

## MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

### II Corinthians 12:7-10

#### INTRO

The first time I remember learning about Christ's grace being sufficient for me was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. My mom came home from working out one day saying that her back hurt. Within a few days, she became bedridden, and remained so for 6 months. After that, she slowly was able to do normal life, but her back has never stopped hurting, 24 hours/day for the last 17 years.

When I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I remember being very discouraged that God was not healing my mom. She came in my room one day and encouraged me with these words: "Blake, his grace is sufficient for you." What did that mean, Jesus' grace being sufficient? How did that make things better? That is what I have been learning for the last 17 years, and will continue to learn until the grace and presence of Jesus is all I know.

#### BACKGROUND

[This morning we will focus on verses 7-10, but we need to set the scene first.]

Our passage begins with Paul saying something strange: "I must go on boasting..." (12:1).

Why is Paul boasting?

There are wolves in Corinth, false teachers preaching a different message than the gospel of Jesus Christ (11:1-6). These wolves are boasting about themselves to win over Corinthian believers.

Paul says, "NO. You are not preaching Christ." And He answers them according to their folly and boasts back (Proverbs 26:5).

But in chapter 12, Paul takes an unexpected approach:

Even though he has seen a vision of paradise, he says in verse 5, "on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses."

That is where we pick up, Paul boasting about his weaknesses, chiefly shown by his thorn in the flesh.

## I. THE THORN (7)

This morning we begin by answering three questions about Paul's thorn and ours:

1. Why was it given?
2. What is it?
3. Who gave it?

WHY? is it given – TO HUMBLE US

In verse 7, Paul says 2x that the thorn was given “to keep me from becoming conceited.” To keep him from “rating himself too highly.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul just saw a vision of heaven! His temptation would be to say, “Wow, look at me everyone! I'm so amazing.” Maybe you've never had a vision of heaven before, but do you ever find yourself thinking, “Wow, I'm really all that.” And we may not say it out loud, but the thought behind that is, “I'm God. I don't need anything.”

So the thorn is given to break our pride – to humble us – to keep us from becoming conceited and believing we have everything we need without God.

WHAT is this thorn?

We will not answer what Paul's thorn was this morning. All Christians for the last 2,000 years have debated about that.

But there are several things we can know about Paul's thorn, and from that, about the thorns in our lives:

1. Thorns are painful

Before Paul's day, the word translated “thorn” meant “stake” – a sharpened wooden shaft [Hughes, NIC, 447]. Think more than just a cute little thorn on a rose bush – think something that would impale you, causing immense pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Danker, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 362.

## 2. Thorns are persistent

The thorn punctures and then stays until someone gets it out. When you have even a little thorn, you can't think of anything else – it affects all you do. No matter where you are, it's "a pointed reminder."<sup>2</sup>

## 3. Thorns are varied

The phrase "in the flesh," literally translated is "*for* the flesh." The thorn is *for* the flesh. Various takes on this have ranged from Paul suffering from malaria or a toothache, to Paul battling temptation to sin – from physical to emotional to spiritual.<sup>3</sup>

## 4. Thorns are demonic

The phrase "a messenger of Satan" – angels were called "messengers" – a fallen angel would be a messenger of Satan, a demon. Satan, although ultimately defeated by Christ's death and resurrection, still works as a thief to steal, kill, and destroy until Jesus crushes his head forever (John 10:10; Romans 16:9).

## 5. Thorns "harass" us

That word means to rain blows on someone, knock them around,<sup>4</sup> to attack over and over, to slap them.<sup>5</sup>

The same word is used in Matthew 26:67 after the high priest asked Jesus if he was the Christ, the Son of the living God, and Jesus says, "You have said so." Then the high priest tore his robes, and "they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him, saying, 'Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?'"

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<sup>2</sup> Danker, 323.

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, New International Commentary, 447-448.

<sup>4</sup> Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, 560.

<sup>5</sup> Danker, 204.

