

June 2009

Dear Friend,

Last month we took a good look at the inexhaustible peace that you and I were given at the new birth. We discovered that it is a peace that seems to thrive under adversity. One of the points that we made was that our peace has been road tested and proven to hold up under any conditions. The man that we used to prove this point was the apostle Paul. We sited II Corinthians 4:7-9 as our key scripture.

II Corinthians 4:7-10 *But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

Notice that Paul states the conditions of adversity but at this point he gives no real life example to what he might be referring to. #1- *Troubles*, #2- *Perplexities*, #3- *Persecutions* and #4- *Cast Down*. When I read these conditions it's easy for me to substitute my own personal examples in trying to relate to what Paul might have been talking about.

If I really wanted to see what Paul had on his mind when he penned these words, I'd have to move ahead several chapters in the Book of (**II Corinthians 12:7-10**) *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

Let's understand a few things before we go on. Notice that Paul said Satan had sent a messenger to buffet him? Messenger in the Greek is the word "*angelos*" meaning a fallen angel or now presently a demon. This devil had come to track him down everywhere he went and try to be a thorn in Paul's flesh. It's important to see how Paul described this trouble maker. A thorn is not something that normally kills people, it really can't even stop you from going about your normal daily routine; it just makes things uncomfortable and tries to slow down progress. Notice here where he puts this thorn, in the flesh, not in the spirit, but in the flesh. This is important, because the Lord has a remedy for Paul's flesh that will forever put a spiritual immunity between the poison of this thorn and Paul's joy.

The victory in all this was one of the greatest revelations on grace ever received by any of the church fathers. The word grace was forever transformed in its meaning to describe a measure of strength that was transferred immediately from the Lord at the least sign of this thorn in the flesh.

This transfer of strength was so powerful when Paul received it that it made him rejoice in the very face of the thing that had come to destroy him.

So what was Paul's thorn in the flesh? What conditions brought Paul into a state of joy that he could lift his hands and worship as if he was in a state of pleasure rather than adversity.

Look at **v. 10** *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

The actual real life events of verse 10 are spelled out in the preceding chapter, which of course is the thorn in the flesh that he was describing.

Special note: Before we look at what we are about to see it is imperative that we understand something.

- 1) We are not building Paul as our patron saint. He was only a man.
- 2) We have only one full example and that is Christ; although Paul did say follow me as I follow Christ.
- 3) The Holy Spirit had Paul pen these things for our example.
- 4) This is an excellent example of the worth of our peace in Christ.

Now let's examine just how big a thorn Paul had to deal with at the time. For your convenience we'll list them in numerical order. This will add meaning and purpose for teaching sake, understand that a lot of what Paul listed he grouped together. We'll break them down into individual events.

I would like to take the opportunity at this time to insert some facts to paint a more vivid picture of this man Paul. -

Paul was born about the same time as Jesus, in 2 or 3 A.D. Paul's education and zealousness in Judaism advanced him to a place of prominence among the Jews until his conversion to Christ. Paul's conversion to Christ takes place on the road to Damascus as recorded in Acts chapter 9. Paul then lived out the remainder of his life as an apostle, traveling an estimated 13,000 miles on three missionary journeys spanning some 30-35 years before his execution in Rome some time between 65 and 70 A.D.

To over simplify the book of Acts we can say it is divided into 2 parts, the first half being the Acts of the Apostles in and around Jerusalem and the second half "the life and times of the Apostle Paul." Luke, a physician is the supposed writer and the traveling companion on much of the next thirty years of Paul's life. Luke records some of the events that Paul lists here in II Corinthians 4 but not all.

Just for fun Friend I would like to take some literary liberty, although I'll say to begin with this is not factual. Let's say for the purpose of teaching that Luke, a physician or doctor was with Paul in all or most all of the things Paul is about to list. Let's also say that Paul and Luke have 21st century knowledge of things but are limited to first century resources.

The argument that Paul gives now is to repudiate the claim of "false apostles" that has invaded the Corinthian church. Instead of telling the church why he thinks they ought to listen to him rather than these other guys, he simply tells them why Satan thought he needed to be stopped more than these other self proclaimed apostles.

(II Corinthians 11:23-28) *Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in*

the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

#1- Labours - more abundant -

▶ 13,000 miles, 30-35 years of constant labouring for the Lord, establishing churches throughout the entire Roman Empire.

#2- Stripes - above measure -

▶ I call these miscellaneous stripes. Not the ones mentioned later by the Jews. Sometimes Paul was beaten by heathens like at Phillpi in Acts 16. Above measure may have meant beyond the sentence given or I can't remember how many.

#3- Prisons, more frequent -

▶ meant more times thrown in jail than these other preachers that you're relating to.

#4- Deaths – often -

▶ possibly to mean either a spiritual fight or just despairing for his physical life.

#5- Beatings – of the Jews – one (forty save one stripes) = 39 stripes

#6- Beatings – of the Jews – two (+ 39 stripes)

#7- Beatings – of the Jews – three (+ 39 stripes)

#8- Beatings – of the Jews – four (+ 39 stripes)

#9- Beatings – of the Jews – five (+ 39 stripes) = 195 stripes

If Luke was with Paul in the aftermath of any of these beatings what might their conversations have been like? **Luke:** “Paul, I'd like to call the ambulance but there are none. You need emergency care but there is none. Paul I can't even give you an Advil for the pain.”

The next part is called rod beatings, traditionally known to break all the bones in the feet, thus hobbling the victim to impair their mobility making travel impossible for the rest of their lives.

