

The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost  
July 12, 2015  
2 Corinthians 12:7-10  
God's Powerful Solution to My Weakness  
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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus our Savior,

Sometimes a pastor misspeaks in a sermon by not checking it more closely. I did that last Sunday by saying that his enemies murdered Jeremiah. Sorry, this is not true. I almost did it again this week in a little different way. In my original idea for a theme, I used the expression "the problem of weakness."

This would have been incorrect, of course, because the apostle Paul did not consider his weakness a problem at all. Nor should we. In fact, Paul viewed his weakness as just the opposite. He boasted about his weaknesses. He was thankful for his weaknesses because he then relied solely on the power of God's grace that gave him strength.

Someone echoed Paul's approach when he said, "As long as we sinners imagine that we still have some power, we are unfit instruments in the Lord's hands."

We all want to be fit instruments in the Lord's hands, don't we? Yet we are weak. What is the solution? Hear and apply **God's Powerful Solution to My Weakness**. The solution is not the removal of the weakness. The solution is the sufficient grace that makes me strong.

False apostles had been boasting about their ministry to the Corinthians. They were eloquent and convincing. They tried to discredit Paul as a poor speaker and a fool. They were succeeding in what often happens today. Preachers who are eloquent and convincing get Christians to believe false doctrine, the messenger over the message. Paul pointed out that is like Satan "masquerading as an angel of light."

Now, Paul was going to use that same tactic only in a different way. He was going to boast to the Corinthians about his weaknesses. He has been in prison and flogged. He had been shipwrecked. He walked in danger all the way and all the time from nature, bandits, unbelieving Jews, gentiles, in the cities and in the country. He had been cold, hungry and naked. Most of all, Paul labored through sleepless nights under the pressure of his concern for all the churches.

God also had given Paul a miraculous revelation of some kind. He saw and heard "inexpressible" things he was not permitted to share. He might well have begun to think pretty highly of himself because of this. "Therefore," we begin our text, "in order to keep me from becoming conceited," literally, self-elevating, "I was given a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." v. 7

This weakness served a good purpose. It was not an accident. What was tormenting Paul daily to keep him humble in the realization of his weakness, we do not know. We do know the sharp thorns, the sharp stakes that pierce our pride and sense of self-sufficiency. We know our weaknesses. They also are "a messenger of Satan" v. 7 in the sense that all results of sin are from Satan. Yet they all are from God in the sense of being under his control and for our good.

God put a fence around Satan in what he could do to Job. Jesus prayed that Peter would not lose his faith. God answers our prayer, "Lead us not into temptation," by controlling the messengers of Satan that are our weaknesses. Our thorns prevent us from becoming self-elevators. We know we cannot boast in any power of our own as the fit instruments God has created. So, we boast in our weaknesses.

The solution to my weakness is not the removal of the weakness. We wish. I stand before you fully admitting I am the first one to wish God would remove the thorns in my flesh. You may feel that way, too. With Paul, we use regular fervent prayer asking God to remove it. “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.” v. 8

“But God said to me.” Here came the definitive and correct answer to Paul’s prayer. What do those words mean to you? Do they mean here is the right answer? Do we listen to God’s answer in his Word in the certainty that God knows what he is doing, and what is best for me?

God’s answer with his Word to Paul is the powerful solution to my weakness. The solution is the sufficient grace that makes me strong. God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness.” v. 9

God’s grace is the saving activity of Jesus Christ our Savior in our lives weak in temptation and sin. The power of grace is the power of Christ who is the living Word come into the flesh. The Word, Christ, grace, and power, and strength all go together. God’s power is made perfect in our weakness means God’s power brings about his desired end. He fulfills the purpose of his power in our weaknesses to give us strength to endure in faith and not lose heart in sharing the kingdom of God through the preaching of Christ.

That grace is the powerful solution to my weakness. That is why we boast about our weakness. It is really a boasting about Christ’s power, power that gives us strength. Remember that Paul was using the word “boast” in mockery of the boasting of those whom he called “super apostles,” those false prophets masquerading as ambassadors for Christ.

“Therefore,” Paul wrote, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me,” literally, tent over me, cover and protect me. These words remind us of Paul’s words to Philippians in chapter 4, “I can do all things through him who gives me strength.” v.3

The sufficient grace that makes me strong is the solution to my weakness. It is God’s powerful grace in Jesus Christ. That power lies over us like a tent protecting us. Paul may be alluding to the Tabernacle, the tent, Israel carried with them in the wilderness. The glory of the LORD entered it and rested in it as evidence of his presence. This was the people’s strength in their weaknesses as they journeyed to the Promised Land.

Is it any different for us? The glory and power of the Lord is in our midst in Jesus Christ, and in the written Word of God. “That is why, for Christ’s sake,” literally, on behalf of Christ, “I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” That is God’s powerful solution to my weakness. Amen. <SDG>