

2 Corinthians 12:9-21

“Spending And Being Spent”

We left off last week at the point of Paul’s pleading with the Lord 3 times that He might relieve him, that is take from him the “thorn in the flesh” that messenger of Satan given to buffet him lest he be exalted above measure. Oh I have no doubt that initially he didn’t know why he was being afflicted and that’s why he sought the Lord so passionately concerning it. You recall that Paul was speaking of a vision that he’d had, a revelation that God had given him, an experience whereby he was “caught up” into the 3rd heaven. He was taken (whether in the body or out of the body he wasn’t certain) into the presence, the very dwelling place of God. and It was so staggering, so breath taking, so beyond description concerning the words of human vocabulary that he didn’t even try to describe what he saw, and what he heard he said he couldn’t even repeat. He said that he heard words that were so inexpressible that it would’ve been unlawful, like unto sin for him to try and articulate it, there was that much of a gap between the words at his disposal Vs the words that he heard and the things that he saw. and It’s not difficult to see how a man could get a bit inflated having had a 1st person perspective of the very dwelling place of God, I mean what kinda man gets that kinda privilege? **and So lest he be exalted above measure God gave to him a thorn in the flesh, some sort of incredibly painful, reoccurring physical infirmity to balance him out. The revelation he’d had was 2nd to none, yet God was going to keep him humble, because it’s humility that equals “use-ability” and what use is it to have all this revelation and insight if God can’t use you?** But initially Paul didn’t realize why this affliction was upon him, why when he prayed God didn’t simply heal him or take it from him. and So he prayed and he pleaded with the Lord over and over and over again that he might take it from him.

Hey, it’s only right, if you’re undergoing some sort of affliction, some infirmity that’s got you down, or is bringing you low and you’re not sure what’s going on or why it’s even happening. **Pray and seek the Lord, plead with the Lord, over and over and over again until you hear from the Lord regarding it one way or another. Until He removes it or informs you as to why it is that He’s ordained you to bear it. I’m sure that Paul initially saw it as a hindrance to his service to the Lord, something that slowed him down, he couldn’t see it from God’s perspective.** I mean, “How does this help?” I don’t know maybe it doesn’t maybe it’s a hindrance, pray, ask the Lord to remove it, and He just might. That’s one way of lightening a load that we’re bearing, by simply removing it. But there’s another way and that’s by strengthening the shoulder that’s bearing up under it.

But here’s the deal Paul didn’t simply sit there with a “whatever I guess if it happens it must be God’s will” type of a mentality. He sought the Lord, until he heard from the Lord one way or another. If you’re going through a tough time, perhaps a physical infirmity, maybe you’re being absolutely drained emotionally, and it’s robbing you spiritually, you feel paralyzed or sterilized in your service to the Lord like it’s weighing you down. You pray and seek the Lord, and you keep seeking the Lord until A) He removes it from you, or B) He gives insight regarding it to you. Don’t sit there while the waves of warfare are crashing upon you with out direction or understanding what to do. He may remove it from you, with Paul He had a different plan.

Vs9

and This is the principle that we closed with last week. The Lord revealed to Paul that the diamond of His strength, His power, shined forth most brightly against the black velvet backdrop of human frailty.

Now I somehow doubt that this was the answer that Paul was looking for or even expecting. But God had an answer for him nonetheless, how often God answers us, but because He doesn't answer us the way we want Him to we turn a deaf ear to Him. But instead of removing this "thorn" from Paul's life, God *had* given, and would continue to give Paul His *grace*. He said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength in made perfect in weakness." and Man this goes against the grain of all that we are as Americans doesn't it? But here's the news flash, God's *not* an American. As a matter of fact most Americans have a lot of pride, something that God radically resists. Americans have a tendency to "idolize" the "self made man" "I did it my way" and all of that. We want to rely on ourselves, but here's the deal; we can't receive *God's strength* until we're readily aware of *our weakness*. **You see we really don't believe that God's grace is sufficient until we believe ourselves to be insufficient. and Often times it's through the means of affliction and infirmity that we're brought to the radical realization of our own insufficiency, our need to depend upon God totally.**

