

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Lesson 7 – Outline

- I. Anytime I minister on physical healing, someone brings up Paul's thorn in the flesh.
 - A. They say, "God gave Paul a thorn in the flesh. He made him sick. Paul tried to believe the Lord for healing but wasn't healed."
 - B. This misconception is based on a misinterpretation of Scripture.

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.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

- C. In verse 7, Paul made it very clear that this thorn in the flesh was a messenger from Satan, not from God.
 - D. The Greek word translated "messenger" here is also rendered "angel" elsewhere in the New Testament (Luke 1:13, 2 Cor. 11:14, and Gal. 4:14).
 - E. Therefore, this was a demonic messenger, a dark angel, sent from the devil to buffet Paul.
- II. Some people erroneously suppose that God gave this thorn in the flesh to Paul because this kept him from being exalted above measure.
 - A. They just automatically think this is saying the thorn in the flesh was sent from God to keep him humble. Not true.

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

1 Peter 5:6

- B. Being exalted, being lifted up, is good when God does it.
- C. The Bible says to humble yourself.
- D. If God does it to you, that's not humility; it's humiliation.

- E. Humility is not something you can force on a person; it has to come from the inside out.
- III. Satan recognized that Paul was drawing many people to the Lord because he was walking in such absolute victory and being exalted by God.
- A. Lest Paul be exalted above measure, Satan gave him a thorn in the flesh.
 - B. It was from the devil, not God.
 - C. I've had people who were sick tell me, "I'm like the Apostle Paul. God has given me a thorn in the flesh, and I'm just supposed to bear it."
 - D. Remember, it was because of the abundance of the revelations that this thorn came.
 - E. If you have been using this thorn-in-the-flesh thing as an excuse, too, you need to quit hiding behind it unless you have so much revelation that you could write half of the New Testament.
- IV. Another reason some people think it was sickness is because the word "**infirmities**" is used twice here in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10.
- A. We must remember that man put in the chapter and verse divisions later for the purpose of reference. Second Corinthians wasn't broken up by chapter and verse divisions.
 - B. Starting in 2 Corinthians 11:23, Paul defined, explained, and listed what he was calling "**infirmities.**"
 - C. All of these things listed were talking about persecution and hardships that Paul endured for the cause of Christ.
 - D. Then, just a few verses later, he declared,

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities.

2 Corinthians 12:9

- E. In context, "**infirmities**" here is talking about all of the hardships he suffered for the Gospel.
- F. Verse 10 goes on to make it very clear, saying,

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.

2 Corinthians 12:10

- G. Every one of these makes it very clear that this is not talking about some kind of physical sickness. Rather, it was speaking of a hardship or persecution that Paul had to deal with.

- V. Also, the people with a Jewish background in the church that Paul was writing to would recognize the phrase “**thorn in the flesh**” from the early books of the Old Testament.
 - A. When Paul used the terminology “**thorn in the flesh,**” their minds immediately went back to the imagery in the Old Testament scriptures of Numbers 33:55, Joshua 23:13, and Judges 2:3.
 - B. In each case, it referred to people who were antagonistic toward God’s people.
- VI. Paul walked in victory, but he also endured more persecution, shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonment, rejection, and criticism than anyone else.
 - A. The devil was doing this to turn people away from Paul’s message.
 - B. So Paul sought the Lord three times to remove this thorn in the flesh, this demonic angel that stirred up persecution through people.
 - C. The Lord answered,

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

- VII. Through Christ’s Atonement, we have been redeemed from sickness, but not from persecution.
 - A. Paul himself acknowledged this truth later in his life while writing to Timothy:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

2 Timothy 3:12

- B. God doesn’t just stop all of our persecutors.
- C. Rather, He reveals Himself to people through us as we continue to love them, forgive them, turn the other cheek, and follow Jesus.
- D. It’s a powerful testimony when we continue to love God despite their threats, and God uses it.
- E. We aren’t redeemed from persecution, but we are redeemed from sickness.

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Lesson 7 – Discipleship Questions

1. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. A thorn in the flesh was given to Paul lest he should be _____ through the abundance of the revelations.
 - A. Paid above normal.
 - B. Warmed and filled.
 - C. Exalted above measure.
 - D. All of the above.
 - E. None of the above.
2. What was made perfect in Paul's weakness?
3. According to Luke 1:13, the angel greeted Zacharias by saying what?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 11:14. What can Satan be transformed into?
5. According to Galatians 4:14, was Paul despised or rejected because of the temptation in his flesh?
6. How was he received?
7. According to 1 Peter 5:6, if we humble ourselves, what will God do?
8. Read Acts 20:9-12. When did Eutychus fall asleep?
9. When Eutychus was raised from the dead, were the people only a little comforted?
10. According to Acts 16:16-18, whom did Paul speak to?
11. Read Acts 19:11-12. God worked _____ miracles by the hands of Paul.
12. According to Acts 17:6, whom were Jason and certain brethren taken to?
13. Read Acts 16:25-33. What did Paul and Silas answer the keeper of the prison?
14. He and his entire house were baptized when?
15. According to Romans 8:26, the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings that cannot be _____.
16. Read 2 Corinthians 11:23-33. If Paul needed to glory, what was he going to glory in?
17. Read Acts 14:19. After stoning Paul, what did the people do to him?
18. Read Numbers 33:55. What would happen if the inhabitants of the land weren't driven out?

19. According to Joshua 23:13, was the Lord going to drive out the nations from before the Israelites anymore?
20. According to Judges 2:3, what would the gods be to the Israelites?
21. Read 1 Corinthians 4:9-13. Who were the apostles spectacles to?
22. Read 2 Timothy 3:12. Is this a guarantee?
23. Read Philippians 3:14. **“I _____ toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”**
24. According to Acts 7:58, at that time, Saul was a _____ man.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Lesson 7 – Scriptures

2 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. [8] For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. [9] 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. [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.

Luke 1:13

But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.

2 Corinthians 11:14

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Galatians 4:14

And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.

Acts 20:9-12

And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. [10] And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. [11] When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. [12] And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.

Acts 16:16-18

And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: [17] The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. [18] And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the

spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

Acts 19:11-12

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: [12] So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

Acts 17:6

And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.

Acts 16:25-33

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. [26] And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. [27] And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. [28] But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. [29] Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, [30] And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? [31] And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. [32] And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. [33] And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

2 Corinthians 11:23-33

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. [24] Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. [25] 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; [26] 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; [27] In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. [28] Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. [29] Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not? [30] If

I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities. [31] The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not. [32] In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: [33] And through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.

Acts 14:19

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

Numbers 33:55

But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.

Joshua 23:13

Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you.

Judges 2:3

Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you.

I Corinthians 4:9-13

For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. [5] Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. [6] And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. [7] For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? [8] Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. [9] For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. [10] We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. [11] Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; [12] And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: [13] Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

2 Timothy 3:12

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Philippians 3:14

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Acts 7:58

And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.