

Introduction:

- IE. "A Texas rancher met up with a Wisconsin dairy farmer. The two men began talking about their land and the milkman told the cattleman that he operated his business on 125 acres. The Texan scoffed at such a small parcel of land. He said, "Yankee, that ain't nothin'. On my ranch I can get in my truck at sunrise and I won't reach the fence line of my property until sunset." The dairy farmer snorted, "Yeah, I used to have a rotten ol' truck like that too."
- A sightseeing bus was making the rounds through Washington, D.C., and the driver was pointing out spots of interest. As they passed the Pentagon building, he mentioned that it cost taxpayers millions of dollars and that it took a year and a half to build. While everyone was looking at it, a little old woman piped up: "In Peoria we could have built the same building for less, and it would have been completed even sooner than that!" The next sight on the tour was the Justice Department building. Once again the bus driver said that it cost so many millions to build and took almost two years to complete. The woman repeated: "In Peoria we would have done it for less money, and it would have been finished much sooner." The tour finally came to the Washington Monument, and the driver just passed slowly by without saying a word. The old woman was curious. "Hey," she shouted to the driver, "what's that tall white building back there?" The driver looked out the window, waited a minute and then said, "Search me, lady. It wasn't there yesterday."
- Heavy Weight champion Mohammed Ali was known for many things, not the least of which being his pride and arrogance. It's reported that once, when asked by a stewardess to fasten his seat belt, Ali replied, "Superman don't need no seat belt." Unamused, the stewardess replied, "Superman don't need no airplane either!" We are going to talk about 'bragging rights' this morning.
- The apostle Paul also like bragging! Any time he could brag about Jesus he did!
- *"And He said to me, **My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NKJV)
- *"Each time he said, **My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.**" So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NLT)
- As we look at bragging rights this morning, we are going to look at: 1. An experience worth bragging about. 2 Thorns worth bragging about. 3. My actual bragging rights.

I. An Experience Worth Bragging About (1-7)

- A. What are "bragging rights": entitled to boast or brag; the right to boast or brag associated with winning! If a person has 'bragging rights' they have a reason to be proud! They have accomplished something. Bragging is making it about me.
 1. We all are guilty of this. Or we at some point in the last few days have been guilty. Ie. I broke my clavicle had to have a titanium plate put in six screws. "Hey, I have nine screws and one they screwed all the way through the bone. Ya, came out the other side." Bragging rights look at me.
 2. Religion is always boasting. We accomplish something so we can brag. Paul said if anyone had reason to boast it was him: born a Jew, circumcised on the eighth day, of the tribe of Benjamin, Student of Gamaliel, no one more devoted, a pharisee of pharisees! Bragging rights. Look at me.
 3. Anything to make me look good or better.

- B. Because of our depravity, we have a tendency to brag about things that make us look good. We are contending for love, acceptance, and significance on our own strength. If we will stop that we will be forced to look else where...Jesus. Let's look at experiences worth bragging about.
1. Vs 1. *This boasting*: Paul shares his 'score card' (11:21-28). His pain, trouble, suffering, and accomplishments of his flesh to survive.
 2. vs. 1. *This boasting*: I will reluctantly tell (about my experience in revelations and visions.) This happened 14 years ago. (Must have really been good to still be talking about it.) IE. I have angel experiences, Kelly and I have angel experiences together. Paul says those things are worth boasting about. Bragging rights, look at me! (That is what it does)
 3. But he implies that such things really do not bring glory to God. Yes, they capture people attention but rarely do they capture people's character. Of course an angel can make God look good. Gabriel, Michael both can make God look good. But if you really want God to stand out put Him in someones weakness! Whoa! He will shine there. Other people will see, "Hey, He can do that in me too!"

II. Thorns Worth Bragging About (6-8)

- A. Thorns, Gr. *Skolops* - stake, splinter, thorns as in thorn bush. Thorns do several things:
1. Thorns hurt-that gets your attention, or pain gets your attention. If Paul was thinking about being proud because of all the things he saw in the spirit, his pain was humbling him.
 2. Thorns irritate - ie. Like a splinter in the finger. Really doesn't bother you until you use it.
 3. Thorns aggravate - ie. I had a shirt that I could not find the plastic tag thing you have to cut to remove the price tag. Every time, I put it on it would stick me. It was aggravating.
 4. Thorns cause discomfort - thistles, sand spurs, etc.
 5. How many of you are married to a thorn to a thorn? Anyone work for thorns? Anyone raising thorns?
 6. Did you notice that all of these are emotional responses as well: hurt, irritate, aggravate, discomfort. This is how Paul was feeling about his "Thorn in the flesh"
- B. Paul gets a thorn. What do you do when you get a thorn? "Get it out!"
1. Paul's prayer: "Please take this thorn away!" What is Paul saying, "Fix this for me!" In fact he asks three times for the thorn to be removed.
 2. God says, '*My grace is sufficient*'
 - a) What do you do when God says, "No?"
 - (1) Do you get hurt, get irritated, get aggravated, get uncomfortable around Him.
 - (2) How do you explain that? Paul, perhaps the greatest missionary of all time, being turned down by God on such an important request? After all he has done to spread the gospel! It echoes harshly in our ears; it is inexplicable.
 - b) That's the point. We see God's actions on our terms. On our terms, Paul is entitled to having this thorn taken away from him. Yet God sees it differently.
- C. What Paul gets, is a thorn to assist in his humility. "To Keep me humble God gave me a thorn."
1. "If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it, because **I don't want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message,**" (2 Corinthians 12:6, NLT) ie. You may not see an angel but you can

see love at work in my life. You can see gentleness, kindness, faithfulness. You won't see that in a revelation or spiritual encounter.

