

“But GOD”

“But God said....” 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

September 15, 2024

INTRO.: Thank you for sharing, Shawn! It has been very exciting to hear of how God has been working in the lives of His children! We have heard of the many ways the power of God has been manifested. We are reminded that NOTHING is too difficult for God. Can I hear an Amen? This morning, we want to look at the question, “What about when God says no?” I posed a couple of scenarios last week leading up to this week. Suppose somebody shares this testimony, “I was driving down the road and a car swerved in front of me, but I thank God that He was with me, allowing me to miss the car.” It causes me to ask the question, “If they hadn’t avoided the accident, did God’s presence suddenly leave them?” Or how about the person who doesn’t survive cancer, and God calls them home? Now, I do believe we should celebrate God’s healing and His hand of protection over our lives, but how do we walk through life’s pain and heartache when God says, no? This hit home again for me this week when I received word that Freddie Coile, a man I count as a friend, a man who loved Jesus and was passionate about sharing the gospel, a man I had the privilege of ministering with at youth camps held at Three Springs (where the ladies are at for the Ladies Retreat this weekend), a man who loved and cared for his family, was called home to be with Jesus. A while back, Freddie was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of brain cancer. They pursued treatment and had many people praying and on September 1st, the Lord called him home. He was 59 years old. Please pray for his wife, Janet, and his four children: Josiah, Eden, Benjamin, and Bethany. In the letter announcing his homegoing I read this: “Even as he faced the battle with cancer, Freddie taught us that ‘when disaster strikes, even cancer, we don’t need probabilities, we need certainties. Certainties that can only come from God.’” Shawn has shared some very difficult, life altering events that happened in his life. He has testified to God’s plan and purpose through all the pain and shattered dreams. I’m reminded of the testimony of Joni Earickson Tada, who was paralyzed in a diving accident at the age of 17. It was an incredible struggle for her, and she went through great periods of depression, but this is the conclusion she came to: "I would rather be in this wheelchair with Jesus, then walking without Him." So, what certainties do we have in life? The only place I know of to turn to answer this question is the Bible. We believe that the Bible is the Word of God, absolute truth, 100% accurate and reliable, and without error. There are four things we are going to look at from 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 as Paul shares an interaction he has with the Lord. These include: The Pain, The Prayer, The Purpose, The Perspective. To get some context we are going to read the first ten verses of 2 Corinthians 12. Before we read this passage let me give a little background of what was going on in Corinth. The Corinthians had begun to accept the lies of many false teachers concerning the Apostle Paul. In the previous two chapters Paul shares his qualifications leading into this chapter. Take note of where he gets his strength and whom gets the glory for anything that happens in his life.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. **8** Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

THE PAIN

v. 7

2 Corinthians 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

Paul, in the midst of defending himself, speaks of what came into his life to stop him from becoming conceited. He was given a “thorn in the flesh,” which in and of itself sounds painful.

“*thorn in my flesh:*” this is the only place this word, thorn, is used in the New Testament. This word was used of anything pointed and some believe it would be better translated “stake.” This tells us that this would have been quite painful.

Paul didn't go into any great detail to explain what this "thorn" was, so it is possible that the Corinthians knew what it meant. We could speculate but there are no definitive answers and where the Scriptures are silent, I can't make any certain conclusions. All we know for sure is that it was extremely painful.

"a messenger of Satan;" the word "messenger" is the word for angel, but here, since it is called a messenger of Satan, it would be a demon. Satan is attacking Paul. Where else do we see this happening in the Bible? We see it in the book of Job, and we see it in the temptation of Jesus to name a few.

As we will clearly see as we continue in this passage, God is still sovereign. The Scriptures make it clear that God is sovereign over all and He will use all things to accomplish His purposes. This does not mean that God is the author of evil, or responsible for evil, but that He has and will use all to accomplish His purposes.

Peter reminds us of this in Acts 2 as he preaches:

Acts 2:22–24 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

Satan had to seek permission from God to test Job.

Job 1:9–12 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. **10** "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. **11** But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." **12** The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

"to torment me:" this phrase combined with the phrase, *thorn in the flesh*, clearly communicates this was extremely painful. When anyone hears the word *torment* it brings to mind some form of harsh treatment. This is in the present tense, so this torment was ongoing.

THE PRAYER

v. 8

2 Corinthians 12:8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

"pleaded:" there is an urging, a pleading before God. Paul didn't just earnestly pray one time. He pleaded before the Lord 3 times. Some compare this to what Jesus did with the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Both prayed for something to be removed and both times the answer was no.

Matthew 26:36–44 Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." **37** He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. **38** Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." **39** Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." **40** Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. **41** "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." **42** He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done." **43** When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. **44** So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

Like Jesus, Paul was earnest in his prayer. There is much false teaching out there today regarding prayer and healing. Some of the so-called healers blame the person that has the affliction if they aren't able to heal them. They say things like, "You didn't pray enough." "You didn't have enough faith." They don't consider that God may have a different plan or purpose. This doesn't stop us from going to God in prayer. He tells us to pour our hearts out before Him. We are told to pray earnestly, and as we pray we believe nothing is too difficult for God and we believe that we can trust His plan and purpose for our lives.

