

Seminary of Suffering

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Preacher: Matt King

[0 : 00] So this morning, I, as you all know, I just kind of, I started a quick little short sermon series on what to do with Israel as I entitled it. And I was supposed to preach part two of that sermon, but Matt King showed up in town.

Now, for those of you who are like, who's Matt King? Let me have the pleasure of introducing you to Matt King. So Matt King is a friend of the ministry, certainly a friend of SBC and some of the families that he's interacted.

Matt comes from the, I'll say, the second best province in Canada, Ontario. He has the privilege of pastoring a church in Bracebridge, Ontario.

If you know where Bracebridge is, that's where Santa's Village is. And halfway on the way to the North Pole. So what we've done before is Matt came to help us five years ago with a counseling situation.

Matt is a professional counselor, and we needed his wisdom on a situation five years ago, so he was able to come. And we've been able to connect with him.

[1 : 14] We, at times, will talk to him, just certain wisdom to approach. And he has been here again this weekend in a very blessed way. But one of the things that people don't know is when Matt showed up five years ago, and this kind of reminds me, just makes me think of how big the world is.

He returned home, found out he was going to be a father to baby number four with his wonderful wife, Becky. And then, finally, two days later, Matt woke up feeling kind of strange.

And I'm going to have Shane show us the first picture. Ended up being intubated and paralyzed for over a year. And Matt will share a little bit about that story.

To this day, we still don't know why it all happened, but all of a sudden had to live in light of God's promises. They had to medevac him from his home, take him to Toronto, where he was in, from what I believe, being a part of the prayer chain at that time.

Just about every specialist in the world was spending time with him. I'll just show you number two. And then he had to learn how to walk and basically grow up all over again in a lot of ways.

[2 : 34] And in that time, there's some stories he still has not fully recovered. And I'll let him share a little bit of that story. But he used this terminology when we were talking about it at the family table.

He said, you know, I kind of went through the seminary of suffering. And I said, you know what, that sounds like a great sermon. Would you be willing to preach this to us today?

And he said, yes, he would. So, Matt, come on up. Please give a good hand to Matt King. And I'm just going to pray briefly.

And he's going to share a little bit of the story and what God has done with him, through him, by him, in his wife's life. And now there's four children. And there's plenty of stories of having to rely on God in ways that most of us are absolutely unacquainted with.

So let me just pray. Dear Lord, Heavenly Father, I just ask for your hand of blessing on our brother, Matt. It just tells me how interconnected we are, but yet how distant.

[3 : 38] I remember being a part of the prayer team when this immediately happened. And then life goes on. And I never really, to my shame, never knew how things were going beyond quick conversations, quick texts now and again.

But this morning, I was just sort of, well, this week, just so moved by just how God had been working in his life and just how he has been working through this whole relationship with God in the midst of these trials.

So, Father, I'm asking and praying for your hand of blessing upon him. Father, bless our ears that we would truly hear the message that he has for us today. Father, give us soft hearts to truly understand the significance of how the gospel powers this message and helps him understand this

God of the universe who's bigger than we can absolutely comprehend.

But we can still know him in our finite humanness. So, Father, just your blessings be upon him and upon us as we hear this word.

Your most holy, precious, and everlasting name. Amen. Amen. Well, listen, I'm excited to open God's word with you here today. Head on over to 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

[4 : 58] Head on over to 2 Corinthians chapter 12. Coming out here to BC, I'm not going to lie, you guys have ruined my definition of what beauty is.

I live up in Muskoka in Ontario, which is like the nice northern area, the cottages, the lakes, all these different types of things. And I called my wife after one day being here, and I just told my wife, Becky, I want you to know where we live is now ugly.

I have been in awe of God's creation since I landed in your amazing province. I have been in awe of God's goodness for my entire time here.

And now what I want to draw us to is awe of God's word. I have a particular passion, being a counselor and having the privilege of equally being a pastor.

And it's how does God's goodness meet our brokenness? You ever had a season of life where just something happens that wasn't planned?

[6 : 08] I didn't see this on the radar. This is not what I was asking for. Lord, this is not part of my plan if I'm being honest. And what we're going to see in 2 Corinthians 12 is somebody named Paul who loves the Lord and serves God faithfully.

And what we're about to see in 2 Corinthians 12 is a bit of a unique breaking point. That if Paul does not depend on the Lord, he is not going to make it.

And so in the first seven verses primarily, you're seeing that God is giving Paul profound insights. Paul is having unique visions.

God is blessing his ministry massively. And then what happens in verse 7 is by definition something that's not on the radar.

But we'll see how Paul takes comfort because it did not slip the radar of the Lord. And so in 2 Corinthians 12, I'm going to read verse 7 on.

[7 : 20] So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

And three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Pray with me, church. God, I have nothing to offer these wonderful saints who are in front of me.

I can do nothing from my expertise or strengths or it's nothing. But one movement of your spirit from your word is life.

[8 : 45] And that is my only prayer. This is my only plea as we go through this passage. Would you make your word alive to us through your spirit?

That we would walk out of here today and say, I encountered the living God and he was good. I pray this in humility and dependence.

In Christ's name, amen. Well, listen, I want to go through this passage verse by verse. If you're a note taker, my first point this morning is going to be this.

The design is dependence. The design is dependence. It's found in verse 7. Look there with me, church. So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelation.

A thorn was given to me in the flesh. A messenger of Satan to harass me. To keep me from becoming conceited. Let's pause there in God's word. I want to make it very clear.