and The idea here is that of an ongoing process, it's a linear though, "My strength is *being* made perfect in *your* weakness." In other words they're directly proportionate, to the degree I realize and acknowledge my weakness, to that same degree the strength and power of Christ will rest upon my life. **The more I rely upon myself or see myself as someone who is strong and of little to no need, the less the strength of Christ will be at work in my life. In other words if I'm relying on myself Jesus won't interrupt me, but if I'll just step back and say, "Lord I can't do it, I don't know what to do or how I need to do it." Jesus will be more than happy, He even desires to step in and take over, we just need to be out of the way.** John the Baptist put it like this, "*He must increase, but I must decrease.*" John 3:30 I need to get out of the way, so that Christ can have His way in my life, but unfortunately sometimes the only tool that will get us out of the way, cause us to realize that we're not all that, is some sort of affliction or infirmity that reminds us of our humanity and humbles us before the Lord. **and We begin to cry out to the Lord, we have to lean fully on the Lord, and the Lord says, "Now you're right where I want you, out of the way, now My strength can be seen in you, because all that's apparent in you is weakness."**

and He says, "My grace is sufficient for you." What a precious promise to *lean on* and *draw from*. Man you can highlight or emphasize any aspect of that phrase you like and just be blessed. For instance He says, "My *grace* is sufficient for you." "Grace" the unmerited, undeserved favor of God, every resource that you or I may need to function and excel in this life regarding godliness and fruitful living is funneled into our lives through the means of God's grace. **We serve a God of grace, the book of Hebrews refers to the Holy Spirit as the "Spirit of grace." We're encouraged to come boldly before the "throne of grace" that we might obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. and The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of *grace* and truth.**

And of His fullness we have all received, and *grace* for *grace*. Jesus doesn't want you to run today on yesterday's grace, He has a fresh supply for you today, He exchanges grace for grace everyday. His mercies are new every morning. For the law was given through Moses, but *grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ. "My *grace* is sufficient for you."

Look at it again, "My grace is sufficient for you." Who's grace, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, if it were "my" grace we could all scoff, what could my grace possibly accomplish for anybody? But when Jesus says those words they take on a whole new meaning, it's His grace, how can He possibly fail at anything, in what way will He not be there for me in His faithfulness to me. Hey if there's anyone who knows a thing or 2 about thorns it's Him, He cares, He knows, and He gives His grace.

Here's a precious part that we don't want to miss, "My grace is sufficient for you." It's sufficient right now, it's not that it will be some day, or that you remember how it once was. Jesus is here for you, desiring to dispense His grace into/out through and all around you right now for whatever you're going through. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "It is easy to believe in grace for the past and the future, but to rest in it for the immediate necessity is true faith. Believer, it is now that grace is sufficient: even at this moment it is enough for thee."

Consider the next aspect, "My grace is sufficient for you." Alan Redpath said this, "Do you see the humor of the situation? God's grace: me. His grace sufficient for little me! How absurd to think that it could ever be any different! As if a little fish could swim in the ocean and fear lest it might drink it dry! The grace of our crucified, risen, exalted, triumphant Savior, the Lord of all glory, is surely sufficient for me! Do you not think it is rather modest of the Lord to say sufficient?" I think that the resources of the Creator God of all the universe are satisfactory, don't you?

Then finally, "My grace is sufficient for you," He didn't say, "My grace is sufficient for Paul the apostle," and I for one am really glad about that or else I may not've been certain how I fit into the equation, if there was grace there for me. But Jesus intentionally leaves it broad enough, His grace is sufficient "for you," for you right where you're at. You're not beyond it, you're not any different, your thorn isn't any worse than countless others down through the ages have endured affliction and walked in triumph by the grace of Jesus Christ His grace is sufficient "for you."

