

Severe - Gentle

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Date: 16 December 2018

Preacher: Jim Masters

[0:00] please take your Bibles and we're gonna go to 2nd Corinthians the last chapter chapter 13 2nd Corinthians chapter 13 oh yes you saw in the bulletin next week we'll do a Christmas message I'm gonna do something in 1st John then I'll do Psalm 16 and then we'll figure out what we're gonna do in January but eventually we'll start in Matthew the Gospel of Matthew that's kind of my goal today 2nd Corinthians chapter 13 we'll finish up this letter Paul's it's actually the fourth letter that he wrote to Corinth two of them we have two of them we don't have chapter 13 oh I'm sorry that black Bible and the chair in front of you go towards the back page 146 146 in that black Bible sorry 2nd Corinthians chapter 13 let me read and then we'll do our study this is the third time

I'm coming to you every word is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses I said this before when present the second time and now absent I say to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well and if I come again I will not spare since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me Christ is not weak toward you but mighty in you for indeed he was crucified out of weakness yet he lives out of the power of God for we also are weak in him yet we shall live with him because of the power of God toward you try yourselves if you are in the faith approve yourselves or do you not know this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you are unapproved but I hope that you will know that we ourselves are not unapproved but we pray to God that you do no wrong not that we ourselves may appear approved but that you may do what is good even though we should appear unapproved for we do nothing against the truth but for the truth for we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong and this we pray for your completion for this reason

I'm writing these things while absent nor that when present I may not act severely according to the authority which the Lord has given to me for edification and not unto destruction verse 11 finally brethren rejoice let yourselves be made complete let yourselves be comforted be like minded live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you greet one another with a holy kiss all the saints greet you the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all Amen when it comes to parenting Reese Witherspoon believes in full transparency she was on an interview for ABC News she said this she mentions that she prefers to tell her kids the truth no matter how harsh it might be guess what kids you're going to be disappointed and uncomfortable once in a while she said she relates the story quote

I remember Ava crying in bed in third grade she was on JV basketball and she was the only kid on the team who didn't score I said Aves maybe you're bad at basketball she thought that was mean I said mean or true because guess what your mom's bad at basketball too harsh telling the truth being severe that's not being gentle that's not being loving that's not being kind or is it what if the most loving thing to do is to be tough what if the kindest thing to do is to be harsh what if the gentlest thing to do is to be severe what if good things come from painful things what if we need a good kick in the pants so that way we don't get our leg chopped off or as the song goes what if your blessings come through raindrops what if your healing comes through tears what if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you're near what if trials of this life are your mercies in disguise that's from

Laura Story's song called blessings see for us in our American culture we don't like that so the message that you will hear is going to be anti-American so to speak or maybe I should say anti-American culture harsh and gentle severe and gentle those are opposites right not so here Paul is going to be severe and in his severity he's actually going to be gentle so that way he won't really be severe the paradox boasting in our weakness boasting in the Lord right that's the paradox that we've been looking at over the past how many messages have we done like 20 something like that so today we're going to look at this paradox severe gentle severe gentle instead of coming

severely Paul would write severely so that he could come to edify and build up instead of having to destroy or I'll put it in a different way severe gentle instead of being gentle in his words [6 : 35] Paul was severe to the Corinthians so that when he would come he could be gentle in the midst of being severe Paul was actually being gentle that's the paradox which is the paradox of the gospel right of course we have to bring it back to the gospel our relationship of love and communication with God came at the expense of the death of his son the kindest thing for God to do was to bring severity upon Jesus as you read but the Lord crushed him severely and Jesus has been severely crushed and that has happened forever he will forever be like this he will forever be the God man forever we will see the severity the harshness the toughness of God because when you would look on