#10- Beating of rods - one

#11- Beating of rods - two

#11- Beating of rods – three

Luke: “Paul, you need x-rays on those feet and need to have them set in a cast but of course there is no such thing to offer you, not even an aspirin.

#13- Stoned – left for dead -

▶ this stoning is recorded in (**Acts 14:19**) at Lystra. The people stoning him thought him dead and he may have been. The brethren gathered around him and prayed until he was revived. I have seen head injuries that resulted in death, the head bleeds excessively.

Luke: “Paul can you hear me? How many fingers am I holding up?”

Paul: “Just help me get the blood out of my eyes and ears. I have to go back into Lystra and finish my sermon.”

#14- Shipwreck - one

#15- Shipwreck - two

#16- Shipwreck - three

▶ ships being the predominate way of long distance travel for large groups of people. What would this be comparable to in modern times? (*Plane crashes*)

#17- *Night floating in the sea* -

▶ things that go bump in the night.

#18- *Day floating in the sea* -

▶ daylight reveals everything.

What if Paul and Luke shared the same piece of broken ship to float together on? What might have been part of their conversation while floating in the beautiful pristine waters of the Mediterranean Sea?

Luke: “Paul, how big do you think that shark is?”

Paul: “Judging by his dorsal fin probably between 12 and 14 foot long.”

#19- *Journeyings, often* -

▶ 13,000 miles mostly on foot, just bone tired at times.

Paul now lists perils, which are exposures to risk or harm. They carry their own tribulation with each circumstance.

#20- *Perils, of water* -

▶ this probably not having anything to do with the sea. The word water here carries a meaning of moving, like a river or stream, basically the dangers of crossing a river.

#21- *Perils, of robbers* -

▶ got robbed or they attempted to rob them

#22- *Perils, of my own countrymen* -

▶ other Jews tried to do Paul in.

#23- *Perils, of the heathen* -

▶ people from other countries maybe not even connected to religious practice tried to kill Paul.

#24- *Perils, in the city* -

▶ bad things in the streets

#25- *Perils, in the wilderness* -

▶ away from everybody still danger occurred, maybe being chased by wild animals.

#26- *Perils, in the sea* -

▶ possibly more trouble not mentioned earlier.

#27- *Perils, among false brethren* -

▶ these may have been the betrayals of the Judas type from those who ministered with Paul for years just to at some point abandon him.

#28- *Weariness* -

▶ Exhaustion

#29- *Painfulness* -

▶ maybe the experience that it took to confess his feet back into health. The possible weeks it took to worship himself back into health.

#30- *Watchings* -

▶ staying up through the night, either in prayer or watching for his life.

#31- *Hunger* -

▶ no food where Paul was, either in prison or some back side of the desert where no KFC's or McDonalds existed.

#32- *Thirst* -

▶ nothing to drink, long way to the next Oasis.

#33- *Fasting* -

▶ self imposed fast for spiritual reasons to win in the warfare.

#34- *Cold* -

▶ exposed to the elements

#35- *Nakedness* -

▶ probably stolen clothes left him naked or striped by his jailers

#36- *Daily care of the churches* -

▶ fighting the urge to worry about the doctrinal state of the churches having heard that many of them were in a tremendous battle to turn from sound doctrine, considering there were no phones, no email, and no means of modern travel to quickly get anywhere to address or fix a problem.

My God Paul, this doesn't sound like a thorn it sounds like a whole forest!

If any one of these things had happened to most of the so called modern day apostles you would have never heard the end of it. It would be on every web page, blasted by pictures of the travesty and probably legal suits against the persons who caused it.

I shudder to think what I might have placed in the categories first list in chapter 4, the categories that describe adversity.

I also know that Jesus looks at my adversity with the same love and respect that He looked at Paul's when I trust in His grace for deliverance.

I think the thing that stirs me more than the 36 types of events that Paul listed that made up his one thorn was this, Paul's reaction found in **v. 29 - *Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?***

Paul may have said it like this: You think I mention all this to say it has weakened me? Who is weak? Are you talking about me? Not me. I am not weak because of all this. These things haven't discouraged me one bit. I am still resolved to go just as hard as I ever did. "Who is offended? I burn not." Do you think I am mad at all the people that did these things to me? Is that what you think? Do you think I mentioned all this because I am burning inside with hatred? I'm not even mad at those who participated in the things done against me.

v.29 - *Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?* Who is weak?

This almost seems unreal to me. I can think of times in my life I might have used any one of these things to throw the biggest party ever, the *biggest pity party*.

Friend understand this, I am not making light of any of our present day trials. I know that Jesus treats us with the same level of respect that He treated the apostle Paul. To Jesus our broken heart, infirmed body, loss of employment, emotional test, wayward child etc...all of these trials spell one thing to Him...*compassion*.

Again, I simply want us to understand the conditions that this peace has the capacity to hold up under and keep going. It could not be stopped after 36 plus horrible events, nor can it be stopped by a pink slip from your employer. Just remember Paul was never stopped by Satan's messenger in all of this. He died a martyr being an old man and very willing to do so.

1. *Paul never quit.*
2. *Paul never had to be hospitalized in a sanitarium because of an emotional breakdown*
3. *Paul never got off in his doctrine as a result of the lessons of life.*

If Paul could finish his course, you and I are destined and can determine to do the same.

In closing, remember Friend, our peace through his grace is limitless. We can and will finish our course into revival.

Love,

Pastor Bronc

P.S. - The word says that we are to exhort one another daily while it is called today and that if two shall agree as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of our Father which is in heaven. If you have a prayer request or a praise report to share please let us hear from you. You can contact us through the web site at www.broncflint.org or email us at fpc@broncflint.org and/or feel free to write us at:

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