

God's Grace Is Enough

Text: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10

2 Corinthians 12:2-10 (Series B, 5th Sunday after Pentecost) Ps 48

Mark 6:1-13

But to keep me from being puffed up with pride because of the many wonderful things I saw, I was given a painful physical ailment, which acts as Satan's messenger to beat me and keep me from being proud. Three times I prayed to the Lord about this and asked him to take it away. But his answer was: "My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak."

Prayer:

When we turn to read the News paper or TV news programs, it's clear that there is a lot of suffering and tragedy in our world. We shake our heads in disbelief as we watch the news wondering why these things have to happen and when is it going to end. We see pictures of some places around the world experiencing war and unrest, homes being destroyed, shooting, and violence.

We see children suffering and dying. It is beyond our ability to comprehend it all. We see pictures of crumpled car wrecks and hear of young people whose lives have been cut short through car accidents. The newsreader tells us in a very matter of fact way about children who have been scarred for life because of abuse.

When we look on a *personal* level, and see people whom we love suffering and there is no real explanation why; our own friends who've lost children to accidents, or illness, before they've even had a chance to fully experience childhood, let alone adulthood; when we see people within our family who've lost jobs, income, and along with it any sort of a sense of security, for no good reason, but just apparently by random chance. And our own personal weaknesses and infirmities; it just doesn't seem *fair!*

This kind of suffering brings with it *agony, anguish, heartache*, and plenty of *questioning*, as we try to work out just what's going on. We wonder, "How in the world am I going to get *through* this one?"

This brings us to St Paul's experience of suffering in his life in our second lesson. He referred to it as his "*thorn in the flesh*". We don't know what kind of suffering he is talking about but we do know that it really bothered Paul and it was a recurring problem. There was nothing good about this "*thorn in the flesh*".

And what made matters even worse is that he cried out to God in prayer, not once or twice but three times. He was persistent and sincere in his praying. He asked God to take his suffering away but *did not receive an answer* - at least, not the answer he wanted and needed. Paul knew what it was like to *wonder* just what in the world was God up to!

Have you ever wondered about that? I imagine most of us have at some time felt that way!. Paul knew what it was like to *wonder* whether God really did answer prayers; if God really cared or not.

Have you ever wondered about such things? Have you ever wondered that even when we lift up our prayers to God in absolute, sincere faith, we sometimes don't get the things we ask for, and pain and suffering come anyway?

Have you ever wondered why sometimes the prayers for healing and help are answered, and sometimes they aren't? One couple prays desperately that their teenage child, seriously injured in a car accident, will survive and recover fully, and their prayer is answered with healing. Another couple, in the exact same situation, offers up the same prayer, and the child does not recover. It really doesn't add up.

Why? How can we explain this? Some try and comfort us saying that *this is the will of God*. It's true that we don't understand everything there is to know about God's will and never will in this life. We might diligently search the Scriptures and conclude that God never wills any harm on his children but *permits* certain things to happen.

We might conclude that pain and suffering are absolutely *not* a part of God's will, but simply a painful consequence of the fallen world we live in and the fallen people that we are.

We might even conclude that there are some things that do fall within God's will, but in the moment of my pain, *I simply don't care. I want relief.* Knowing and accepting God's will *is* important, but it doesn't take the pain away and it doesn't answer the question "*why*" – "Why has this happened to me?" or "Why can't God answer my prayer like he answers the prayer of others."

Someone may have reminded Paul of his own words that: "*in all things God works for good*" (Romans 8:28). I can accept that down the road when I look back on the events of my life, I will be able to see how God has used the suffering and tragedies to bring me blessing, but I am suffering right *now*.

I am praying to God for his help right *now* and I can't make any sense out of his apparent silence. If you're watching someone close to you suffer right now, you need an answer *right now* to your burning question, " Why don't you do something, Lord? "

Likewise, Paul wanted relief from his "*thorn in the flesh*" right then, and so he prayed, and prayed, and prayed. The answer Paul received from God is also our answer in times of suffering and tragedy. "*My grace is all you need, for my power is greatest when you are weak.*" This means that God freely extends his love toward us in every time and every situation.

It means that he is always our loving God and he never stops caring for us even though there are times when we think that he doesn't care anymore and answers our prayers in ways that are so opposite to what we actually prayed.

It means that even though I don't understand what is happening in my life and things seem so out of control, the *knowledge* of his never-ending love for me comforts me and helps me come to terms with what is happening. It means that God's power will kick in when I need it the most and give me the strength I need to see this thing through.

God's grace enables us to say, *"I believe it takes great faith to say Lord if it be your will, God, let there be healing, and recovery, let your grace provide a miracle - but if not, God, then let your grace provide comfort and keep me going. I can see this through not by my own power, but by the strength that God gives me."*

Paul's afflictions and suffering got him down every now. His suffering created a feeling of weakness, inadequacy, and an inability to cope. His own strength to handle the *"thorn in the flesh"* was insufficient but the answer God gives in response to his prayers reminds him not to rely on with his own inner strength but on God.

Paul accepted the thorn as a sacred reminder to be aware of the dangers of being puffed up of his achievements as an apostle. His monologue in this passage almost sounds as if he is reminding himself, as well as the Church at Corinth, in his repetition that he, himself, doesn't know everything but *God knows*.

He summed up everything nicely when he said; *"I am most happy, then, to be proud of my weaknesses, in order to feel the protection of Christ's power over me"* (2 Cor 12:9). And also in Philippians, *"I have the strength to face all conditions by the power that Christ gives me"* (4:13).

God's grace is *"all we need"* my friends. God's comforting grace, God's sustaining grace, God's strengthening grace, God's empowering grace-- but that is all we need when the chips are really down!

Country Song writer and singer Clay Walker penned these words: Which illustrate the thought I am sharing with you this morning.

- "How in this world, can we put a man on the moon, and still have a need for a place like St. Jude's. And why is one man born, in a place where all they know is war. A guy like me, has always been free.
- And how can two people, who built a loving home. Try for years and never have a child of their own. And somewhere out there tonight. There is a baby no one is holding tight. In need of love. To me that don't add up.

“But I wasn’t there when you filled up the ocean, I didn’t get to see you hang the stars in the sky. So, I don’t mean to second guess you, Or criticize what I don’t understand. These are just a few questions I have.”

And why did my niece, have to die when she was hit by vehicle. A good child only nine I still wonder 'bout that. It seems unfair to me. Some get the chance to chase their dreams. And some don't.

What do I know.But I wasn’t there when God filled up the ocean....” I didn't get to see God hang the stars in the sky. So, I don’t mean to second guess you, or criticize what I don't understand.

In few moments we will part take in Holy Communion, tangible means by which God’s grace is made known to us. At times when God's will is beyond our human comprehension.

At times when it's beyond our ability to look into the future and try to determine what "good" might come out of our circumstances or painful experience, *God's grace* is there for us. It may not seem like much but it the perfect answer to our prayers.

Let us, then, stand up, step out in faith, shake off the dust of disappointment and the pressure of our thorns, to do the work we have been given to do, in God, through Jesus, there enough grace by the power of the Holy Spirit, there is plenteous redemption. for the sake of Christ and in His name we say. **Amen.**

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