What thorn harasses you – batters you to the ground – slaps you around? Is there some painful, persistent ailment in your life? Or in the life of someone close to you?

Is it chronic pain or sickness, migraines, depression, cancer, addictive cravings, desiring marriage but remaining single, nightmares, a broken body, a failing mind?

WHO would give such a thorn? How dare they?

In verse 7, we are told that this thorn was “*given*” to Paul. By whom?

Maybe it was Satan. It is his messenger, right?

Consider Job. The deep pains and miseries he experienced were inflicted by Satan, but Satan is only carrying out the will of God (Job 1).

Consider also the **result** of the thorn: **humility and strength in weakness**. Satan would never want this. *Satan is the instrument God uses to give the thorn, but God is the Giver.*

You may say, “You don’t know my thorn! God would never give this!”

You’re right, I don’t know your thorn.

But consider Hannah in I Samuel 1 – who had the thorn of barrenness – verse 5 says, “*the LORD* had closed her womb.”

John Newton, ex-slave trader and recipient of Amazing Grace, describes God as a skilled soul physician, prescribing just the right medicines to heal our souls of sin. He says this: “**Everything is needful that he sends; nothing can be needful that he withholds.**”

Think on that for a moment. We know from Exodus 34:6-7 that God is a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and

transgression and sin...” Would a Soul Surgeon like this make any unnecessary incisions? Any misplaced thorns?

Consider another man of whom it is said, “It was the will of the LORD to crush him” (Isaiah 53:10). This man endured thorns like ours during his life. And of him it is said, “with his wounds we are healed” (53:5). Had Jesus not been wounded, we would have never been healed from sin, death, and despair.

God gives us thorns to humble us – to kill all that is killing us.

## II. THE THORN’S RESULT (8-10)

### A. Pleading

We can ask God to take our thorns away.

[READ verse 8]

Paul pleads – begs, calls for help – with Jesus to let his thorn leave him. It is good for us to plead with God.

We can pray with David in Psalm 13, “How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God”

There is another man who pleaded three times to have his thorn taken away: “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mark 14:36).

We endure God-given thorns for our restoration, but Jesus endured thorns for retribution. We drink gospel medicine; Jesus drank the cup of God’s wrath.

Because of this, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

## B. Boasting (9-10)

This explains Jesus' answer to Paul's pleading to take the thorn away in verse 9.

Does his answer surprise you? "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

Notice what Jesus does NOT say: "Here, I know that thorn hurts. Let me take it away."

But rather, "My grace IS sufficient." Present tense. It is sufficient today. And tomorrow, it will be sufficient on that day.

*Why does Jesus often leave the thorns in our lives?*

Because he knows this: That **we will know and experience his grace WITH the thorn in ways we never would without it.**

Paul says a few chapters earlier in 8:9 – "For you know the *grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."

**THIS IS GRACE.** Jesus gave all so that we might have all in him. He bore our sins in his body on the tree. We, deserving eternal punishment, get eternal reward instead. **UNDESERVED FAVOR. HIS LIFE FOR OURS.**

So now, the places where we are weak are the very places where God's strength shines the brightest.

**Our weaknesses become arrows pointing to Jesus!**

Abraham and Sarah – God promised them a son at 100 and 90 – they both laughed, but God provided (Gen 17).

Brett – Brain tumor – just finishing his 12<sup>th</sup> year of college.  
Jesus – Paul said he “was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God” (II Corinthians 13:4).

**On the cross, Christ’s power was made perfect in weakness.**

So we boast of our weaknesses, of our thorns, of our vulnerabilities, not because we want people to look at us, but because we want them to look through our weakness to Jesus.

To boast of weakness is to welcome and glory in weakness as a way that Jesus’ power will be shown.

So in verse 10, Paul says he is content with weaknesses...

This is not, “I’m stuck with this thorn,” but saying with Paul, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need, I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:11-13).

One day soon, we will see that the very place where the thorn cut is the place where God brought beauty from ashes, joy from mourning, strength from weakness.

**<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