and Jesus wants us readily aware of our weakness so that His strength can shine forth from us, "For My strength is made perfect in weakness." and So Paul says, "Why then would I want to brag on my personal abilities, spiritual experiences or anything like that? Those things only quench the glory of God and hinder the strength of Jesus, they make me the focus. Paul says, "I'm going to boast in my infirmities, those things that reduce me to nothing and leave me as it were "lying helpless on the floor" before the Lord. Why? Because it's there that the power of Christ is at rest upon me." Or is "overshadowing" me; you guys I'm going to let you in on a little secret. Many believers long for the day that they "grow" to a point whereby they don't really struggle with trials, or temptations, or the turbulence of this life. They long for a day when they're spiritual "supermen" and the wiles of the wicked one, the thorns that plague this fleshly tent bounce off their chest like the bullets off of superman's body. Listen, that day is an illusion, it's never going to happen, and when you get to heaven there won't be any troubles or temptations.

But until then God will keep you mindful of your weaknesses, because the only strength He wants funneled through you is His own. and That can't happen as long as we're fighting our own battles thinking we've got this one covered. I don't have anything covered, I want the strength of Jesus covering my every move. Again Redpath said, "God works through the man who has been wiped clean and turned inside out, his life emptied before the Lord until he is hopelessly weak, that no flesh might glory in His presence."

Vs10

Jesus would have us come to that point whereby we actually realize that He meant what He said when He said, "*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*" John 15:5 But praise God the opposite of that is then equally true, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" Phil 4:13 "When I am weak, then I am strong." So Paul says I'm going to glory in those things that make for my weakness because that's when the door is blown wide open for Jesus to magnify and glorify Himself, to show Himself strong on my behalf. So we're confronted with the question of where our pleasure truly lies, in the things of the flesh, the things that comfort us or serve our own agenda? Or the things of the Spirit, those things that serve and/or make for a means to serve the Lord's agenda and see Him exalted through our lives?

Vs11-13

Now in keeping the context we remember that there are these other guys in the mix of the Corinthians that are these self proclaimed apostles. and They're there ripping off the people, robbing them of their resources, speaking of these great and wondrous things they've been apart of and slamming on the apostle Paul. and They're leading the believers astray. So when Paul speaks of not being burdensome to them it's a direct reference to not taking their money, not charging them to minister the gospel to them. and It's a bit of biting sarcasm when he in essence says, "Excuse me!" I'm sorry that I didn't take your money, forgive me for that.

and I don't want you to think that it was Paul's common practice to refuse support from a fellowship, he received support multiple times from multiple fellowships and thanked God for it all. But the Corinthians weren't of a mature enough mindset to be able to support him without thinking the worst of him. I mean he didn't take anything and they're turning that on him, man if he'd have received support they'd have really found something to hold over him. and Really that's what he's saying when he says, "In what way were you inferior to other churches?" Well the answer is that they weren't, yet he says, "I wasn't burdensome to you," "I didn't let you contribute to my ministry." and Really he's saying that's the way that they were inferior, they weren't of the right heart to be able to give and have it accredited to their account in the kingdom. Because Paul quite frankly wasn't interested in the money for the money's sake. The fact is that it's good and right for us to give. I believe it was Adam Clarke who said, "Those who don't contribute their part to the support of the gospel ministry either care nothing for it, or derive no good from it." Which is pretty harsh but probably true, but it wasn't simply support that Paul was into. He genuinely was excited for the eternal investment people were making and the fruit that it would bear to their account.

Remember he told the Philippians, “*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.*” Phil 4:15-17 I mean yeah it was a definite blessing for the apostle Paul, but the true reward would be seen on the other side regarding what their gift accomplished for the kingdom, that’s what excited the apostle. But with the Corinthians Paul knew that if he received any support from them it would only come back to haunt him so he refused it, he didn’t want to stain the name of Christ over money.