Jesus you would see that that should be me I should have been dealt with in that way you should have dealt severely with me you should have been harsh with me and yet you were harsh with your son so that way you can be gentle with me you see the paradox God showed his glorious kindness by the glorious severity in the cross Jesus suffering and dying for us God's grace or power is seen most clearly not in the best of times but in what seems to be the most severe times the most painful times in your life the harsh times and yet God's not being harsh with you you want God to be harsh with you he'll send you to hell that's being harsh you want God to be severe with you he'll send you to hell that's being severe but he's not and yet as we go through these painful times and lives we realize that that severity is where

God's blessing and grace is found and Paul's desire he wanted to bring this contention with the Corinthian church to an ultimate end so he threatened to use severity but yet he appealed to them to judge themselves so that way he can avoid severely confronting them but it wasn't to further his own agenda no Paul's main concern was the healing of their relationship and for their wholeness in Christ that's what every pastor wants for God's church for God's people in short he preached the gospel to them again he was ready to preach it with his conduct by confronting them you're going to see how Paul he asserts the authority which is given to him from the weak crucified risen Lord the Lord who's the power of God displayed in weakness so let's walk through the text first we have the threat of a severe presence look at verse 1 and 2 this is the third time

I'm coming to you okay what were the first two the first was the founding visit the second was that painful visit well it didn't go very well remember that and now it's going to be the third time but now it's a legal issue it's going to be a church discipline visit or it could be which is why he cites quotes Deuteronomy chapter 19 verse 15 every fact or words to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses okay well who are the witnesses what does he mean by this there's different views it could be him and the associates it could be himself the Corinthians and Christ I tend to think he means the three visits so whichever view you might take this matter needed to be resolved Paul's authority as their apostle to embrace them as their apostle to embrace him as their pastor that was the issue at stake and notice every fact it's actually the Greek word which means word what was said and now what he says in advance of his final visit that he was a legit apostle rested on the spoken word the gospel spoken out of his weakness in faith that's what he means and it's this word that they were disobeyed by not embracing

Paul as a true apostle their true apostle this was the heart of the conflict this was the issue this was the problem and notice what he says in verse two I said this previously when I was present the second time that second painful visit didn't go really well he says it here again if I have to come a third time I will not spare this is pretty strong language Paul's not messing around severity would come with it he would come with a rod upon his children the entire church was guilty remember he's talking to the entire church not just to the opposition well what was he going to do he doesn't say and we don't know was he going to tell these super apostles was he going to tell them to leave was he going to kick them out

[12 : 37] I don't know was he going to tell the church to come together or disband the church we don't know now from later references it seems like Corinth did repent but we just don't know what Paul would have done if they did not but in any event we see here Paul strongly asserted his authority as their pastor and since sufficient warning was given punishment would come and he would have to be harsh in the use of his given authority that's where we come up with that point the threat of his severe coming well why would he have to threaten this why this threat look at verse 3 since you're seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me they sought proof there's going to be a play on words here so keep that in mind that word proof they believed he lacked it they believed

Christ didn't speak in him he was weak he was a loser he was a nobody he didn't wobble and dazzle people Christ had not spoken in him because of his weakness his feebleness thus he had no authority he had no power well notice what he does at this point he brings up the reality of a weak presence look at what he says the next part of verse 3 Christ who speaks to me Christ who's not weak toward you but mighty in you Christ was not weak toward them Christ was mighty well the question is how how was Christ not weak toward them but powerful in Paul Christ's power was manifested in Paul's weakness see Corinth thought like the world believing weakness should be excluded or removed by power but for

Paul power is present and effective only within weakness that's so anti world that's so anti American culture too if you have a weakness what are you supposed to do with it get rid of it right you don't keep your weaknesses in your business you don't keep your weaknesses there in your job you don't keep those weaknesses you want to get rid of those weaknesses make them in the strengths right of course everybody knows that Google it right power is present and effective only within weakness that is the message of the gospel Christ humbled himself by taking on flesh was obedient to death on a cross that's power and that's the harsh severe painful weak reality of our salvation look at what he says from verse four for indeed he was crucified out of weakness the one who exercised power among them was killed on a cross so he was crucified notice out of weakness that's what it literally says from the