The pain Paul is experiencing is real, the pleading by him is earnest, then we see:

THE PURPOSE

v. 9a

2 Corinthians 12:9a But he (God) said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

“*But he (God) said:*” God now intervenes and instead of removing the thorn, God gives Paul a promise. This is in the perfect tense which means the promise is ongoing. God is not only giving His answer to Paul’s pleading, but He is also saying this answer will continue to be in force. This is a promise, not only for Paul, but for each one of us. So, let’s examine this promise because it must be very important.

“*my grace is sufficient for you:*” Just in these few words we see several things:

*The source: (*my grace*) God is the source of the grace Paul needs. Grace is God’s unmerited favor; it is getting what we don’t deserve. It is also what every believer needs to navigate life. The word “grace” is used 155 times in the New Testament. It is what makes Christianity unique. Every other belief system makes one earn their god’s favor.

*The quantity: (*is sufficient*): there is an ample supply of God’s grace. God’s grace will NEVER run out! This is in the present tense and so this sufficiency will be ongoing.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

*The recipient: (*for you*): God’s grace is personal! It is shown in the conviction of sin and the need of the Savior in the life of the unbeliever. Then, it continues in the believer’s life as God says here.

“*my power is made perfect in weakness:*”

*The source: (*my power*): God says that it is His power that will be displayed through Paul. The word “power” is *dunamis*, where we get the English word, dynamite.

*The quantity: (*is made perfect*):

David E. Garland, The verb “perfected” (*teleitai*) means “brought to completion” or “is made fully present.” The present tense indicates that it is not yet a finished product but that it is still in process of being made perfect. This answer from the Lord helps Paul to regard the stake no longer as the vexing mischief of Satan; instead, he recognizes that through it the grace of God operates more effectively. The stake makes him acutely aware of his own inadequacies and prevents him from thinking that he is equal to the task alone. It prevents a bloated ego from crowding out the power of God in his life.

*The description/recipient: (*in weakness*): those who recognize that apart from God there is no ability to navigate life. Who receives the glory when we rely on God to carry us through the painful, heartbreaking, and crushing circumstances of life?

Garland:

The response follows a chiasmic pattern:

A is sufficient
 B for you
 C my grace
 C’ my power
 B’ in weakness
A’ is perfected

When a person comes to faith in Christ they are giving ownership of their lives to God. When we do that, we trust in the promises of God, that He has a purpose for our lives. Let me highlight two promises in particular.

Romans 8:28 (NASB95) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

“*we know:*” the believer can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that what is said here is true. It is in the perfect tense which means this knowing began at a point of time in the past and is continuing on to the present and into the future.

“*God causes:*” the great cause is God, He is the One that has the power and He is the One who guarantees this is true.

“all things:” The extent of this as it relates to our lives. There are no exceptions. It’s not like the English language: i before e except after c, and so many others.

“to work together for good:”

John MacArthur: we get the English word, synergism, from this Greek word: the working together of various elements to produce an effect greater than, and often completely different from, the sum of each element acting separately.

“To those who love God:” this is not a blanket promise to everyone in the world, for he is speaking to believers

Romans 8:29 (NASB95) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

“to become conformed to the image of His Son:” God’s purpose is to make us more and more like Jesus. Does this include the painful, heartbreaking, and crushing circumstances of life?

We can trust this promise! God will use all things for His glory and to make us more like Jesus. The second promise is:

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, **4** who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

God desires to use the trials you go through to allow you to comfort others who are going through similar trials. I can’t speak to others going through cancer like Lynn Wintersteen and Beth Hill can. I can’t speak to people having their future totally rearranged by an accident like Shawn can. I have watched widows in this fellowship minister to newly widowed people. Can I encourage you to not waste your pain. Please understand that I am not saying this is easy and I’m not saying that you shouldn’t lament or experience sorrow. What happens when we don’t get the answer from God that we had hoped we would get?

We have looked at the pain, the pleading, the purpose, and I want to close with:

THE PERSPECTIVE

2 Corinthians 12:9b Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.

Paul is willing to boast about his weaknesses because it allows Christ’s power to be seen. As one commentator said, this doesn’t mean he enjoys his weaknesses and the pain he is enduring. He knew that it was a way for Christ’s power to be seen.

2 Corinthians 12:10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

“for Christ’s sake:” his life revolves around Jesus Christ. This is an opportunity for people to see Jesus through him.

“I delight in weaknesses:” could also be translated “pleased.” (MacArthur) This is a present tense indicating this was his ongoing response.

“for when I am weak, then I am strong:” these are present tense verbs: “weak” and “I am.”

Paul wanted Jesus to be seen in and through his life, even if it meant going through difficult things, painful things, heartbreaking things.

SO WHAT???

*Have I come to personally know God, the only One who has the answer for eternity and assures me there is purpose for this life?

*Am I willing to trust God with my life even when He doesn’t answer my prayers the way I want?

*In what ways can my trials, pain, and heartaches be used so others see Christ’s power?

*Men: what other men, who are following Christ, are walking this journey of life with me?

Women: what other women, who are following Christ, are walking this journey of life with me?

*What small group am I involved in?