

“My Grace Is Sufficient for You”
(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Introduction: We all face situations in life which are beyond our ability to do anything about. Some of us have had difficulties at home with our children and have had our heart ache as we watched them walk away from the Lord. Some of us have been faced with health problems, either personally or with those whom we love. We have even had loved ones taken away from us, sometimes early in life and sometimes after a fairly full life. We have faced problems in our jobs, strife and conflict which we couldn't resolve. We may have even lost our employment over them. Some of us have lost material possessions which we were helpless to keep, a car was stolen or our house burned down. There are things which happen to us all the time which are beyond our control. This will always be the case.

Paul admittedly was faced with such a situation. He describes it to us in this twelfth chapter of 2 Corinthians. He apparently was the man he was referring to in verses 1-6, who was caught up into Paradise and heard words which could not be expressed and which he was not permitted to speak. He says that because of the surpassing greatness of these revelations, so that he would not exalt himself unduly, the Lord gave to him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him, to keep him humble. We don't know exactly what this “thorn” was. He says it was in his flesh. It could have been some kind of illness or disease. He appeared to have some kind of difficulty with his eyes since he said on one occasion that he wrote with large letters, and on another that the Galatians would have plucked out their eyes to help him. It also appears that whatever it was, that although it had its source ultimately in God's plan and will, yet it was implemented by the devil. It a messenger of his sent to buffet him. But the point is that this thorn was outside of the apostle's control. Knowing that it was, he sought the Lord three times that it might depart from him, but the Lord did not remove it. Why didn't He? Why didn't God deliver the apostle from this messenger of the devil? It was so that Paul would learn to trust less in his own strength and more on the Lord's. And that is what I want you to learn from this passage as well this evening.

In no matter situation you are faced with which is outside of your control, you must always learn to rely upon the Lord's strength and not your own to deliver you.

I. Listen to the Response of the Lord to the Apostle Paul's Prayer. He says, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

- A. We Need to Realize that the Grace of God is Enough for Us in Every Circumstance.
 - 1. Part of true godly humility before the Lord is the recognition of our own weakness, our utter inability to do anything pleasing to God in our own strength.
 - a. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).
 - b. Jesus does not mean that you can absolutely nothing. There are multitudes of people in the world who do things everyday who are strangers to Christ.
 - c. But it means that you cannot bear any fruit for God's glory apart from Christ. He is the source of power that you must be plugged into by faith, before you can do anything which is truly pleasing to the Lord.

- d. In ourselves we are weak and beggarly. We do not have the power to face our difficulties. We do not have the power to serve the Lord in fear as we ought. We do not have the power to resist sin and temptation. We do not have the power to endure our trials and afflictions without folding underneath their burden.
- e. But isn't this exactly what the Lord was teaching Paul here? When you begin to think that you can do it on your own, the Lord will remind you that that is simply not the case. You need Him!

2. And the reality of this should constantly drive us to the Lord to throw ourselves upon Him.
 - a. A few biblical examples will show us that this attitude characterized the most used men of God throughout history.
 - b. The apostle Paul said, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:5-6). Paul recognized his weakness and was a humble man. He did not consider anything that he accomplished as coming from his own strength, but from the Lord.
 - c. When God called Moses to go and command Pharaoh to let His people go, Moses said to God, "'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?' And He said, 'Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain'" (Exod. 3:11-12). Moses was very reluctant to do God's will. He knew his weakness and limitations all too well. But when God calls, He also enables. It does not depend on man's, but on God's abilities.
 - d. Joshua trembled with fear when he realized the great responsibility which the Lord was placing on his shoulders to take the children of God into the land of promise. He knew that it was beyond his power. But the Lord said to him, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9).
 - e. The Lord called Jeremiah when he was but a youth to be His spokesman to the people of Israel. But Jeremiah responded, "'Alas, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.'" But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, "I am a youth," because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, 'Behold, I have put My words in your mouth'" (Jer. 1:6-9).
 - f. When the Lord Jesus was telling His disciples of what would shortly take place, how they would be brought before kings and governors for His name's sake, He told them not to worry about what they would say, for He would give them the wisdom to speak. He said, "For I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute" (Luke 21:15).
 - g. If you realize as well your own inabilities and weaknesses, do not let this stop you. Though it is true that apart from Christ you can do nothing, it is also true that you