Greek meaning that weakness was inherent in Christ it belonged to Jesus the same weakness that belongs to humans we're weak aren't we we're feeble aren't we that same weakness belonged to Jesus that same weakness belonged to Christ and it was out of or from that weakness he died he was crucified but into this weakness Christ has entered and out of weakness Christ was crucified and yet he lives out of the power of God look at what he says in the next part yet he lives out of the power of God Christ or excuse me God exercises saving power in Christ the God man so as weakness was inherent in him so God's power was inherent in him so here's the crux of the issue the Corinthians believe that where power existed weakness should not be present we want to gain power and rid ourselves of our weaknesses right that's what we want we just said that just a few moments ago to make strength out of our weaknesses even to destroy our weaknesses we don't want to admit those weaknesses but the gospel teaches the opposite

God's power is present and operative only within weakness says one writer God's power overcomes our weaknesses without removing our weaknesses well how do we know Jesus still has a nail prints in his hands and he's still human he still shows his weakness he still shows the severity of God he will always be God man think about think about that statement Jesus still has a nail prints and still is human he will forever be the embodiment of weakness he will forever be the embodiment of the harshness of God he will forever be the example or display of God's severity forever and I understand he has a glorified body

[18:40] I understand that but it's still a body he's still human it's a glorified humanity he will always be God man think about that forever we will worship the one who will forever be displayed as weakness as severity as the harshness of God so that we can get kindness so that we can get love so that we can be shown grace you understand that does that make sense to you now think about this only in affliction does comfort and mercy spring into action so that we may know God's saving comfort well why does God do this why does God not remove weaknesses to save us from our addiction to and worship of power we have an affection a desire for power we want that we desire we crave power we crave it as humans that's why God does not remove the weaknesses that's why he doesn't do that that's why power is effective only within weakness because that's where

God's grace that's where God's power comes into play and since God's saving power is gloriously seen in the death of Christ at the cross God brings to nothing human affection for power in other words God saves us from ourselves notice he says this next part in verse 4 for we are also weak in him yet we shall live with him because of the power of God toward you we're weak in him just like Jesus Paul's weaknesses remained so he participated in Christ in that he shared in Christ's weaknesses but he would also live with Christ Christ's power was inherent in Christ but not in Paul so the need was to participate was to share things in Christ because all things are operative in Christ and notice he says toward you the end of verse 4 toward you church

God's power is directed toward the Corinthians too thus Paul's salvation and corn's salvation they coincide together they're bound together I'll put it a different way this is kind of weird Paul cannot be saved without the church and they could not be saved without their apostle it goes together

because they boast in one another they boast in one another of the work that God had done in them Paul's whole life was a vivid display of the gospel that's why every true pastor who loves God's church is a vivid display of the very gospel he preaches and the gospel that they believe I am a visible sermon to you all the accusations all the struggles all my weaknesses everything I'm a living display of the gospel I'm the embodiment of the gospel and I would even go as far as to say this not just me but my family as well we have been the embodiment of the gospel to you as a church this is what we have been for 12 years we've been this to you because every true pastor is this and the salvation that we have as a church salvation that we have together we're bound together at least of what it should be and now notice what he does he changes things it's like he turned the tables on them the severe gentle challenge self approval look at verse 5 that's why things change try yourselves if you're in the faith approve yourselves you see he says he's saying to them

Christ Christ has spoken to me I'm your true apostle I'm your true pastor the proof is here now you as a church are you approved approved and notice he says try to see if you're in the faith when he says the faith he's talking about the content of faith or the faith that is believed so are you approved the faith is born from the gospel by the spirit's work in the heart it arises from God's power not from man and then look at what he does he says examine yourselves there in numeric standard it actually means prove yourselves it's the same root as the word that's used there in verse what was it three where they say you're seeking for proof same root word dakimas so they're seeking for his approval and if he turns the tables on them says no what about your approval you guys are still wanting to judge me have you thought about judging yourselves says

