

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

September 27 & 28, 2015

Sermon Series: Celebrate God's Grace.... It Never Ends. (150 year celebration start)

⁷ 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. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ 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.

Can you empty the ocean with a five gallon pail? Even if you were to do that 24 hours a day, 365 days for every year of your life, the ocean will not run out of water. Can you breathe so fast and so deeply that you will take all the oxygen out of the air on this air? It would be fun to see you try. Can you pick the leaves off all the trees on the earth, one at a time, during your life time? Of course, not. Watch a wave hit the shoreline along Lake Michigan, will there be another?

That is how the Apostle Paul paints the picture of God's Grace in our text for this morning. Last week, as we began to celebrate God's Grace which he has poured out on our congregation for 150 years, we saw that it changes hearts. It takes hearts that are dead and brings them back to life through faith in Jesus. But that is not where God's Grace stops. He doesn't just bring us to faith and then says to us: *Good luck. See you later!* Day after day he pours out his love on us. God will not run out of his Grace. Again and again he gives us his promise: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.... So that Christ's power may rest on me."**

Think what those words mean for us. When we think of the word *sufficient*, we think about it meaning getting something that *gets us by*. *We want more, we could use more, but it is enough for now*. That isn't exactly what Paul is saying here. The word *sufficient* means: *"to be possessed of unending strength; to be strong, to suffice, to be enough."* It is God giving us everything we need perfectly. It means that the strength of the almighty God will not fail us. It means that God has enough grace to solve every dilemma you face, wipe every tear from your eye, and answer every question you ask. Therefore, we **"can celebrate God's Grace because it never ends!"**

The Apostle Paul tells us that he had some kind of **"thorn in my flesh."** Have you ever gotten a splinter that has gone deep into your finger? You can't seem to get it all the way out. So, every time you touch that point on your hand, it reminds you that it is there with pain. The longer it stays in, the more infected it becomes. That little splinter turns into something much bigger. Paul was experiencing that in his life. What this thorn in his life was, we're not certain. Some claim it was a form of epilepsy. Others claim it was a recurring bout with Malaria, severe migraine headaches, or even a speech impediment. We just don't know. Whatever it was, he couldn't seem to get that problem out of his life. This thorn, this *spike or stake*, was perhaps even beginning to take away his ability to function as an apostle. Satan was using this **thorn to torment him**. Satan seems to be relentless in pounding Paul with this thorn.

Therefore, the Apostle Paul needed to hear these words. We need to hear these words of God: **"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.** Is Satan doing the same to you? Does he fill you with fear as you face the cancer in your body? Does the sorrow in your heart keep hurting so deeply? Does he pound that stake into the hole that is left in your life by your spouse dying? Does he try to crush us with the guilt of sin? We can understand the pain that Paul was experiencing in his life.

So, how do we deal with it in our lives? Do we just ignore it, like the *check engine* light in our car and hope it goes away? Do we take it to the Lord in prayer as Paul did? Yet, as we do, we don't get the answer we are looking for. **"Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me."** We shouldn't think that Paul just prayed three times and then he gave up. It wasn't: *three strikes and then you're out*. They must have been 3 very intense times that he **pleaded** with God. He got the same answer each time: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

God comforted Paul in saying : *my grace will never end*. He tells us to take all of our sins, hurts, and thorns and lay them at the feet of Jesus on the cross of Calvary and let his grace be poured out on you. Let God take our sufferings and turn them into something good. Let him carry us through the hurts and thorns of life. Would we expect anything less from

God? We have a God who has promised us: **“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”** (Rom. 8:32)

Trust his promises. Trust the words that God gave us in our First Lesson today: **“How great is the love the Father has LAVISHED on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”** He dumps bucket after bucket of love over our heads. Look at the difference that God’s Grace made in the life of a short little tax collector named Zacchaeus in our Gospel Lesson. He was never the same after Jesus told him: **“I must stay at your house today.”** Look at all the times that God did that with his people over thousands and thousands of years in the Bible. He never does it with something that is just *good enough*. He does it perfectly with more than we can possibly imagine.

Over the next year, we will celebrate God’s Grace for St. Paul’s for 150 years. We also want to celebrate God’s Grace every day. God’s Grace will NOT end. He will love you as you wake up in the morning. He will love you as you close your eyes at the end of day. When the day comes that we close our eyes on this world and open them in the next, we will live forever with our God and his never ending Grace. May we join with the Apostle Paul in saying: **“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.** Amen.