Back in Vs 11 he says, “Man I feel like an idiot even sharing what I have, I shouldn’t have to do this, but rather than commend me (defend me) you guys compel me to share and show my qualifications as an apostle.” Those guys were slamming on Paul and the Corinthians didn’t defend his integrity, stand by him or commend his authenticity...How careful we need to be when it comes to this kind of thing. You’re standing there in a group, or beside a group and the conversation is going on, someone talking trash about your bro, or sister in Christ; now what do you do? The bible is replete with warnings and exhortations against gossips, or whisperers, backbiters, it’s of the flesh and mouths like that need to be silenced. Don’t be apart of it, or go one farther and be an active voice in calling it out and shutting it down. Because if that person isn’t there to bring clarity, or understanding, or perhaps the balance to what you’ve heard, maybe it’s true and they need to repent, doesn’t matter, all that’s going on in that circle is hearsay and it’s sin. So how does that make you (or me) in that case any better, or any different? These guys should’ve had Paul’s back, but instead they were backbiting.

He says, “How am I lacking in any way compared to these ‘super spiritual apostles’ who are there?”

But notice again how quickly he qualifies that statement, “Though I am nothing.” He hasn’t spent all this time trying to get them to see it’s not about men and their credentials to now try and get them to acknowledge him as a worthy leader. He wants them to see Christ. He’s saying, “I’m nothing we all know that, I’m but a weak and frail human being, but the power of Christ in me is undeniable, truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you.” What were the signs of an apostle? Well, apart from having seen the risen Lord (which Paul had) he mentions here “signs” which is a reference to perceiving something and making a logical resolve, everything points to the legitimacy of who he is, there’s no reason to doubt him. “Wonders,” the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit through his life, things unexplainable outside the intervention of God, (the miraculous). and “Mighty deeds” it’s the word “dunamis” speaking of the inherent abiding power of the Holy Spirit with in him. and Again this shows us the fact of the book of Acts not being a complete record because we don’t read of any miracle performed through Paul while he was in Corinth yet he makes it clear here that mighty deeds and miraculous wonders happened and they all knew it. So the idea here is, “It’s undeniable that Christ is at work *in* me, so you should give ear *to* me and trust what I’m telling you.” As opposed to blowing him off and believing what the scam artists among them are telling them.

Vs14-15

Most of us can probably identify to an extent with that, wanting nothing more than the best for someone, or a group of people yet the more you love them the less they reciprocate that in return. But in this Paul becomes an example for us all, because why are we in it anyway? Why do we serve the Lord? Is it for what I can extract out of it? Or what I can add, and hopefully contribute to it by allowing Him to use me to be a vessel of blessing to others. **You see Paul says, “I’m not serving you for what I can get out of you, it’s not yours that I’m after, it’s you.” and Really that’s the heart of Christ toward everyone of us. So often we think that God wants what we have, “Lord you can have my abilities, you can have my money, you can have this, or that.”** and That’s all great, but what God really wants is *you* and not just part of you, He wants all of you. You see does He have the fullness of (not what you have) but of who you are, your whole heart, that’s what He’s after.

and He says here, “When I come this time I’m not going to be a burden again, I won’t receive any money for my ministry, because the children shouldn’t be laying up for the parents, but the parents for the children.” Now again this isn’t really a compliment to them, he’s saying they haven’t grown to the point whereby he’s ready to receive their support knowing that it came from a pure heart and right motives. But that’s not a point of resentment to him, it really wasn’t about the money. He’d come a minister for nothing. He says, “I’ll very gladly spend, and be spent for your souls.” He saw it as his opportunity to *bless them*, to give *to them*. You see we can give in various ways, the question is do we resent it when we do? Paul was willing to spend and to be spent for them, gladly; though his work among them was really quite frankly unappreciated. How do I know if I’m willing to gladly spend and be spent for people’s spiritual well being? **A good measure is how does it effect me when my giving is unappreciated? Or better yet when my contribution to that function, or a particular outreach or ministry is criticized? Do I resent it, do I allow it to set me back and shut me down, “Forget it then I’ll never do that again, I resent that!”** Well, than I’m not willing to spend and to be spent for your soul, because if I’m not appreciated count me out. Wow, I’m glad Jesus didn’t take that approach, talk about someone who was willing to spend and be spent for our souls! Was it appreciated?