[24 : 34] Paul prove yourselves notice the next part of verse five or do you not know recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you now he expected they would pass the test not because they're gazing at their navel no no no but individually and corporately by whether or not they knew Jesus was in and among them see being in the faith equals Christ in and among them the effect of God's work in them what's the next question how do we know if God's work was in them how do we know if God's work in them had cause and effect power within weakness righteousness within sin life within death comfort within suffering it means we surrender we surrender our dreams of earthly power and glory we embrace the harsh severity suffering painfulness of God instead of power here's another thing that blows our minds think about this conforming to Jesus is suffered it's not achieved by discipline or devotion discipline and devotion helps us by reminding us in the midst of our suffering weakness and feebleness of our frailty and morality mortality excuse me and of our desperate need for Christ

God and the spirit in other words I'll put it like this just because you read your bible and pray that doesn't necessarily mean anything conforming to Christ is suffered it's when you suffer when you face pain when you face difficulty when you face trial that's when that word that's when you start praying that's when you start remembering the promises of God that's when you remember that God is faithful that's when you remember God's love for you in Christ nothing will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord right it's when you're suffering it's when life is horrible it's when life is painful it's when someone severely attacks you and they are harsh as Paul was here with the Corinthians confirming faith lies within the reality of faith he called them to a fresh act of trusting in the gospel grasp once again power and weakness

Corinthians which is a fresh embrace of God's grace which is Christ because by his wounds we are healed and to fail notice what he says unless indeed you have failed the test really is you have you are unapproved which means you disbelieve the gospel see that's why it's so vital for you here if you're not a Christian you need to believe in the gospel you must repent and put your trust in Christ stop messing around get serious with God he's calling you to respond why won't you respond and then look at what he says here in verse 6 but I trust actually saying but I excuse me but I hope that you will know that we ourselves are not unapproved now from God's perspective

God's work in Christ was sure and confirmed but from the Corinthians perspective there was a little bit of doubt there they're kind of acting weird that's because Paul did not have confidence in them his confidence was always in Christ because it's not about you it's about the gospel it's always about the gospel but that's why Paul says I hope though you know we're not unapproved in other words we're for real in other words we are in the faith guys Christ has spoken in us guys I have the authority of an apostle Christ notice how he asserts his authority we are approved you're seeking the proof Corinthians I'm the real deal Paul was for real we're not unapproved we are approved and

that's why he turns the tables but what about you guys because think about it I mean if Paul was unapproved he was the one who spoke the gospel to them if he's unapproved then guess what they're unapproved because they're the ones that believe the gospel that he actually preached to them see he's like come on guys you're not making any sense this isn't making any sense if I'm a charlatan if I'm out to get you and exploit you then you're charlatans because you believe the very gospel that I preached in other words if they stood the test and were approved then Christ dwelt in them and thus they received this gospel given by Paul they embraced him as their pastor and look at what he does verse 7 but we pray to God that you do no wrong he petitions for them he prayed they would not do any evil in other words look guys

[30 : 35] I'm not against you I'm for you church I've never been against you look at Paul Paul believed the best he hoped the best he endured their foolishness what a guy what a pal what an apostle I mean what a challenge for us that we would believe the best about each other hope for the best for each other and endure each other's dare I say stupidity do we do this as a church this was Paul's attitude with Corinth and they were horrible they treated him like trash he wasn't concerned about them being devoted to him he was concerned about the conduct of their lives not to do evil he wanted them to have complete obedience devotion he wanted to betroth them to

Christ remember chapter 10 you guys already know this Corinthians graphs the gospel once again and look at what he says the next part here in verse 7 not that we ourselves may appear approved but that you may do what's right or what's good even though we should appear unapproved he's saying this is my mission simplicity to Christ your devotion to Christ yet notice he's willing to make an exchange he'd be happy to trade places with them he'd rather that they do good so that they excuse me he might be the one who appears to be unapproved what's he doing what's he saying if they would mean he'd win the Corinthians for Christ and the gospel then he's ready to lose in this contention he was ready to be made the sinner so they can be righteous that's what he's ready to do again

