



Going Deeper

Grace Under Pressure: Taking Down Strongholds

2 Corinthians 10:1-6

November 8, 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 10:1-6.

What words or phrases stood out to you as you read this passage?

What is Paul seeking to emphasize in this part of his letter to the Corinthian church?

Introduction

When was the last time you got a handwritten letter? There's something very personal about a letter that was written specifically to you, seen in the handwriting of a person you know cares about you. This letter to the Corinthian church was just that: a personal, specific word of love and concern from the Apostle Paul to a church that he founded and for which he cared deeply. In fact, Paul didn't intend this – or any of his letters - to be part of the Bible. He was simply writing from his heart to people he pastored. As the church read them, however, it became evident that these letters had a special anointing. They were especially inspired by the Holy Spirit. As such, they were cherished by the church and became part of the canon of scripture.

This letter is especially personal because through it Paul acknowledges that there is negative sentiment in the church regarding his ministry. It has been said that he is "timid" in person and "bold" when absent and writing letters. This is what he is addressing in verse 1 of chapter 10. But in other places Paul admits that he isn't a great speaker. In his first letter to the Corinthians he says, "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power..." (1 Corinthians 2:3-4). Then, there was the time Paul preached so long that a young man named Eutychus fell asleep and fell out a second story window. Paul had to pray for him to be brought back from the dead! (Acts 20:7-12) Not the exact results a preacher seeks!

Going Deeper

1. What does it mean to you when you get a personal, handwritten letter? When did you last receive one? When did you last send one?
2. Why do you think God sent a person like Paul, who wasn't a gifted speaker, on missionary journeys to proclaim the gospel? What other biblical characters were sent as messengers despite a lack of giftedness? What does that say about the nature of work in God's kingdom?
3. How do you think Paul's personal word to the Corinthian church reflects God's personal concern for his people?

Breaking Down Strongholds

Paul wrote that in his life and ministry he had had to face many strongholds. However, the weapons and tactics for fighting these were completely different than what the world would count necessary for battle. Paul had learned to use these as he observed Christ break down strongholds in his own life.

Prior to his work as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul was known as Saul – a Jewish religious leader who tormented and persecuted Christians. He had built up strongholds of pride, hatred, anger, and perfectionism in his life. On a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus, however, Paul met Jesus himself. The risen Lord spoke seven words that forever changed Paul, breaking down these strongholds and setting him free for new work: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Paul was blinded during this encounter with the Light of the world. However, as evidenced by his later ministry, his eyes were really opened to the truth of the gospel and the freedom in Christ. Read more about Paul's conversion in Acts 9.

Fr. David talked about his early relationship with Fran, how one sentence from her broke down a stronghold in his life. As he finished seminary, Fr. David was set to move to Tucson when he met Fran. They went on a few dates but just prior to leaving, Fr. David decided that a long-distance relationship wouldn't work. In a conversation with Fran, she spoke just a few words that broke down strongholds of doubt in Fr. David and changed his life forever. She said, “If you wanted me to I'd follow you anywhere...” Well, the rest as they say, is history. Her words melted Fr. David's heart. They were married one year later! Ah, the power of words!

In 1987, Ronald Reagan also spoke words that changed history. At the Brandenburg gate, President Reagan challenged Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev to act on promises to bring change to the Soviet Union. He encouraged him to break down the barrier between east and west, saying, “Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” With those words the end of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War began.

Going Deeper

1. What are “weapons” we typically use to fight our day to day battles?
2. What strongholds has God broken down in your life? Did he use a particular word to confront and heal?
3. What word has God specifically given to you? How did it change your life?

God's Word

God's primary tool in speaking to his people is his word, the Bible. At the beginning of each study, we've reflected on 2 Timothy 3:16 which says, "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." See, God's plan is for us to live and act like Jesus Christ. That's why Paul said, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). Everything we say and do should be compared to the standard of Jesus Christ. The Bible is the tool God uses to show us how his people should live. It's also the spotlight that searches our lives for places he needs to be at work. Strongholds of sin and addiction. Fortresses of pain from past experiences. Places that we've created by our poor choices. Places that were created by others who mistreated us. Whatever they are, God's word can break us out of prison and bring freedom to us!

Mark 5:1-20 tells the story of a man possessed by legions of demons. They had ruined his life. They caused him to live in a graveyard, away from his family and community. He cut himself with stones and lived the life of a wild animal. Yet with one word from Jesus, he was restored. When the people of the town arrived to see Jesus, they saw this man – previously wild and naked – restored and in his right mind, talking with Jesus.

Your need may not be that dramatic. (Or it may be even more intense!) God has power through his word to bring healing to you! Open yourself to his word, to his Spirit. Allow him to break down the strongholds in your life.

Going Deeper

1. Fr. David asked this question in the sermon today, "Where do you need the word of God to speak in your life?"
2. Another question from Fr. David: "Are you living in a stronghold of your own making?" Are you willing to allow God to break it down?
3. How frequently do you read God's word, the Bible? Do you find yourself encouraged to read it more frequently?

Closing Prayer

May thy strong hand, O Lord, be ever my defense; thy mercy in Christ, my salvation; thy all-veritable word, my instructor; the grace of the life-bringing Spirit, my consolation, all along and at last. *Amen* (Lancelot Andrews)

Word of God Speak
(sung by Josh Havens at the end of the sermon)

I'm finding myself at a loss for words
And the funny thing is it's OK
The last thing I need is to be heard
But to hear what You would say

Word of God speak
Would You pour down like rain
Washing my eyes to see
Your majesty
To be still and know
That You're in this place
Please let me stay and rest
In Your holiness
Word of God speak

I'm finding myself in the midst of You
Beyond the music, beyond the noise
All that I need is to be with You
And in the quiet hear Your voice

Chorus (repeat)

I'm finding myself at a loss for words
And the funny thing is it's OK

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