



Grace Under Pressure: The Thorn and His Grace
The Sermon Study Guide
2 Corinthians 12:1-10
November 15, 2009

Opening Prayer

We thank God for his word:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16

Leader **The Lord be with you.**
People **And also with you.**
Leader **Let us pray**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Remembering the Message (Read 2 Corinthians 12:1-12)

1. What words or phrases stood out to you as you read this passage?
2. In your own words summarize Paul's message to the church in Corinth in this passage.

Introduction

In Anglicanism, we have two books that we use in worship – the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. 87% of the BCP is straight from scripture; it is the Bible arranged for worship. The prayer which we've been using week by week to open up our study of 2 Corinthians is a collect written by Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer had a vision for what it would take to change the heart of a nation. He sought to place Scripture in the hands of every person in a language plainly understood. The Bible is not a Sunday-only book for only a few to hear and understand – we are all called to be open to hearing God speak through his word every day of the week. Cranmer wrote a prayer with five verbs...hear, read, mark, learn and digest...a prayer that was part of a radical change in the spiritual landscape of England. Over the next few centuries the gospel was carried around the globe.

Going Deeper

1. How has this prayer to “hear, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest” holy Scriptures been realized in your life as we have studied 2 Corinthians?
2. Which of these 5 verbs has been the most applicable to your study in these last 10 weeks? How so?

Paul Caught Up to Heaven

There is a marked contrast in the text of this passage – Paul, the spiritual giant and Paul, our brother with whom we share much in common. The first 6 verses point to Paul as a spiritual giant – a man who has been caught up to the “third heaven” which in the ancient world would have been the top of the heavens or paradise. Through Paul we get the briefest of glimpses of the throne room of God. Paul *heard* things...things inexpressible. Heaven is a place where things are **heard**. In Isaiah 6 and in Revelation all around the throne are those who are singing and shouting praises to God. God communicates through word. Even Jesus’ ministry on earth included miracles in which Jesus spoke: calling out demons, declaring forgiveness of sins, speaking words of healing for the lame, the leper, the deaf, the mute, the blind; even speaking words which brought life to the dead.

As we read this first section of verses 1-6, Fr. David reminded us of one question that God is asking over and over again of you and me..... **Can you hear me now?** David reminded us that God is speaking to each one of us. God has a Word for you! The most important human activity in we can engage on a day-to-day basis is to clear up the noise, eliminate the static, and have quiet time to think and to hear a word from God. It can be difficult to hear that word over the noise of our lives. Are you listening?

Going Deeper

1. Read Psalm 143:8, Habakkuk 2:1, and 1 Kings 19:1-18. What do these passages tell us about God’s speaking and our listening?
2. What is the “noise” or the “static” in your life that gets in the way of hearing God speak?
3. Do you sincerely want to hear God speak his Word into your life? Can you hear God now? What will you do this week to create space and quiet in order to hear from God?
4. When have you heard God speak in your life? What did God say to you?

Paul's Thorn

Here we get a glimpse of Paul, our brother and peer, as he shares something that is common to all of us – a thorn in the flesh. He takes us from the heights of heaven to the depths of what it means to be human. Something major hit Paul's life. He's out there preaching, writing letters, defending the faith, and being a leader of leaders. He is caught up to heaven where he hears things he cannot express with words. And then he is given a thorn. We are not sure exactly what it was but it was a crisis in Paul's life. Last week we heard about strongholds – the things we hold on to that keep us from a full life with God and others. It is the word of God that breaks down those strongholds. This week we see the other side of the coin – things we'd like to get rid of, things we want to let go of but they won't let go of us. We pray that God would take away those things and yet they persist. Paul's response to the thorn is this: **God's grace is sufficient! God's power is made perfect in weakness!** We are reminded of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 1:9 – *Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. **But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.*** In our weakness, we cry out to God, we are desperate for Him. Paul ends in 2 Cor. 12:10 with this: *For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Going Deeper

1. What are the "thorns in your flesh?" Is there one that is particularly thorny at the present time? (When doing this study in the context of a small group share as led.)
2. How has God used a thorn, a weakness to reveal his strength at work in you?
3. Do you, for Christ's sake, delight in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties? What would it look like to "boast....about your weaknesses?"
4. How have you experienced God's grace as being sufficient for you?
5. Commit to memory this word from God: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Cor. 12:9**

Closing Prayer

Father, we are desperate.....desperate to hear you, to hear your voice spoken through your word. We need you and we cry out to you right now out of our deepest need. Your word spoken.....it is our daily bread. We wait upon you; we will wait to hear you speak. May the noise of our lives be silent. May the static be stilled. Speak, Lord, and let us hear the voice of your word. *(A time of silence.)*

We've prayed for the thorns in our flesh to be removed and yet they stay with us. We stand on the truth of your word, that your grace is sufficient for us. We name those weaknesses and difficulties and hardships now, aloud and silently. *(Pause for a few moments.)* We will give thanks that you use those thorns, whatever they might be, in a way that reveals your glory. Let it all be in praise of you – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. *Amen.*