

Spiritual blessings and thorns in the flesh (Quality: Good)

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[0 : 00] entirely dependent upon the Lord's health. We will speak from verse 9 in the chapter that we read. The second epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 12 and verse 9.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Most gladly therefore, would I rather glory in my infirmities than the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Amen. This is one of the most frequented spots in the whole world of God.

One of the places most frequently from, like the steps, Sire of St. Paul's Cathedral, the absolutely warm, or Canterbury Cathedral, or any other place, warm with the footsteps of untold numbers over untold years.

[1 : 30] Not that this scripture, or any scripture, is worn away far from it. Nevertheless, it is so frequented by the Lord's people that it can well be likened to that place where they often have to go in times when they are encompassed with infirmities and experiencing the deeper matter of Bible God with it.

For here, as in other of the Apostles' inner secrets, we have a very favoured revelation of what's going on inside.

And after all, if this is put in writing, or on record, ought we not to value it?

Because this is the whole point of the work of God and the grace of an heart. It's what's going on inside us that matters.

What is of the Spirit? What we are learning? What our pathway is teaching us? Whether we are straggling and struggling along blindly, ignorantly, or on the other hand, whether we are observing, looking closely into, narrowly viewing the things that God is doing in our life.

[3 : 36] Not just brushing them off and saying, oh well, I expect it will be better soon. What's happening today?

You may not say tomorrow, what is the Lord doing?

Why is he dealing with you as he is? Look at the untold numbers of today under the divine discipline and teaching of the Holy Spirit.

I say, look at them, you can't. Think of them. It's a wide world over.

And the different sufferings, trials, persecutions, and afflictions that they are passing through.

[4 : 37] What is their point and purpose? For God does work those things which are according to his own purpose.

So he gives no account of them. And that Paul is pressed into a very difficult position. he doesn't want to boast.

He doesn't want to say many things about himself. I don't think that preachers sent from God do. Not in the way of egotism.

Set themselves up on a pedestal. I'm positive they come. because if God deals with them there's no pedestal to set themselves upon.

But he is pressed into a position where he's got to say what he's passed through in this previous chapter.

[5 : 49] And when it comes to the solemnly thrice I was beaten with rods.

Once was I stowed. Thrice I suffered shipwreck a day and a night I have been in the deep.

So if we pondered over these things even these dozen or more verses we should see that his suffering were great for Christ's sake.

But he starts this chapter it is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

He's in that position where he needs to establish in the face of opposition and his enemy the fact of God having dealt with him so strangely from the very beginning of his call all through his ministry until this present time and now he's faced with these critics of Corinth.

[7 : 12] Godly people among them it is true a godly seed planted infested with the work of the adversary and of course attacking the apostle himself as to his authority which is exactly what Aaron and Miriam did to Moses and also some of the sons of God have the Lord spoken only by Moses they said is he the only one so with the Lord Jesus Christ Christ he is attacked his person his work is the centre of the attacks of the great adversary and it is good for us and we come to such chapters as these to be reminded that there's nothing new or extraordinary the devices of the devil he's cunning and crafty he is all that a devil is and the very epitome of devilism but he only repeats those things which he's tried out in centuries before and there is nothing new in his opposition to the work of grace and of

Christ the Christian's comfort therefore is in the way that God can handle this mighty hope and we have not one or two but more examples in the scripture of how the great adversary of the church and he is a great adversary is entirely in the hand of God and that God can control him permit him to do and go what he will and as far as he permits and no further and this great comfort has ever stood in the doctrines of the gospel and it stands here after the apostle has spoken thus of his glorying and the things which he has suffered he comes to a secret that he's kept for 14 years this is a very remarkable thing that for the period of 14 years just when it was we do not know we are not intended to know but he declares quite clearly that it was some 14 years ago that he was caught up in the paradise and heard things hard to be happen and for all his time of his ministry he is kept silent on this point it goes to prove that

God's blessings have an appointed time to be spoken of what God is doing today the hearts of different ones of his people they may not be able to talk about today and it is a very unlikely thing that they will today but tomorrow the time will come when they are compelled to speak of what God has done for them you may not believe that you may if you study your own path think well I shall never have anything to say you are too harrowed you have too much unbelief too many fruits of

Satan ever to think that you are going to have any fruits of the spirit to talk about make no mistake about it the apostle kept this secret for all this time and I doubt not there are such secrets today up and down in Zion I would hope in our little bit here that the time will come I may never see it I hope I do but I may never live to see it not now I have been waiting for it for many many many years and not live to see now the purposes of God ripen and as you know fruit doesn't ripen overnight and so with regard to this secret that the apostle had he kept it for a long time he wasn't negligent he wasn't something that he ought to have done right at the outset but it had to mature in his own breath at a time when he needed it the most and that was to withstand the criticism of those who hurled evil words and thought at him you we read together concerning some of the things for

