

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 ESV

“When I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong”

Do you understand?

Sunday, July 5 at 8:00 & 10:45 + Monday, July 6 at 7 PM
 6th Sunday after Pentecost / 5th Sunday after Trinity – 2015

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Even though July 4th was last week, we continue to think about our freedoms: The First Amendment guarantees freedoms concerning ♦religion, ♦expression, ♦assembly, and ♦the right to petition. Even though our nation is wavering, God is still offering us eternal freedom from *sin, death, hell, and fear!* Even though such things are infinitely stronger than we are, *God – in Christ – has paved the road to freedom!*

1. **An Amazing Story:** Paul is about to do some boasting, *not to exalt himself but to prevent the Corinthians from being led astray by false teachers.* ¹ **I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it [for me], I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.** ² **I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows.** ³ **And I know that this man was caught up into paradise--whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows--** ⁴ **and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.**
 - a. A man in Christ... fourteen years ago: That was Paul’s humble way of identifying himself; Paul was converted around A.D. 40; then, 14 years later, he wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians.

- b. Heavens: There are three:
- i. **First**: Daytime sky (sun, clouds).
 - ii. **Second**: Nighttime sky (moon, stars).
 - iii. **Third**: Paradise (dwelling place of God).
During Jesus' ministry there were seven times when He said He was going **"to the Father."**¹ So where is the Father? *In heaven / paradise!* Jesus said to the *repentant criminal*: **"today you will be with me in Paradise"** (Luke 23:43 ESV). Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus: **"To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God... Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life"** (Rev. 2:7, 10 ESV).
- c. The purpose of Paul's vision / revelation: The Lord said to Ananias in regard to Paul: **"...he must suffer for the sake of my name"** (Acts 9:16 ESV). Therefore, *to carry Paul through his times of suffering*, the Lord allowed Paul to have a glimpse of the third heaven, of paradise!
2. **The Lord Gets All the Credit**:
- a. ⁵ **On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.** // So Paul boasted about ✦the Lord's work in his life and ✦about his own weaknesses, *but not about anything he himself had done.*

¹ John 13:1; 14:12; 16:10; 16:17; 16:28; 20:17.

- b. ⁶ **Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool** [by exaggerating], **for I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me or hears from me.** // So the Corinthians – *about 5 years earlier when Paul was among them* – saw his deeds and heard his words; *those deeds and words spoke for themselves!*

3. **A Pride Deterrent:**

- a. ⁷ **So to keep me from becoming conceited** [*literally, from exalting myself*] **because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me** [*literally, strike me with the fist, treat me roughly*], **to keep me from becoming conceited.** // So the Lord worked in Paul's life to keep *two factors* at a high level: ♦his knowledge of heavenly things AND ♦his humility. Paul's fantastic experience in the third heaven could have easily led to pride, so the Lord counter-balanced that experience with a particular difficulty. We might ask ourselves: How is the Lord at work in my life to both ♦build me up and ♦keep me humble?
- b. ⁸ **Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.** ⁹ **But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** // As Paul prayed about his thorn, so I prayed about my eye condition last year (you may have your own condition). Also, as the Lord did not heal Paul so

neither has He healed me, **but His grace is sufficient!** That means He will always provide our needs; *so let us trust Him and be content!*

4. **The Benefit of Our Weakness:**

- a. **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.** // Whenever we think we can do something, we are trusting in ourselves (1 Cor. 10:12 – “Therefore, let him...”). But it is far better when we are aware of our weaknesses and trust in “the power of Christ” (Jn. 15:5 – “I am the vine...”).
- b. ¹⁰ **For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.** // Dr. Kretzmann explained: “Those very experiences which another person would regard as evidences of the wrath of God... Paul knows to be proofs of God’s fatherly devotion. The more he is conscious of his own weakness and inability in carrying out the work entrusted to him by the Lord, the more the strength of the Master can become effective in him” (NT 2:220).

Conclusion: So in the face of ✦personal sin, *let us know we are forgiven in Christ*, ✦personal weakness, *let us find our strength in Christ*, and ✦powerful enemies, *let us rejoice that in Christ we have the ultimate victory!*

And all God’s people said: **Amen!**