaknesses were opportunities for God to display His strength, emphasizing that when we are weak, God's strength is made perfect.

Transcript

What a struggle Paul had as he worked to win back the hearts of the Corinthian believers who had been duped by false apostles. He was loathe to boast about himself---knowing that he was a "nobody" yet also "in no respect inferior to the most eminent apostles"---but he felt that he had no other option. So we find him writing of a man whom he knew---surely speaking of himself---who "was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words" and received "surpassing revelations" (12:4, 7). It was such a sacred event to Paul that it was not something he readily shared.

The potential for Paul to be lifted up in pride because of his heavenly journey and wonderful revelations was apparently so great that God took significant measures to make sure that he would not exalt himself. Paul was given a "thorn in the flesh" (12:7), clearly a figurative expression.

This passage has unfortunately been used to rob sick Christians of faith to be healed. May I point out that Paul never said that he was ill, he never said that he asked God to heal him, and he never said that God would not heal him. Paul clearly revealed what his "thorn in the flesh" was, calling it "a messenger of Satan." The word translated "messenger" in 12:7 is the Greek word *aggelos*, which is translated 168 times in the New Testament as "angel" and only 7 times as "messenger." Paul's thorn in the flesh was an angel of Satan sent to torment him. Paul asked the Lord three times that "it" might leave him, but the Lord denied his request, which would make sense if it was the Lord who originally permitted the angel to torment Paul in order to prevent him from exalting himself.

How exactly that angel of Satan tormented Paul we are not told, but the result was that Paul found himself weak and needing to depend on the Lord, so that the "power of Christ" was manifested in him. I suspect that tormenting angel was responsible for much of the persecution that was stirred up against Paul, as he referred in this same passage to the weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, and difficulties that he experienced, problems that made him weak, but that ultimately resulted in his being strong, since God's "power is perfected in weakness" (12:9-10). Notice that there is no mention of sickness in Paul's list of difficulties here; nor was sickness mentioned in Paul's earlier list of his various sufferings listed in 11:23-33.

I have two final questions for those who still cling to the idea that Paul's thorn in the flesh was some sickness or disease, using it as their reason to remain sick: "How many journeys to heaven have you experienced that make it necessary for God to keep you from exalting yourself by means of your sickness?" And, "If God wants you to remain sick, why are you going to a doctor or taking medication to thwart God's will?" (I rest my case!)

It is good to always remember that what God said to Paul is true for us all. Our weakness is an opportunity for God to show His strength. When our own resources are inadequate, God's resources are unlimited! We can thus say with Paul, "When I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). When you feel lousy, God feels great! So trust in Him!

Note Paul's contrast of himself and the false apostles: "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you...by signs and wonders and miracles" (12:12). That would seem to indicate that not a few of the modern "apostles," whose greatest sign or wonder is pushing someone over in a prayer line, are not apostles at all.

In spite of Titus' good report, it is obvious that Paul remained apprehensive that his upcoming visit to Corinth might uncover "strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes...impurity, immorality and sensuality" (12:20-21), sins that, according to Paul himself, will prevent people from inheriting God's kingdom (Gal. 5:19-21). This reveals the real root of the problem in Corinth. Goats, by nature, don't act like sheep. And goats don't belong with sheep. A showdown was on the horizon.

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