I fear when I come I shall not find you such as I would and that I shall be found unto you such as you would not go I without creating a stir somewhere else and thus Paul didn't look forward on his third visit with any anticipation of a warm welcome he could see there was work to be done unless when I come again my

[15 : 28] God will humble me among you and that I shall be one of many which have sinned already and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which I have committed this is a view of Corinth you read the first chapter the first official or any of the blessed chapters in either epistle you'll see the pure gospels and the humble believers and intermixed with it just like the roots of the wheat and the tares you'll find such characters as these so that he is brought under pressure to expose reveal what God has done for him therefore he comes on down to this revelation but he doesn't give any details of it had he done so it may well have swept away all the charges of his enemies but he gives but few words about it how interesting it would be to know exactly what he saw but no quite plainly he says that it was forbidden he heard unspeakable words but it is not lawful for a man who others that's as much as we're told now having said that he comes to something else and that is what this revelation cost him in his own person exactly what true religion does cost him something in their own self that they got to endure alone suffer alone what intimately in his business no wonder you can't see the work of grace going on and the church of

God growing in numbers and these things constitute the life of faith it comes down to these homely words of his which we have in this text and this explanation as to why he was suffering from what he calls a thorn in the cliff this couldn't have been any reference to his carnal nature utterly impossible for him to introduce into the epistle his sinful death his wretchedness his lost condition because he already told us that years ago he already intertwines this with so much that he writes with nothing that was brought to him afraid over the

Corinthian troubles nothing it has been very mistakenly said the thought in the place was the apostle carnal nature but no it was something of a hidden nature that we can surmise as long as we like make as many suggestions as we like and try and attract people's attention by it but it would be the utmost calling to try to do that because we are not specifically told what it was even half a dozen words would have solved the mystery but no but there is another side to this that is that he saw the vision revelation which God had given him was of a peculiar nature and knowing his own heart he says lest I should be exhorted about measure what measure by the ordinary everyday human measurer of his own heart lest he should be proud and show it the Lord balanced him balanced him having something really heavy something to tie him down now what wisdom this is that he's given to the apostle because

God gave it to him he didn't with all his ability created himself and just like perhaps your thought today pricking pretty tidy you didn't produce it did you you thought instead of a thorn you were producing perhaps a rose you proved the old saying that no rose without a thorn now you see this you can't understand it's not possible for you to say well yes I can clearly see what this is it's to keep me humble it's to give me something to pray about you may say well I can

I can see why I got it because I can feel the effects of it afflictions you may say make me see what I should otherwise see you say I can begin to see why these things are well to keep close to his word he says there was given to me this is one of the gifts of God God yes but who is the instrument Satan now I do not say nor do I think that Satan doesn't work in our human nature he does take the case of

[23 : 59] Job the first and second of Job that strange meeting between God and the devil whence comest thou Satan he said from walking up and down in the earth a non-committal answer hast thou considered my servant Job says God unto him one of nests to it evil and then Satan says ah but we've set a hedge about him I can't get at him I would if I could you've set a hedge about him and his children even his cattle and then the Lord says behold is in thy hand but touch not

Israel now these things are either believed or disbelieved they're either among what are called the old passion people who certainly don't believe in the book of Job or else they're among those who do and if we are among the latter then undoubtedly the book of Job will afford us much profitable reading but there's an example in the case of David a number of the people is another Satan stood up and tempted David God stood up we read in another account he permitted David to be so overcome with the desire to know how many people he got that he sent this evil thought into his light and sent to

Joab his commander through the army to take a sentence it took him nine months and more and even then he was so dilatory about it because he didn't agree with the whole thing that he didn't give him the right figure and David's heart smoked it when he saw that number his heart smoked it and knocked to them you see this is bringing it home when your heart smites you just the same with David when he was in the cave and he cut off the hem of Saul's garment at all it didn't hurt Saul a bit he did anything about it but his heart smoked him why why because he put forth his hand against the Lord anointing isn't it well for us to be apprised of the work of the devil and not to go along blindly every day of our lives if there wasn't such a person or listen to false teachers who laugh at that teaching of this what a happy life there must be who teach that there's no supernatural devil

I've worked with them heard them talk perhaps you have and I snap their fingers at this saying that it's entirely a figment of the imagination you can't enter into this text therefore if you believe such a thing to come back to where we were the apostle knew why he got the thought and I always found this to be a great blessing if you know why you have got the thorn in your flesh that you have or the infirmity or the trial of your faith that which is bitter brings cries and tears and wrings them out of your hearts if you know why you've got it that's half the battle why why is it half the battle because you will be able to pray about it that's why if you can't pray about this thorn in the flesh where are you for one thing is it really a messenger from Satan to baptism is it something normal that you look about and say well plenty of people like are there is it something that is unusual this is the test if you got a thorn sent to