Paul was the living display of the gospel this should be the attitude and mission of every true godly Christ fearing pastor this should be my attitude towards you and look at what he says here's the explanation in verse 8 for we do nothing against the truth but for the truth I am a servant of the gospel of Christ that's the truth the truth is the gospel he did not act in his own interest but on behalf of the gospel because it's not about you it's never been about you church it's been about the gospel the gospel judges us all me you all of us Paul understood that which is why he says there in verse 9 that last part excuse me there in verse 9 the first part for we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong so he prayed for the right conduct because that's his mission and then he says we rejoice when we're weak and you're strong this is the mission of every pastor

Christ's power that operated in Paul and his weaknesses was for their benefit look if I end up looking like a moron so let it be if it's going to benefit you guys fine this is attitude Christ's power that operates in me and all my weaknesses is for you Cottonwood Bible Church my very life is a display of the gospel to you and all my weaknesses and all the attacks against my weaknesses and everything I'm the vivid display of the gospel to you and look at how he completes off this prayer and this is what I pray for at the end of verse 9 your completion Paul's prayer was for them his prayer was for their restoration it's actually how you can translate the word or bringing them back back to what back to the gospel why because remember the strife the immorality the unruliness the sensuality he's interceding for them because he wants their wholeness he wants their well-being he wants to benefit them it's not about his own agenda which is why he gave this severe letter look at verse 10 for this reason

I'm writing these things while absent in order that when I'm present literally he says I may not act severely he wanted to avoid exercising the authority he says according to the authority which the Lord has given to me to avoid using this which he threatened earlier at his next coming the authority the Lord has given to me unto edification and not for destruction listen the authority God gives to pastors is for the edification of the church not for their destruction realizing that the latter may become necessary in order to do the former why because in order for there to be life there must be death how do I know that the gospel see in order for there to be life Jesus had to die sometimes as the death of Jesus brings life and sin brings righteousness it may be necessary to deal with the opposition head on and risk destroying the church in order to bring about true elevation of the church that's what he's saying that's why he was severe now what does he do now he starts challenging them in a severe gentle way his severe gentle challenges look at verse 11 finally

brethren given the strife and the turmoil in the church it makes sense why

[36:46] Paul has all these commands rejoice have joy when faith in Christ is true and real joy is ever present and notice his joy was bound up in their joy and their joy was bound up in his joy remember chapter 1 into chapter 2 lift your eyes up away from this present contention between you guys between this going this way and this way see the great goodness and grace of God given to you in Christ for crying out loud stop fighting and then notice what he says rejoice be made complete it's a passive verb which is why I translated it for you let yourselves be made complete the same word he uses from verse 9 what he prays for your restoration let yourselves be restored let yourselves be made complete receive

God's work of making you whole and he does that by you receiving my teaching my apostleship he says and not just corporately but individuals you embrace me he says as your apostle do you want to be made whole and complete one way is for you to listen to your pastor I'm serious having a humble receiving response notice what he says as well be comforted again a passive verb let yourselves be comforted for them to rejoice and be made whole as a church they should allow themselves to be comforted in the gospel let it comfort you again notice the next one he says be like minded intent on the same thing focus on the same matter go beyond your differences instead of focusing on the things that divide us find unity above and beyond we find it in the gospel don't we set aside your upward strivings factions your kingdom your vanity your selfish ambition he's saying seek out others and their best for

Corinth they unify in Jesus if they unify in their apostle listen a church will not find satisfaction will not grow will not will lack comfort and joy will not be made whole and will not be like-minded if members are divided against their pastor or their leader it will not happen I guarantee that's what Paul's saying notice he says as well live in peace overcome all this disorderliness this chaos the warring community let it cease this thing has ensued let things go be in peace and then notice what he says here the end of verse verse 11 and the God of love and peace shall be with you if they did this the God of love and peace will be with them they would receive a fresh experience of the reality of the gospel at work in their lives in Christ