Well if you call being beaten beyond recognition, all your friends forsaking you, nailed to a cross and a spear thrust through your side “appreciation.” Yet He was glad to spend and to be spent for our souls. Talk about strength being made perfect in weakness, the power of God unto salvation being perfected in the weakness of the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world. **Paul says, “Man I can’t catch a break from you guys, but that’s ok I’m just going to keep loving you, and serving you, spending and being spent for your souls, even if the more I love you, the less you love me.”** Pretty heavy heart check for you and me.

Vs16

He’s like, “C’mon you guys, you really believe this stuff.” It seems that his opponents there in Corinth were like, “Paul’s just tricky, he says he’s not about the money yet he’s receiving this large collection for the ‘poor saints in Jerusalem.’”

So that he won't be implicated in it he sends Titus to take the money and then in the next town they're living it up!" So here in Vs 16 he's all, "You've got to be kidding me! Do you really think that's what I'm about, being crafty, catching you by cunning!?"

Vs17-18

In other words, "The record stands, no one I've sent to you has received a dime from you, we were of one heart inwardly (same spirit) and ministered in like manner outwardly (same steps)." Unity in ministry is a must, can 2 walk together lest they be agreed? No way, that's why we need to be of one heart and one mind in the Lord.

Vs19

You see this is where we want to be, other's oriented. He tells them, "Don't think I'm sitting here making excuses before you, I don't have anything to excuse, we're telling you like it is before God, the things I'm saying, the things I'm sharing, my goal in serving is for but 1 thing, *your* edification." Paul didn't do these things for his health, or because he somehow enjoyed being scorned, ridiculed, mocked, made fun of or unappreciated. He did what he did because he wanted to edify, that is build up and promote the spiritual health and well being of the body of Christ. Even if it was at the cost of his personal comfort or well being, whether he was liked, loved, appreciated or not really wasn't the point. *The point was to encourage and strengthen the body of Christ, God help us to come to that place whereby we're so totally out of the picture that the consideration of ourselves or how we "feel" about something doesn't even factor in to the equation. But "Will it build up the body of Christ? Will it promote the health and well being of the body of Christ? Than I'm on."*

Vs20-21

His heart is to help, not hinder, he doesn't want this 3rd trip to go sour. and Just so they know what he's speaking of he makes it clear, "Contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults." Seems like people will believe anything if you just whisper it to them. *and Paul is making it clear that if he doesn't find them as he would like (having dealt with these issues and repented) they'll find him as they won't like, because he'll have to deal with it. When it speaks of him mourning there's a bit of debate as to what exactly that means, does he simply mean that it'll humble him to find them unrepentant instead of responsive and that he'll find himself mourning over their unrepentant sin?* It's possible certainly the heart of any shepherd will mourn over the sin of the unrepentant. But it's also a word that speaks of mourning for the dead. and We're reminded of Ananias and Sapphira, not repenting of their sin and literally being struck dead in the presence of the apostle Peter.

and Paul may be saying, "I don't want that to happen, I don't want to find myself at your funeral because you wouldn't repent and God decides to clean house." The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, how important it is to repent of revealed sin and walk in the Spirit, bearing the fruits of repentance. Humbling ourselves before God, judging ourselves that we be not judged. *Why wait for God to deal with us? How much better to simply acknowledge our sin, confess it, forsake it and be forgiven of it walking in repentance and the newness of life. Paul said back in Vs 20 that he feared that when he came they wouldn't be found as he wished. When I read that I thought "Lord, when *You* come, I want to be found as *You* wish, a good and faithful servant busy about My Master's work."*

Prayer Points:

God help us to heed Your Word, Your conviction, to be a people of repentance, walking in true humility. and Be there jealousies, or whisperings, backbitings or contentions among us, God convict us, may we turn from those things and be a people well pleasing to You, that we might be useable to You. and Father once again we want to acknowledge Your grace and the sufficiency there it to meet our every need. May Your power, Your strength be evident in our lives.

Every blessing, every benefit that God has for you is found in Christ and is dispensed through grace, it's by grace that you're saved, through faith, and even that not of yourself it's the gift of God, we can't work for it or somehow earn it God does the whole thing. and He wants to do it in your life if you'll but let Him. If you've not given your heart to Christ why not call upon Him today, receive His grace and be forgiven of your sin.