2. God is not impressed with the pride of men. What interests Him is humility.
 - a) The details of Paul's thorn are not disclosed in scripture. Whether it was an affliction, or an opponent is unimportant.
 - b) What is important is that Paul asked God to remove it, and God said 'No' In fact, God said no three times.
3. So I am not going to brag about a spiritual experience. And I am not going to brag about my thorn. What will I brag about? That brings us to point number three.

III. My Actual Bragging Rights!

- A. The late Chuck Colson of Watergate fame shared his experience when God said NO. *"The great paradox [of my life] is that every time I walk into a prison and see the faces of men or women who have been transformed by the power of the living God, I realize that the thing God has chosen to use in my life ... is none of the successes, achievements, degrees, awards, honors, or cases I won before the Supreme Court. That's not what God's using in my life. What God is using in my life to touch the lives of literally thousands of other people is the fact that I was a convict and went to prison. That was my great defeat, the only thing in my life I didn't succeed in."*
- B. Did God say "NO" to Paul's prayer to remove it?
 1. Only if you refuse His answer.
 2. *'My grace is sufficient'* God did not say No. He said, my grace is sufficient.
 3. "No" is the answer we arrive at outside of God's perspective/view. He wants us to see and experience something greater!
- C. My weakness is my bragging right...why?
 1. My weaknesses make God look good. Especially when I allow Him to enter them. The Light really shines in the darkness! God shines in our humility!
 2. My weaknesses are about my lack of strength/my inability, so He is strong in me.
 3. Power in weakness runs as a thread throughout the 2nd letter of Corinthians and reaches its most powerful expression here! Read: 2 Cor 4:8-12
 4. Paul observes that Christ, who was "crucified in weakness ... lives by the power of God," and that believers, "by God's power, live with (Christ) 2 Cor 13:4 *"Although he was crucified in weakness, he now lives by the power of God. We, too, are weak, just as Christ was, but when we deal with you we will be alive with him and will have God's power."* (2 Corinthians 13:4, NLT)
- D. Christ's reply:
 1. My grace is sufficient. My grace is all you need.
 - a) Grace: God's ability in me to do what I can not do in and of myself.
 - b) Sufficient:
 - (1) enough to meet the needs of
 - (2) adequate for the purpose of
 - (3) I.e. My grace is sufficient for you! What ever trial you have...I have grace for. What ever you are facing...I have grace for. No matter how difficult it is ...I have grace for it. A little bit of My ability will always cover your tremendous problem, pain, thorn.

- (a) *"Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength."* (Philippians 4:11-13, NLT) Christ who gives me GRACE! His ability.
 - (b) It is like some little fish is being troubled about drinking the river dry! But the rains might say, "Little fish, drink away! My stream is sufficient for you!"
 - (c) Or like a little mouse in the granary of Egypt, after the 7 years of plenty fearing it might die of famine. Joseph might say, "cheer up little mouse, my grain is sufficient for you."
 - (d) Or a man way up yonder, standing on a mountain. He says, I breath so many cubic feet of air every year. I fear I shall exhaust the oxygen in the atmosphere. But the earth might says, "Breath away young man! And fill your lungs forever! My atmosphere is sufficient for you!" Whatever you are in, believe big! His grace is sufficient for you.
2. Christ's reply to Paul's prayer **must be seen as the climax** not only of this passage (12:1-10) and of the "Fool's Speech" (11:1-12:13), but in some ways of the entire Second Letter to the Corinthians. Barnett, P. (1997). 2 Corinthians (p. 572). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
 3. His grace is sufficient! *My grace is enough; it's all you need. My strength comes into its own in your weakness. Once I heard that, I was glad to let it happen. I quit focusing on the handicap and began appreciating the gift. It was a case of Christ's strength moving in on my weakness. Now I take limitations in stride, and with good cheer, these limitations that cut me down to size—abuse, accidents, opposition, bad breaks. I just let Christ take over! And so the weaker I get, the stronger I become.* Message (2 Co 12:9-10).

Conclusion:

- How sufficient is the grace of God for you today?
 - What are you bragging about?
 - How are you using the 'thorns' in your life?
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- What can we know/learn from Job?
 - That we do not *know* why any particular person is suffering.
 - That we can make suffering worse for someone when we *presume* to know.
 - That the only thing we need to know when it comes to suffering is the One in control.