

THE ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

2 Corinthians 12:9

Introduction

This phrase forms just part of a story in the life of one man. It is also a great and powerful statement that reveals a profound philosophy of life, and also reveals a deep truth concerning God; the knowledge of which gives a person peace and comfort and can give you power for service. While all of God's Word inspired; there are some portions of Scripture that we cling to more than others and speak to us more than others.

In the words of the text this morning, many people have been helped and comforted, even though they may not have understood its deepest meaning; for in proportion as the soul trusts God, God communicates to that soul strength and comfort, even though His promise is comprehended perfectly.

1. What the words do not mean.

This word came to Paul at a difficult time in his life to give the apostle some peace. Now, you may be having some difficult times in your life, your faith may be stretched to the limit and you feel like you could break at any moment. Don't think for even a second that anything happening to you is outside of God's will or control. The meaning of the grace of God is far more profound than you may think. God is not saying to Paul, or to us, that since the hard times could not be avoided, I'll help you out.

In a broad sense I'll tell you what the text means, then we'll examine it more closely. The thorn in the flesh, that messenger of Satan is in God's grace. It is part of God's plan for our lives. The thorn in the flesh is there because God allowed it to be there. The messenger of Satan is God's messenger. None of these things is against you, but for you. The hard and difficult circumstances you find yourself in are not outside of God's will or control; but rather it part of His purpose and plan. Everything that is imposed upon you is under God's control.

2. The Context.

Read 12:1—4. Now, it's always unwise to try to understand things that we are told cannot be understood. I have been asked if I really believed that Paul had been caught up to the third heaven. Of course I believe it. I don't know how it happened—even Paul couldn't explain that. All he knew for sure was the fact that he was there.

Many Biblical scholars have their own ideas about what Paul saw and heard while he was there, notwithstanding the fact that he heard things that could not be expressed or spoken of.

This experience probably came to Paul while he was at Lystra, some 14 years before he wrote this letter. They stoned him there and left him for dead, and I believe that's when God caught him up and gave him visions.

Read 12:7—8. A great many people have tried to discover just what Paul's thorn was, but if we were meant to know God would have told us. All we know is what Paul himself said: "There was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan...". It was some kind of mental and physical affliction. Paul was given this to keep him humble, for he had seen things and heard things no other human being had ever seen or heard.

Then Paul says, "I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me." That prayer was answered by the voice of God saying, "My grace is sufficient for you..." While Paul was praying for the thorn in his flesh to be taken away from him and for the messenger of Satan to be withheld, I do not think he could have written, "There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan..." When he wrote these words, he understood that the very thing he wanted taken away was actually part of God's plan for him. The writing of that sentence "There was given to me..." was subsequent to the great answer of the text. The purpose is now clearly revealed, the thorn in Paul's flesh was for a specific purpose.

3. *The Effect*

Here was Paul, having seen an awesome vision, suddenly depressed by great pain and suffering, both physical and mental. Out of the consciousness of his pain, out of the fierce agony of his suffering, Paul cried out to God and asked that this might be removed from him. To that condition of mind, the word of God came, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Notice the effect God's word had on Paul: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me." It's easy to read that, but hard to believe the change that has taken place. Paul does not say, "I'll bear up" or "I can make it" or "I can endure". No, Paul's complaint changes and he no longer cries out and whines to God...instead he speaks triumphantly and says, "When I am weak, then I am strong"! Here is a man who has gone infinitely beyond being thankful because God is helping him to bear up. Here is a man who has seen in his pain something of value, who has discovered the very cross from which he would have escaped is of value, something he could not have lived without.

4. *The Power of Grace and Some Illustrations*

So what was it that changed Paul's dirge into a song of praise? The answer is simple: "But he said to me, 'My grace...'" It's the power of God's grace. Grace is that which is pleasing to God, that which accomplishes the will of God. It is far more than "God's unmerited favor". You can spell "grace" using just four letters: L-O-V-E. Nothing gives the heart of God pleasure except that which is and blesses others. God finds His delight in loving and in healing and restoring and blessing, so that the essential grace of God's character becomes a river of healing and of life wherever it flows forth.

“My grace,” that which pleases God.

“My grace is sufficient.” If a man is where God wants him to be, then he is in the place of power even though at the moment it is a place of pain.

- ✓ Read Nehemiah 8:10. Ezra had been reading the Law of God, and the people were filled with sorrow and grief for two reasons: (1) the Law was so strict, and (2) the people were made conscious of their sin and shortcomings. But notice the change in the people in 8:12: The people’s sorrow changed to joy! Nehemiah did not say to them, “Just be happy and you’ll be strong.” He told them not to fear the Law of God. The thing that would make God’s heart glad was their strength—and their strength lay in keeping His Law. As they kept His law, He gave them joy, and they gave Him joy as they grew in strength.
- ✓ Notice also Isaiah 53:10. “It pleased the Lord to bruise him” means that it was part of God’s plan, part of His will. To the Messiah, the joy of the Lord was in co-operating with God in accomplishing His will. Now, that necessitated enduring pain and suffering, but in the midst of the pain, there was joy for He was working with God.

Some people may wonder, “I don’t see how God could be happy in the suffering of His servant.” He had such pleasure because He knew that through the process of pain there should come the very power for which Paul was seeking. God had His eyes fixed on the ultimate issues, and His delight was in the process because of that which was to come out of it. It was that knowledge that turned Paul’s dirge into song, his complaint into thanksgiving, his restless into perfect peace, without the removal of the actual pain. It was the consciousness that his pain also was part of his Father’s perfect provision for his own making and his own perfecting that created the comfort of the message, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

5. *The Applications*

- a) God is love. He is a God of grace, and therefore His arrangements for my life are all based in His love and are full of grace. Every pain that comes to me is part of His will, and therefore it is precious.
- b) Do not be anxious about the pain or trials of your life. The only anxiety in your life should be that of finding out where God wants you to be. The grace of God may be a thorn in the flesh for a time; it may not. The joy of the Lord, the thing that makes Him happy is for you to be in the place of strength whether it is pleasant or painful, rough or smooth, dark or light.
- c) Don’t think that God’s only method of grace is the thorn. I think it is more often the flower, rather than the thorn. We are always complaining about the rainy days, but if you count them up you’ll find that they are far fewer than the sunny ones. Don’t look for pain and God is not responsible for your sins that lead to pain and suffering.

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