God has shown his love in Christ God has shown his peace and notice it will be with you once again he's going after this whole understanding that Corinth had about some endowment with power they thought it was about in power some magical thing they want to push aside their weaknesses no because remember salvation is a relationship of communication with the living God in Christ so we experience God's power in our weakness righteousness in our sin spiritual riches in our poverty it all rests in Christ or put it another way in a different screen to experience fresh God's love and peace these are qualities of God's character is to omit failures weaknesses and sufferings even to embrace them and embrace the gospel in those things we embrace

God himself who's love we embrace God himself who is our peace we embrace Jesus he's reminding them to embrace Christ fresh again you've forgotten Corinthians you've forgotten oh church the truth of the gospel and then he says greet one another with a holy kiss so I expect you to kiss me ward later on bond of love and affection for each other it was an expression of honor but you know it serves something else though and then verse 13 all the saints greet you it was a reminder remember Corinth they were snooty tooty they were high up in Corinth which had lots of bling bling and lots of money they thought they were the end all be all it reminded them of something they were not the only Christians in the world our brethren that live throughout the world it's a community that we have with others when they would read this letter at the worship service it would remind them we're one body one body in the gospel which is why he ends his letter like this verse 14 excuse me grace to the

[42:37] Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all notice these aren't actions it's to know to experience be with you again no power no some magical potion with you experienced to know this grace is seen in Jesus Christ a love that comes from God the Father and the Spirit conveys an intimate relationship with God and with each other the covenant community he wanted them to know and experience fresh this gospel truth the grace in Christ God's love the fellowship of the Spirit it's a reminder of the gospel again salvation is about God communicating in a love relationship with humanity where we have communion with him the giver through the severity done to our

Lord through the harshness and notice his communion with all three persons of the Trinity the God who saves is found in Christ and present in the Spirit because in weakness we are strong in

severity there's gentleness what if the most loving thing to do is to be tough what if the kindest thing to do is to be harsh what if the gentlest thing to do is to be severe what if good things come from painful things do not underestimate how God works I told you about earlier in the message the beginning of the message Laura Story's song blessings in closing I'll read you the rest of the lyrics we pray for blessings we pray for peace comfort for family protection while we sleep we pray for healing for prosperity we pray for your mighty hand to ease our suffering all the while you hear each spoken need yet love is way too much to give us lesser things because what if your blessings come through raindrops what if your healing comes through tears what if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you're near what if trials of this life are your mercies in disguise we pray for wisdom your voice to hear we cry in anger when we cannot feel you near we doubt your goodness we doubt your love as if every promise from your word is not enough all the while you hear each desperate plea and long that we have faith to believe when friends betray us when darkness seems to win we know that pain reminds this heart that this is not our home what if my greatest disappointments or the aching of this life is the revealing of a greater thirst this world can't satisfy what if trials of this life the rain the storms the hardest nights the harshest nights are your mercies in disguise father we admit and we confess to you that we don't want to face severe harsh hard tough painful suffering getting kicked in the pants type things we've become so acclimated to not having any of that and yet the reality even of our Palestinian brethren who live there in the Gaza Strip who live there in the West Bank they know that reality they face it every day some of us here know and knows Neil knows Karen right now she knows Nancy has been experiencing that and even Judy some of us know the severity that's there the pain that's there and yet you guide us not in a law direction type way but in a fellowship with you communion with you a relationship with you we have that father with you through the Lord Jesus oh help us as a church to embrace one another to love as you love us in such severity not as an excuse to be harsh with each other it's a way for us to minister to one another even in the midst of our weaknesses take this time if you would and let your mind dwell on these things ponder ponder in the word ponder what we've seen in the word and after a few moments we'll worship in our giving worship singing two more songs prayer let this be a time just you and the Lord and let this truth sink deep into your soul just a few moments that's all