

Adversity University Message 2: Strength in Weakness

Lessons from last week:

His silence is no excuse for our being silent.

His focus compels us to focus on the needs of others.

His silence may force you to allow others to comfort you in your pain.

His silence may cause you to express your real emotions before God.

His silence will end when His purpose has been accomplished.

This week: Strength in Weakness

Most of you are familiar with the story in I Samuel 17 of David and Goliath. What if it had happened in another way? What if a strong and skillful soldier stepped from the ranks of the Israelites and accepted Goliath's challenge? (Describe battle)

If the battle had gone down just that way; who would get the praise?

²⁶ Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. ²⁷ Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong.

I Corinthians 1:26-27 CSB

If any man in the New Testament would have reason to brag, it would have been the Apostle Paul. But God is slow in using a person who does not depend on Him, but on his own strengths. So God sent Paul adversity.

especially because of the extraordinary revelations. Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself,

a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to torment me so that I would not

exalt myself. ⁸ Concerning this, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it would leave me. ⁹ But

He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.

Therefore, I will most gladly boast all the more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power

may reside in me. ¹⁰ So I take pleasure in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and in

difficulties, for the sake of Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

II Corinthians 12:7-10 CSB

Adversity has a way of making us weak. When we are weak and accomplish great things, it is God who gets the glory.

If you're smart, pretty, or wealthy what seem to be strengths may actually become your greatest weaknesses. You will rely on your own limited assets and neglect God's infinite resources.

Some have suggested that Paul suffered from an eye disease. Others say that his body was weak. There are some extra-Biblical sources that suggest he was an unattractive man to say the least.

I want to propose a way of seeing this text that you may have not considered. I think that the weight of evidence bears out that his flesh is not a physical ailment, as many believe. It most likely is a person. My premise is based upon 3 factors.

First, the word messenger appears 176 times in the New Testament. In all but one of those cases, it refers to a person. The Greek word is "angelos" and is the word we translate as angel.

Second, three places in the Old Testament the word thorn refers to a troublesome person. (Numbers, Judges, and Joshua) Paul's audience would have made this connection.

Third, Paul asks that this thorn in his flesh depart or leave him. If it were a sickness, the proper word would be to be removed. Depart or leave refers to a person.

Paul says that this messenger's purpose is to torment him. The NKJV translates the Greek word as buffet. The root of the word refers to the action of the ocean waves against a shoreline. After constant beating, the waves eventually wear away the beach.

Application

Why does God allow difficult people in our lives? Why did David have a Saul? Why did Elijah have Jezebel?

As was the case with Paul, difficult people may have been allowed into your life to make you stronger.

At least two of those adversities listed in II Corinthians 12:10 that make Paul strong were initiated by people not circumstances: insults and persecutions.

Let's return once again to Christ's example how to face adversity. Adversities ultimate goal is to glorify God. (Blind beggar) He stood before the crowd that crucified Him and He did not retaliate. Pilate interrogated Him and He did not defend Himself. The soldiers crucified Him and He forgave them. A thief mocked Him while dying and Jesus said nothing.

The result was that the other thief saw how Jesus faced adversity and was saved. And a soldier participating in His crucifixion believed, "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54)

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."
Numbers 6:24-26