- can do all things through Christ who strengthens you (Phil. 4:13).
- h. God has given you the promise that He will be with you. What He calls you to do, He will enable you to do. He says through Isaiah the prophet, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isa. 43:2-3).
 - i. It is not your strength that you are to rely on, but the grace of God working in you. Paul writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me” (1 Cor. 15:10).
 - j. This reliance you are to have on the grace of God now, is the same reliance that you should have had from the beginning of your Christian experience, if you truly understood your own helplessness apart from God’s grace.
 - k. Even in the matter of conversion, or I should say especially here, you were completely unable to do anything to save yourself. Apart from Christ you could do nothing. You needed God’s grace to change your heart.
 - l. This is so well illustrated in Bunyon’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, where Bunyon records the testimony of Hopeful on the day when he saw very clearly his utter helplessness to save himself, but the Lord’s strength on his behalf. Hopeful says of the day in which Christ first appeared to him, “I did not see him with my bodily eyes, but with the eyes of my understanding, Ephesians 1:18, 19; and thus it was: One day I was very sad, I think sadder than at any one time in my life, and this sadness was through a fresh sight of the greatness and vileness of my sins. And as I was then looking for nothing but hell, and the everlasting damnation of my soul, suddenly, as I thought, I saw the Lord Jesus Christ look down from heaven upon me, and saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” Acts 16:31. But I replied, “Lord, I am a great, a very great sinner;” And he answered, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” 2 Corinthians 12:9. Then I said, “But, Lord, what is believing?” And then I saw from that saying, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst,” John 6:35, that believing and coming was all one; and that he that came, that is, ran out in his heart and affections after salvation by Christ, he indeed believed in Christ. Then the water stood in mine eyes, and I asked further. “But, Lord, may such a great sinner as I am be indeed accepted of thee, and be saved by thee?” And I heard him say, “And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” John 6:37” (243 [Sage]).
 - k. Perhaps this account of Hopeful’s conversion came from Bunyon’s own experience. In his book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, which is his testimony to Christ’s grace in his life, he relates how this word came to home to him. He had heard and knew from the passage that we are looking at this evening that the grace of God was enough to save a man, but was it for him? Would Christ give His grace to him? He writes, “Therefore I did still pray to God that he would come in with this scripture more fully on my heart, to wit, that he would help me to apply the whole sentence, for as yet I could not. What he gave me, that I gathered; but further I could not go; for as yet it only helped me to hope there might be mercy for me: “My grace is sufficient.” And though it came no further, it answered my former

question, to wit, that there was hope; yet, because “for thee” was left out, I was not contented, but prayed to God for that also. Wherefore one day, when I was in a meeting of God’s people, full of sadness and terror, for my fears again were strong upon me, and as I was now thinking my soul was never the better, but my case most sad and fearful, these words did with great power suddenly break in upon me: My grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee, my grace is sufficient for thee, three times together. And Oh, methought that every word was a mighty word unto me, as *my*, and *grace*, and *sufficient*, and *for thee*; they were then, and sometimes are still, far bigger than others be. At which time my understanding was so enlightened that I was as though I had seen the Lord Jesus look down from heaven through the tiles upon me, and direct these words unto me. This sent me mourning home; it broke my heart and filled me full of joy, and laid me low as the dust” (*Grace Abounding* 67-68 [Sage]).

- l. It is true that God’s grace is sufficient. It is sufficient to save the most wicked of sinners. It is sufficient to save you, if you will but trust in the Christ which God offers to you.
- m. But it is not only sufficient to save you, it is also enough to see you through the very worst of trials. It is able to take you where you are and see you straight through to the end of your journey in heaven.
- n. But you must first admit your own weakness and inadequacy. God does not save or help those who believe that they can do so for themselves. He helps the helpless. He gives help to those who are at the end of their own strength.

B. The Reason that He Has Arranged It So Is that His Power Would Be Magnified Through Us.

1. Peter says, “For power is perfected in weakness.” That is, God’s power is put on display through our own weakness. Strength does not appear strong against a backdrop of strength, but against that of weakness. Power is at its greatest, when weakness is at its weakest. And that is what the Lord wants to bring us to so He can show us His strength in all its fullness.
2. And so this text calls us to admit our weakness and rely on God’s strength so that we might glorify Him by allowing Him to show Himself strong on our behalf. Peter writes, “Whoever speaks, *let him speak*, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, *let him do so* as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet. 4:11).

II. Therefore, Paul’s Response to the Lord’s Answer Was, “Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

- A. “If This Is What I Must Do to Be Strong in the Lord and in the Strength of His Might, Then,” Paul Says, “I Will Most Joyfully Boast About My Weakness That His Power Might Abide with Me.”
 1. When we realize how feeble our strength really is, and how necessary His power is to live for His glory, then the words of the apostle Paul become as precious to us as gold.
 2. Christ has done it all for us on the cross. He reconciled us to the Father while we were enemies. He took away our sins. He gave to us a perfect righteousness, a perfect

record of law-keeping.

3. And now the only response which is worthy of so great a gift is that of a life dedicated to His glory and honor.
 4. But even that we cannot do on our own. Our best feeble efforts soon give way to the despair of ever doing anything pleasing to Him. We need His strength and grace even to show Him how grateful we are.
 5. But the Lord does give that strength to those who are weak. He says to us in Isaiah 40:29-31, "He gives strength to the weary, and to *him who* lacks might He increases power. Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up *with* wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."
 6. Admit then your own weakness before the Lord, so that the precious power of Christ's Spirit may fill you with strength. And learn contentment as well.
- B. Paul also Writes, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).
1. The more you sense your own weakness under afflictions, the more you can experience God's power.
 2. Jesus said, "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11-12).
 3. Life doesn't have to be perfect for you to have joy. Things can be pretty grim and you can still have fulness of joy. Your joy should not come from your outward circumstances, but from knowing that the Lord is pleased with you. If you know that your ways are pleasing to Him, and that He is pleased with you as you stand in Christ, then your joy should be complete.
 4. People of God, may our gracious Lord give us the ability to understand this precious truth this evening. He brings us to the end of our own strength that we might rely on His. He does so that He might teach us not to trust in ourselves, but in Him. Stop relying on yourselves then. Stop trusting in your own strength and wisdom to solve those insolvable problems in life. But glory in your weakness and let the strength of God be perfected in you. Amen.