

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

July 12, 2015 – 7<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

## God's Grace Is Sufficient for You

† thorns given (v.7)

† prayers received (v.8)

† power in weakness (vv.9-10)

Dear saints of God's all-Sufficient Grace, "*God sends his love and his faithfulness.*" (Psalm 57:3 NIV84)

A friend of mine was telling how his girlfriend could run for miles and barely break a sweat. One day he decided to go along, get in better shape. She could not understand why he got tired after a mile or two. He tried to explain, "I weigh 230; you're 98 dripping wet!" Still no compute for her 'til a few weeks later. She bought a weight vest and added a few pounds. Now 15 pounds isn't much for a 200 plus man. But it's over 15% of the body weight of the 98 pounder. He told me, "She barely made it home!"

It's easy to run without getting tired. Same as I run up and down tall buildings in Minneapolis – until I wake up from my dream. Dreaming or talking are much the same, and talk is cheap. We need to learn God's talk is not cheap. With Paul each of us needs to learn: **God's Grace Is Sufficient for You.**

† thorns given (v.7)

Read 1 and 2 Corinthians this week. You hear lots of cheap talk in that congregation of talented people. Some evangelists showed up wanting to be their pastor. "Why worry about Paul? He's always traveling. Not much of a speaker. Look at him! Not real impressive, is he?"

Paul's first letter dealt with some major issues in doctrine and practice. This can turn people off looking for a church. They want peaceful places where pastors say what they want to hear. Like a comment I saw this week by Charles Spurgeon, "the prince of English preachers." Let me paraphrase: "*I looked to find the perfect church...And thought I found it too. But then the members said to me, 'We's perfect until you.'*" We'd all have to say, "That church was perfect until I joined."

In Corinth they argued about the perfect pastor. Paul had to correct that and point them to Christ. He wanted to visit, but when he didn't get there as planned, tongues were wagging. They couldn't jump in a car, hop a plane, or even take a fast boat. Walking and sailing ships were all the rage. So Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians is the defense of his Gospel ministry. For the sake of their souls, he has to answer his critics. But how do you do that in a humble, Christ-like way? Especially when Paul had seen visions of heaven and was so knowledgeable as a highly trained Jewish rabbi?

**God's Grace Is Sufficient in thorns given.** Only a believer could consider something like this a gift: "*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*"

Paul had to answer the braggarts with some boasting of his own. (11:1-30) He was like a farmer teaching a boy who knows everything how to drive a tractor. "Dad, I know. I know." Ten minutes later, he's stuck. And Dad is down there in the mud helping him out. So Paul got down and dirty to rescue God's people from false apostles. None of them had "*visions and revelations*" from God that took them up to "*the third heaven...paradise.*" Paul heard "*inexpressible things that a man is not permitted to tell.*" (12:1-6) He will "*boast about a man like that,*" but not himself by name. God gave him "*a thorn in the flesh,*" to stay focused on Christ. Champions of hard fought fights are like that. God's all-Sufficient Grace shines brightest in the darkest night. It would get darker for Paul before the morning light.

## † prayers received (v.8)

We actually don't know what his *"thorn in the flesh"* really was. That helps us all relate. Whatever it was, Paul was sure he would be better off without it. He's not looking to spend the summer sipping tall cool ones by the lake. Paul just wants to be the best pastor he can for God's people, the clearest witness of God's love for Gentiles over land and sea with the Gospel. Maybe you've been there too, wanting to be a better father or mother, son or daughter, worker or student, citizen or politician. God-fearing people all have some *"thorn in the flesh."* And the "super apostle" pastors will tell their bursting congregations to just believe better – and that problem will be gone. Every promise of God is just a "name-it-and-claim-it" proposition. Supposedly, if you have enough faith, all your problems are over!

It just didn't work that way for the Apostle Paul. God allowed the enemy from hell, Satan, to make life miserable – physically, emotionally, spiritually – pounding hard on Paul. *"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me."* Something wrong with Paul's prayer? Did He need penance or more sincerity? No, no and no – none of the above. We all can be confident that all our we ask in the name of Jesus our Savior are **prayers received**. *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."* (4:16 NIV84)

## † power in weakness (vv.9-10)

This always reminds me of my favorite coach. Do you think he let us go over and sit down on the bleachers because we were tired? "Are your football pads too heavy? They must weigh fifteen pounds!" One Fall day in South Dakota, the public school was let out because it was over 100 degrees. We had football practice. And just to keep everything even, one of the young teachers put on shoulder pads and came out on the field to knock some heads together, just in case anyone thought it was too hard. Our treat that day was lots of salt tablets. But here I am bragging about that like some kind of trophy. Isn't that how it is when the victory's won?

It's as if God was saying, "Paul, I hear you, but I have a better plan. Ready for this? *My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.* Until you're really weak, I can't make you strong. Until you die to yourself, I can't give you life. Until I empty you of yourself, I can't fill you with my grace and wisdom. As long as you're stuck on your own strength, I can't give you mine. But when your resources are all used up, you'll see. **My Grace Is Sufficient for You.**"

That's how Paul could deal humbly, but effectively with false apostles. "Firmness with meekness from above" (TLH 490:3<sup>1</sup>) is what the hymn writer called it. Tough lesson, but Paul was better for learning. And we are still blessed because God was so determined to teach him. Paul passed: *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*

*"I delight in weaknesses* because I can pray better when I'm not so sure of my own strength. *I delight in insults* because I know I'm standing with Christ who was insulted and crucified for me. *I delight in hardships* because in narrow tribulations I see Jesus breaking the way wide open to heaven. *I delight in persecutions* because that's how unbelievers treated God's faithful apostles and prophets. *I delight in difficulties* because they're like a mud hole where God's four-wheel-drive **Grace** proves its power in His all-sufficient, undeserved love for me. Hard lesson, yes, but I and my loved ones are better off to know: *"When I am weak, then I am strong."*

Years ago a guest preacher told a story shared by one of our elders. It was about a sheep that kept wandering away. The shepherd tried everything to keep it close, but it was constantly endangering itself and leading other sheep and lambs away with it. Finally the good shepherd had no choice. He took the stubborn sheep and broke one of its legs. He carried it in His arms until it healed. It never walked well again, but was always limping at the shepherd's side. We're safer here my dears. **God's Grace Is Sufficient for You** – limping at the

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<sup>1</sup> James Montgomery, TLH 490:3.

W.P ~ Wartburg Project translation in popular review. Other Scriptures: NIV84.

Audio: [www.wels.us/newlife](http://www.wels.us/newlife) . Preacher's Apprentice: [m.cordes@comast.net](mailto:m.cordes@comast.net) .

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Shepherd's side. Stay close to Jesus and you will always be looking into the smiling face of God. Amen.