

"Why We Go Through Trials," Part 3 - 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 – April 23rd, 2017

- Today's teaching will be part three of a series I've titled, "Why We Go Through Trials."
- In chapter 11 we had an example of ways to get through a trial, and now in chapter 12 we see why we have to go through trials.
- More specifically, why God allows us to go through trials and perhaps more importantly what God does in and through the trials.

1. Trials enable us to see what God is showing us (Verses 1-4)

- Paul describes in the third person being caught up to heaven where he heard inexpressible things no one is permitted to tell.

2. Trials protect us from pride and arrogance (Verses 5-7)

- He says to keep him from pride due to this great vision God gave him a thorn in his flesh a messenger of Satan, to torment him.

3. Trials keep us prayerfully dependent upon the Lord (Verses 8-10)

- v8 Paul tells them that he had pleaded with the Lord three times to take away the thorn in his flesh that God had given to him.
- v9 He says God told him, "His grace is sufficient for His power is made perfect in weakness" so Paul will boast in Christ's power.
- v10 He tells us why saying for Christ's sake he delights in, insults hardships and difficulties for when he's weak then he's strong.

- After seeking the Lord concerning the text before us today, I sensed the Holy Spirit would have me take a different approach.
- Different in that I would like to ask and answer the many questions that are raised as it relates to the "why" behind the "what."
- Namely, that of why God in His sovereignty dealt with the Apostle Paul in such a manner as to allow this hardship and difficulty.

Question #1 - Why don't we know what the thorn was?

- The first question that I think needs to be answered is why aren't we told specifically what this thorn in the flesh actually was.
- While we don't know what it was, we do know that the word Paul uses for thorn in the original language is an 18" tent spike.
- I'm personally of the belief that were we to know it what it was we would be dismissive of it if it weren't the same for us as well.

Charles Spurgeon - "I generally find that each expositor has selected that particular thorn which had pierced his own bosom."

Question #2 - Why did Paul pray three times?

- The second question to be answered is why did Paul pray specifically three times for God to remove this thorn in the flesh.
- Actually, it's believed that Paul didn't pray only three times, rather, he prayed repeatedly and continuously for God to remove it.
- The reason it's important to understand this is it speaks to praying without ceasing, which is what Paul said in 1 Thess. 5:17.

G. Campbell Morgan - "... three times. ...is the Hebrew figure for ceaselessly, continuously, over and over again."

Question #3 - Why didn't God answer Paul's prayer?

- The third question that we would do well to answer is why didn't God answer Paul's prayer and remove this thorn in the flesh.
- Actually, God did answer his prayer, but it wasn't the answer that Paul had wanted, it was that which God knew Paul needed.
- The truth of the matter is, God knew what Paul needed most, and what Paul need most was for this thorn to remain in his life.

Question #4 - Why did Paul need this thorn to remain?

- This dovetails into the fourth and final question that we need to answer, which is why did Paul need this thorn to remain in him.
- Thankfully, our text provides us with several reasons chief of which is it kept Paul humbly and prayerfully dependent upon God.
- I would submit that absent the thorn that remains in yours and my life, we would become full of pride and do so to our own peril.

G. Campbell Morgan - "There is nothing more hindering to the work of God than the uplifted and proud Christian."

- One of the things the Lord has been ministering to me in my walk with Him, is His way is always higher and better than mine.
- Often times, God will deem it best to strengthen me to bear up under the trial instead of simply removing from me the trial.
- Were He to grant me my wish to remove my tent spike, I would never taste from the magnificent cup of His all-sufficient grace.

Alan Redpath of this grace wrote, "Do you see the humor of the situation? God's grace: me. His grace sufficient for little me! How absurd to think that it could ever be any different! As if a little fish could swim in the ocean and fear lest it might drink it dry! The grace of our crucified, risen, exalted, triumphant Savior, the Lord of all glory, is surely sufficient for me! Do you not think it is rather modest of the Lord to say sufficient?"

- I find it rather interesting that when God answers Paul's prayer by saying that His grace is sufficient, he goes on to say why it is.
- Notice in verse nine where the Lord tells Paul that His grace is sufficient because God's power is made perfect in his weakness.
- This is why Paul in a paradox of paradoxes says in verse ten he delights in his weakness for when he is weak then he is strong.

Charles Spurgeon - "Great tribulation brings out the great strength of God. If you never feel inward conflicts and sinking of soul, you do not know much of the upholding power of God; but if you go down, down, into the depths of soul-anguish till the deep threatens to shut her mouth upon you, and then the Lord rides upon a cherub and does fly, yea, rides upon the wings of the wind and delivers your soul, and catches you away to the third heaven of delight, then you perceive the majesty of divine grace. Oh, there must be the weakness of man, felt, and recognized, ...or else the strength of the Son of God will never be perfected in us."

- I'll bring it to a close by sharing with you one of the best illustrations of God's strength and power, perfected in our weakness.
- Picture yourself pushing a boat in the sand on the beach to the shore. You push and push and try and try but you're too weak.
- Then lo and behold here comes the tide and with it the strength and power of the wave as it effortlessly does what you couldn't.