

## **“Sufficient Grace” (2 Corinthians 12:1–10)(2.28.21)**

2 Corinthians 12:1–10 (NIV84)

**12** I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup>I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—<sup>4</sup>was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. <sup>5</sup>I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. <sup>6</sup>Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say.

<sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup>But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

### **The word of God for the people of God.**

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Sufficient Grace”**

INTRODUCTION:

It seems that there are a lot of strange things about this scripture. Paul is making an argument. Why? Because he is under attack personally, about his ministry in the churches, and about his teaching. Wolves have slipped into the flock and the fledgling church of Corinth is being undermined. We find Paul in a difficult position of having to defend himself. Hence, he must substantiate his authority and his calling. It may sound like boasting, but Paul knows all too well the dangers of pride.

Years ago, a saying developed, “Monday morning quarterback.” In those days, college football games were played mostly on Saturday and professional football games were played on Sunday. On Monday, all the so-called experts, debate over the decisions and the performances of their teams; most especially the leaders, quarterbacks and coaches.

Probably most all of us have done this in one context or another. I can tell you that the same thing happens to pastors, to preachers. Any position of leadership exposes you to criticism. I confess that I too am guilty of this. My grandsons play on The Pilgrim Academy basketball team. At another time, ask me, and I will tell you what the coach should do differently.

There is a kissing cousin to our Monday morning quarterback cliché. It is “armchair quarterback.” Sitting in your living room armchair, with a beverage in one hand and the remote in the other hand, you assume a position of superiority over those who are playing and coaching. You don’t have large elite athletes trying to slam your body on the ground. You don’t have 75,000 fans screaming at you. No television cameras or the pressure of your upcoming contract renewal impact you. Paul’s critics had NOT been through the trials and tribulations he had, yet they presumed to sit in judgment over him.

BODY:

Paul’s detractors were saying that they had special secret knowledge. They had special visions or experiences, so you should listen to them instead of Paul. Reluctantly, Paul shares this very intimate personal heavenly experience. Some of what happened cannot be shared. There are not proper words to describe the third heaven where God’s surpassingly great revelations are given. Also, some of it, Paul is prohibited from sharing.

You can see that Paul is wrestling with this testimony. If his hand had not been forced, he probably would not have told us about it. He does not want people to focus on the person of Paul; but rather, the message of Paul, which is the good news, the gospel, Jesus the Christ.

In fact, while we tend to put Paul on a pedestal, we are shown here just how human he was. The thorn in his flesh was given to keep him from becoming conceited. If Paul was susceptible to pride, how much more so are we? This also gives us a sense of how much God hates the sin of pride. What was that thorn? Nobody knows, but many like to speculate.

Paul says that he prayed about this thorn in his flesh three times. Can you imagine what that prayer was like? Maybe you have prayed a similar prayer “Lord, I get it. I understand. This thorn was given for my own good. Trust me, I won’t become conceited. I will remember the lesson you intended. So, please Lord, remove this torment I am experiencing.”

Without going too far astray, I must address the issue of Satan that is raised up. It is the story of Job that most clearly explains this reference to Satan. The great accuser, along with other angels, has returned from earth to the court of God. The Almighty has chosen his servant Job to demonstrate what faith and trust look like.

Satan is given free rein in his dealings with Job, but it is clear he needs the LORD’s permission. God is sovereign and Satan is not. After Satan caused the death of all Job’s family, here is how Job responds: Job 1:20–22 (NIV84)

<sup>20</sup> At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship <sup>21</sup> and said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,  
and naked I will depart.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away;  
may the name of the Lord be praised.”

<sup>22</sup> In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Through Job’s long ordeal, he seemed to waver at times, but managed to stand fast in trusting the God who laid the foundation of the world. Job 19:25–27 (NIV84)

<sup>25</sup> I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.

<sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;

<sup>27</sup> I myself will see him  
with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!

It is almost universally understood that Paul is praying to Jesus in today’s scripture. How does Jesus answer the prayer? NO. Wait a second. Jesus says in John 14:13–14 (NIV84), <sup>13</sup> “And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. <sup>14</sup> You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

And in Mark 11:24 (NIV84) “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

Dang! How do I explain this? Maybe the name it and claim it movement is false. Maybe the prosperity gospel is false. But don’t Jesus’ own words promise these things? Apparently, “asking In Jesus’ name” contains implications we just do not grasp. Certainly, the authority, character, and will of God are an integral part of The Name.

Bringing glory to the Father certainly is in play. We are also told that all good gifts come from the Father. The great gift giver knows better than the child what is most appropriate for the child. There are also kingdom of God factors to consider. Now imagine the billions of prayers being raised up day after day. They must all be weighed and balanced, not only for short term results, but eternal implications must also be factored into this infinite equation.