God with the purpose of keeping you on a low level and humbling you before him there's this one great point in it that you will do what called it you'll pray and you may test yourself upon this point because if you don't pray if it something that you preserve a dead silence about you will gain the scriptural examples of some of God's people who absolutely defied God with silence the children do their parents don't they the husband can defy his wife with silence don't they and the wife or husband it's a very effective weapon is silence isn't it sulking they call it with the children a sulk we sulk before

[31 : 15] God silent before him and if this leaves your hope then you can't go very far with this blessed ninth verse with regard to the answer because there won't be an answer for you the desperate state get into but you can trace it in a good many lives in the old well as the new testament david david was sulking he was silent for a long time coming up to twelve months before the child was born to the achievers in this you see what can really happen so with joe he couldn't he could open his man his wife said to him curse

God and die what he said shall we not receive at the lord's hand good and shall we not receive evil see the struggle that can be introduced even between man and wife look at man hour this one we have seen the lord is there and we have surely doubt and see good woman says the lord were pleased to kill it he would not have shown us all these things almost saying to her well it isn't rational to talk like that but good man had to be reminded didn't he so here the apostle confides his feelings to his friends at

Corinth and he shares of this soon in the place that it was a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I should be exalted above me now when you realize and when I realize too that it's possible to be proud and possible what a godly hymn right a heart says the heart uplifts with god's own gift and make thee gracious near when you realize that it'll make you tremble at the terrible devastating effect pride exalted above me is it possible to be proud of grace quite possible but what a temptation it is so that allowing us to be perfectly true is it not necessary that there should be some ballast put in the ship and that you should be given something of a peculiar nature that's going to ballast you and keep you on an even keel surely there's nothing unusual about this is it does this help you with this thought of you as faith and mix with what you hear and are you able to say yes to God's ways in this to conceive if you hadn't got this you'd be thought it above me now this is the inner secret isn't it this is the life of faith within the working of

God's divine grace he won't have his people exalted above measure whether they're poor or apollo or cephas or anybody else he hates pride and he makes his people hate it and he shows to them the damaging effects on it and therefore to know yourself and your heart and your balance and your thorn in the flesh will be your great mercy and it will put you in a proper place but now the apostle didn't like this thought and he was so unaware of it at the time that he prayed that it might be removed and he says

I besought the Lord's Christ heart and this in my judgment it may not be in your work means just what it says three times some say it's just a relative figure or expression but we won't stop to discuss that point I besought the Lord's cry take it away Lord take it away take it away I place my room on one occasion using precisely those words take it away Lord take it away he never did and I have the greatest reason today to bless his holy name that he never did oh yes but until the after war one cannot say that so that before the apostle realized what it was doing he said

[38 : 18] Lord remove this sword now perhaps this is your prayer today you're asking you can see no way out other than this that the Lord should remove whatever this particular pricking thorn is and there you stand and this is your only prospect that unless and until the Lord does remove it there will be no blessing for you and you're entirely wrong you're entirely wrong you're looking in the wrong direction you're hoping the wrong hope your expectation is completely awry the Lord won't take it away but as far as the matter goes at the moment you can see no other prospect and that is because we're looking at it with a carnal eye this is where the text and we're a long time coming to it but where else can we begin there is another way have you thought about that way and he said unto me my grace is sufficient for thee for my strength is made perfect in weakness now this is an amazing opening this is fully in keeping with what the apostle says earlier on there's no temptation taken you but such as is common to man however extraordinary it may be says

God to his people and you think you're the only one there's no trial taken you but such as is common to man but God is faithful who will with the temptation and made a way to escape this is the way here this is the way to escape that you may be able to bear James teaches us the same lesson in his general epistles he says the spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy but he giveth more grace here are the two conflicting powers the spirit that dwelleth in us does lust to envy and a good many other things but he giveth more grace to counteract to balance to subdue that spirit of envy and love whatever it may be so that the pressure was or the prayer rather was squeezed out of the apostles' heart for this

I besought the Lord's rights if your eyes aren't erected grace toward I venture to think that you'll go on praying for the thorn to be removed you'll go on saying take it away you won't have any other prospect before you but if the Lord would show you this path which Job speaks of the 28th of Job there is a path snow found out a vulture's eye hath not seen the lion's wealth hath not trod there is a path there is a gate there is a way a narrow way those that come in by this way don't and it is a way of grace so that reviewing the few things that we've said what a wonderful exposition in this chapter of the secret of the life of

God's dear servant we cannot know what he said we cannot put a wrong construction on it it is so fitting it never has been to everyday life and meets the need of all who come this way that it is invaluable it has been as I said at the beginning it's that well trodden place where thousands and thousands have stood before and if so be this is fitterly spoken to you the swallowing with your thorn in the flesh you'll tread it again and the Lord grant to you the same answer which with his help we shall try and look at the sea amen