

“When Our Struggles Bring Us Strength”

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

5/25/10

Introduction: Some of us have heard of the story of this little girl who found a cocoon hanging from a limb in a tree. She took it to her room and placed it in a jar, expecting one day to see a beautiful butterfly. One day she saw the butterfly within the cocoon trying to get out. In an effort to help the poor insect, she cut open the cocoon. After that, the butterfly was able to easily exit the cocoon. But, a strange thing happened. Instead of spreading two wings, the butterfly had two withered and useless wings hanging by its side. Why? God designed the butterfly and the cocoon so that the tight opening would strengthen his wings. Without the pressure of the tight opening, the butterfly was robbed of the beauty of his wings and the ability to fly. We are not butterflies, but we need the pressures and trial of life, if we are to develop into all that God has saved us to be. In our lesson tonight, Paul tells us that the pain and the sufferings he endured gave him the strength to make it through life.

Verses 7-8

The Purpose

These verses show us that our pain and struggles have a purpose. For Paul, his pain/struggle came his way to keep him from being “exalted above measure”. This phrase means “to lift oneself above one’s place”. Because of all the blessings Paul received and because of all the mighty ways in which God had used him, there was the **danger** that Paul might try to take all the glory for himself. Therefore, God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh to remind him that this thing was about God and not about Paul. In other words, it was sent to keep Paul humble (**Matthew 23:11-12**). Do we sometimes have that same **tendency**? When the Lord uses us for His glory, there is something within us that wants to **claim** that glory for ourselves. But, sufferings and troubles tend to keep us grounded. We are reminded of what we are and what we cannot do without Him (**John 15:5**). One purpose of our struggles is to remind us that we need Him and His power to get anything done. Notice in verse 8, Paul’s pain drove him to his knees. When he began to hurt, he began to seek the Lord. When our life is easy, we may forget how much we need the Lord and become **slack** in our communication with Him. But, when trouble comes knocking we are shocked back into reality. Difficulty will drive us back to our knees.

Verse 9

The Promise

Here we see the Lord making a promise to Paul. He told Paul “My grace is sufficient for thee...”. The word “sufficient” means “to be possessed of unfailing strength; to be enough”. How many times have we looked at our situation and said, “if only this problem was solved or this thing over here was somehow different, then I could really serve the Lord!” The problem with that kind of thinking is that it is all wrapped up in self and what self can do. If the truth be told, we can do nothing without Jesus! If we are saved and we are walking in the will of the Lord, then we are right where He has put us, problems/pain and all (**Psalm 37:23**). The Lord wanted Paul to understand He is always in control. His grace will support and sustain us regardless of what we may face. When the Lord says that His “strength is made perfect in weakness”, it simply means that God gets more glory from using the weak things of the world than He does by using the things of greatness and power (**1 Corinthians 1:26-27**). God has a plan and a promise that says, He will never leave us nor forsake us. We just need to stand on the promises of His Word.

Verse 10

The Privilege

Paul closes his thoughts in verse 10 by reminding us that his suffering was not in vain. He realized it was a privilege to suffer for Christ (**Philippians 1:29**) (**Matthew 5:10**). Paul said he takes pleasure in his suffering because he is doing it for Christ’s sake. The things he endured were not the result of foolish decisions on his part. When we come to the place in our life, where we can see our trials from God’s perspective, then our outlook will change. We will learn to yield to Him and His will for our lives. Even though Paul names all these things he is “in”, he doesn’t neglect to tell us that it is “in” these things that he found peace and contentment. We spend a lot of our time praying to God to get us out or keep us out of trouble. How many times have we gone down on our knees and thank God for our troubles? We have to remind ourselves that our struggles can bring us strength.