Of course, Jesus’ answer to Paul’s prayer was more than a flat NO, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

Warren Wiersbe explains: In the Christian life, we get many of our blessings through *transformation*, not *substitution*. When Paul prayed three times for the removal of his pain, he was asking God for a substitution: "Give me health instead of sickness, deliverance instead of pain and weakness." Sometimes God does meet the need by substitution; but other times He meets the need by transformation. He does not remove the affliction, but He gives us His grace so that the affliction works *for* us and not *against* us. Paul knows intimately well about the trials involved with serving the Lord Jesus. In his Damascus Road conversion, when he meets Jesus for the first time, he gets a taste of what is to come. Paul was knocked off his horse to the ground and was struck with blindness. Then Paul is led into Damascus. Acts 9:15–16 (NIV84) <sup>15</sup> But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. <sup>16</sup> **I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.**"

2 Corinthians 4:7–11 (NIV84)

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV84)

<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

Just before the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter we started with,

2 Corinthians 11:23–30 (NIV84)

<sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. 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?

<sup>30</sup> If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

Jesus says, "My power is made perfect in weakness." Clearly this is our weakness to which He is referring. Paul acknowledges that it is through his weaknesses that Christ's power may rest on him. This resting in the original language conveys the concept of residence. When we stubbornly cling to our own strength and solutions, we are refusing to allow Christ's strength the proper place in our lives. Christ's place should be supreme in our lives, a reliance, and a trust.

On Tuesday night, after Bible study, I left the power cord to my laptop here at church. I spend many hours on my laptop every single day. The battery does not last long enough. So Wednesday, I had to come by the church to pick it up. Often while here at the church, I will come into the sanctuary and pray here at the altar. In the middle of my praying I realized I had the power cord in my hand.

What a great illustration that was for me. I must stay connected to God for my faith batteries to be sustained; and, so do you. We do this through a healthy prayer life. We do this by making sure Jesus is on the throne of our lives. Certainly, we are to be fellow laborers with our God. Paul worked tirelessly in his preaching, teaching and church planting while he also worked to support himself. And yet, it is still the grace of God that sustains us.

Sufficient grace, the grace that is sufficient— does not mean barely enough. Christ’s grace is a deep and overflowing fountain that never runs dry. Alexander Maclaren said, “So the grace utilized increases; the gift grows as it is employed.” “Unto him that hath shall more be given.””

Because of Christ’s grace and corresponding perfect power of the Lord, Paul makes what many might think is an astounding declaration. “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.”

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, had a lifetime battle with depression. Here is an awesome quote from him: “Our infirmities become the black velvet on which the diamond of God’s love glitters all the more brightly. Thank God I can suffer, thank God I can be made the object of shame and contempt; for, in this way, God shall be glorified. This shall be the wonder of many, and to the praise of his own grace, that mean and so contemptible a thing was made the instrument of effecting his purpose.”

#### CONCLUSION:

Many of you were here when Pastor Amarilys visited us and shared a message. She has been on and off our prayer list. I should have asked Hannah to put her back on last week, but I failed to do it. Carol and I close our prayers every night by lifting her up and her young teenage son, Nathan. Pastor Amarilys had heart surgery this week and is in ICU at UPENN.

Eight years ago, she was driving a U-Haul truck to her newly appointed church. A driver, high on PCP laced marijuana, hit her at high speed. She suffered life-threatening injuries, but survived. The damage to her internal organs was substantial and she not only faced death, but was at one point pronounced clinically dead.

She has had her own heavenly visitation. The message she was given was to tell people, “Jesus is coming back.” Even though she was often in pain and frequently required hospital stays, Pastor Amarilys continued serving her churches while she cared for her son. She lived sacrificially and worked hard in missions to her community.

Often, I am amazed at her strength and I don’t know how she keeps going. There is no doubt she embraced Paul’s proclamation, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” The diamond of God’s love glitters bright and shining in her ministry.

Psalm 121 (NIV84)

A song of ascents.

<sup>1</sup> I lift up my eyes to the hills—  
where does my help come from?

<sup>2</sup> My help comes from the Lord,  
the Maker of heaven and earth.

<sup>3</sup> He will not let your foot slip—  
he who watches over you will not slumber;

<sup>4</sup> indeed, he who watches over Israel  
will neither slumber nor sleep.

<sup>5</sup> The Lord watches over you—  
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

<sup>6</sup> the sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon by night.

<sup>7</sup> The Lord will keep you from all harm—  
he will watch over your life;

<sup>8</sup> the Lord will watch over your coming and going  
both now and forevermore.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.

