

Dear fellow redeemed,

It was 1997 when musician Daniel Powter decided to try his hand at song writing. He had dropped out of college at the age of 20 to play music, but felt like he could do more. In 2002, he had a melody that was running through his head that he just couldn't shake. At that point, the lyrics weren't there. In fact, Powter would later say that "up and poppy" lyrics would make it "the cheesiest song of all time."

And so, thinking of himself as a struggling musician, he decided to give the song a more negative subject matter, writing the lyrics in the course of an hour-long ferry ride between Victoria and Vancouver, British Columbia. He produced the song in 2002 and pitched it to multiple record labels. It was rejected by every single one. Disappointed, he returned to Vancouver to move on because: "once a record company says no, it's difficult to come around again".

You know, as Americans, we love the rags to riches, pull yourself up by your bootstraps, overcome all odds to succeed type stories. They encourage us, inspire us, motivate us, even. But let's be honest: How many of us would knowingly, willingly go from riches to rags in order to have the chance to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps, or give up everything to stack the odds against ourselves, just to have the opportunity overcome the odds. I mean, as Jesus put it in Matthew 6, doesn't ***each day have enough trouble of its own?*** (Mt. 6:34)

And yet, I have to admit that, as I look back at my life, for all of my problems and challenges and bad days, ♦ God has blessed me (and I dare say blessed all of us) with grace-filled lives. Oh, I know, we look at the lives of biblical bootstrappers and overcomers like Noah, Moses, Ruth, Elijah, and Paul and we say to ourselves, "Wouldn't it be great to experience the wonders and miracles they saw? If I saw what they saw, experienced what they experienced, that would set me up no matter how bad my day was." You can begin to understand the boasting Paul talks about in our text.

Ah, but then we take a closer look at those lives so worth boasting about and realize that we really wouldn't want to knowingly, willingly go from riches to rags or give up everything to stack the odds against ourselves, just to have the opportunity to witness what they did, to perform the things that they did. And while there are plenty of examples in Scripture, we need look no further than Jonah from our first reading today, or better yet, the Apostle Paul from our second reading.

Sure, Paul is considered the greatest of the apostles, performer of miracles, but look at his list of tough days:

*I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. <sup>29</sup> Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?*

Yikes! All of a sudden my life, your life, sounds pretty good, huh? You know, when Daniel Powter was dealing with his disappointment after being rejected by so many record labels, he remembered some advice from his grandfather. "My granddad used to say to me, 'There's better people who are worse off than you,' and I always remember that."

I hear people say that a lot. And quite frankly, we just did that with the Apostle Paul's life. But Paul's point in sharing his struggles is not about saying to you, "Hey, buddy, just think: Your life could be as bad as mine." That doesn't make anyone actually feel better. No, you need to look at his reason for boasting to feel better. You need to look at Jesus Christ.

You see, regardless of what life brings, Paul's boasting, my boasting, ♦ your boasting, is not about what we've overcome, but what Christ has overcome...for you. Our sins, our

failures, cannot be overcome by our bootstraps. Overcoming the odds of our struggles, our challenges, on our own, is not just a statistical impossibility, like 1 in a trillion. No, they are an eternal impossibility with the only outcome being eternal destruction in hell.

This is what Jesus has overcome. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ***The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (1 Co 15:56,57) ***You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*** (2 Co 8:9) It was Jesus' "boots" that crushed Satan and Jesus' feet under which the Father ***has put everything.*** (1 Co 15:27) It is Jesus who stands in opposition to the odds, ***guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.*** (Ep 1:14) I mean, with all of this, by grace, through faith, how can we possibly have a bad day?!

And yet they come, don't they? And we question why, don't we? And we focus on the odds stacked against us, riches we don't have, and the weakness of our bootstraps...don't we? But consider what Paul says at the end of our text, ***If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*** You see, God allows the bad days, the struggles, the challenges to reveal who we are in him. One author puts it this way: Take a grain of sand. In the eye, a grain of sand is first an irritant that, if left in the eye, becomes an infection, and eventually the loss of sight. Yet that same grain of sand in an oyster is first an irritant, then concretion, and eventually produces what? A pearl.

I ask you, did the sand cause the results in the human eye, did the sand cause the results in the oyster? No, the sand is the irritant. If that weren't the case, the next time you get sand in your eye you have to be careful or a pearl would pop out. We all realize how ridiculous that would be. The sand isn't the cause. Rather, it reveals the inner properties of the eye and the oyster.

You see, these crosses that Jesus calls on us to bear, these trials, these struggles, these challenges...they aren't the *cause* of anything good, ♦ rather they are the opportunity God

uses to reveal *his* inner properties in *you*. Again, Paul says, ***I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*** And why? Because, just as the good Lord told Paul in the midst of struggle, ***My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*** (2 Co 12:9) ***Indeed we share in [Christ's] sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory...[for]...our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*** (Ro 8:18)

Eventually, Daniel Powter found himself with a new producer. That producer shared the song with an executive from Warner Bros. Records, securing a contract in 2003. From there, the song climbed the charts first in Europe, and ultimately was a triple-platinum song in the US, hitting the top of *Billboard's Hot 100* in February of 2006. Since then it has won numerous awards, been performed across the globe, according to Powter himself the song has become *everyone's song*," and ultimately, probably gained its highest prominence as the elimination theme song for Fox's hit talent show *American Idol*. Its title? *Bad Day*. Maybe you know it:

*You had a bad day  
You're taking one down  
You sing a sad song just to turn it around*

Interestingly enough, the song isn't about how bad life can be. Rather, it is about how one responds to adversity. And if a songwriter from Vancouver can find secular motivation for *turn[ing] it around*, how much more so can we – redeemed, restored, children of God – how much more can we overcome our bad days, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus in the sure and certain hope that in him, we will overcome. No, it may not be in this world, but will be in the eternal life to come. For the same Jesus who calls on us to ***deny [ourselves] and take up [our] cross daily and follow [him]*** (Lk 9:23) also assures us ***"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. ♦ In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*** (Jn 16:33) Amen.

## Main points:

- 1) God has blessed you with a grace-filled life.
- 2) Your boasting is not about what you have overcome, but what Christ has overcome for you.
- 3) The crosses of life are the opportunity for God to display his inner properties in you
- 4) Jesus: ***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***  
(John 16:33)

## 5 Questions:

1. In this section from 2 Corinthians, Paul uses irony and a bit of sarcasm to communicate the truth. He “boasts” but not like his detractors (he was not a “fool”). They boasted in themselves. Though difficult for him to do, Paul did the same only to identify it all for what it was: rubbish. Look up Galatians 6:14 to find Paul’s true and only reason to boast.
2. Recall your best day and your worst day. Which more clearly displayed God’s power? How? Why?
3. Everything Paul “boasted” about displayed his weaknesses. Make a Top Ten List of your toughest challenges, deepest struggles, and worst days. Then, for “boasting” purposes, note a specific blessing from God that was revealed or given through each of them.
4. We often times have excuses for putting off the difficult and challenging tasks of life. (See Luke 9:57-62 for a list of excuses given to Jesus!) Knowing that we’re *Called for Total Commitment* (Sunday’s theme), what are some of the excuses you have for a less-than-total commitment to Kingdom work? How would Jesus respond?
5. Choose one spiritual task that you have been putting off and get it done.