[9 : 44] We do not know what the thorn was. I think God in his grace has kept the thorn beautifully vague. Because if the thorn was financial hardship, I'm going to dismiss the rest of the passage if my trial doesn't have to do with finances.

And yet here, somebody who loves the Lord deeply is now being inflicted with something. But we see that behind this affliction, behind this thorn, is a grand design.

Paul even says, this thorn, it was given to me to keep me from being proud. Because let's face it, Paul's ministry is seeing amazing things happen.

God is doing miracles. And again, kind of like what Chris was saying, it's not just a childbirth, but rather he's seeing the miraculous. God divinely intervening. And God is using this Paul to heal and to save and to show the world Jesus Christ.

And suddenly here comes this T-bone of this thorn. In fact, I would put it this way. There's a way that you could say it's because of Paul's love and because of Paul's ministry, he's even experiencing the thorn.

[11:05] There is no thorn when Paul was Saul. And it's this humbling reminder. God has never been in the business of using proud, independent, strong people.

Nobody is saved when they're in a position of pride. If you go back to the moment of your salvation when you became a child of God, it's defined as a broken, humble moment before a good God.

God is not interested in using independent, I've got this, I can do this type of people.

He has always been in the business of using the type of saint that goes, I need you. God, I need you.

So we see in my first point in verse 7, there is a divine design to Paul's thorn. The design is to create dependence in Paul's life on his good God.

[12:31] But I don't want to over-romanticize it. It doesn't mean that it's always going to be easy. If you're a note taker, my second point is going to be this.

The design can be difficult. Verse 8, look there with me, church. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.

Can we just pause there and can I just say, I love that this verse is found here. You can hear Paul's guttural, gut-wrenching, tear-filled prayers.

Please, Lord, let this leave me. Please, Lord, let this leave me. Please, Lord, let this leave me.

You ever been at a place in your life where you're just like, I can't. I can't anymore. And here you see Paul's weakness, which by the way, Paul was not an incompetent man.

[13:38] And yet this thorn is now allowing him to hit a sweet divine ceiling. I can't do this unless I have the Lord. And here through tears, through this gut-wrenching, please, Lord, let this leave me.

Please, Lord, let this leave me. Please, Lord, let this leave me. The thorn is already fulfilling its purpose. Because it's already creating a dependence in Paul on God.

How do I know this? Because he's now praying to his God. You're seeing this type of dependence to the Lord where he is taking him and his thorn and he's going to the Lord in prayer.

The thorn is already wonderfully and beautifully doing its purpose. The thorn serves Paul by taking Paul to his God.

But I want to be honest with you. Being a counselor, I've walked with a lot of hard and heavy situations. And the thorn can be gut-wrenching.

[14:43] Because if Paul doesn't take the thorn to his God, then the enemy wants to use the thorn to preach a defeating, discouraging message to Paul.

I am about to lie for the next 30 seconds, so please hear not truth. Deal? Paul, this thorn is his wrath in your life.

Paul, God hates you. Otherwise, you wouldn't have this. God has forgotten you. God is not good. Paul, you are broken.

You are useless. You cannot be used by God. Look at what you have. Clearly, you need to do better, get yourself put back together, and then maybe God might like you again.

In our hurts and in our wounds and in our limps of life, Satan loves to use it to preach to our hearts.

Can I personally bleed in front of you a little bit?

[16:00] It's going to be easy. I'm literally flying out right after the service, so it's going to be all right. I'm just jetting right out of here. When I got sick, does Matt move again?

Am I going to be able to cut food or do buttons again? Am I going to be able to play on the floor with my kids? We still don't have the diagnosis.

We still don't know what's going on. Does it happen tonight? Does it ever happen again? What is going on? I fell into a series of lies.

Matt, your days of usefulness are done. You will be, for the rest of your life, a shell of a husband, a shell of a dad, and a shell of a pastor.

So I planned on how I was going to take my life. And it was there.

[17 : 13] The goodness of the Lord found me. It was under the crushing weight of what I was going through. That there is grace.

There is Christ. The moment where it's, I don't got this together. I don't have it together. I can't handle this. I can't do this anymore. This is not what I thought.

This is not what I planned. This is, no. No. There, even in the darkest caves of our life experience, there Jesus finds us and gives us something that we do not have in and of ourselves.

So in the weakest and lowest of moments, God's most profound power can be found in our lives.

Understand the thorn, whatever it is in Paul, whatever it is in your life, however it manifests itself, it's a spiritual thing.

[18 : 28] And there's a narrative that Christ puts over it. And equally, there's a narrative that the enemy wants to put over it. One narrative is life and power. The other narrative is death and defeat.

And so these thorns of life, they're going to take us as humans to places. Can I ask you a question here today? In the weights of your life, in the hardships of your life, in the trials of your life, where does it take you?

Being a counselor, I don't know you, but I am very confident on this bet. It takes you somewhere.

My only question is, where does it take you? Does it take you to run to self-sufficiency and self-protection and self-strength?

Or is it taking you to the cross of Jesus Christ, where you find grace and mercy in your time of need? We're all dependent creatures.

The only question is, what are you dependent on? We all have hardships and trials and these experiences in our lives. But if we become dependent on anything other than the Lord, it's hollow and cheap.

[19 : 48] But if it is the Lord, and our trust is in the Lord, there is a type of life and power that awaits you that has nothing to do with you and has nothing to do with your circumstances and has everything to do with the goodness of your God.

When our thorns lead us to dependence on the Lord, like it is in Paul, there's a pleading in prayer, there's a time with the Lord, and we're just completely surrendered before him.

So, the design is for dependence, but the design can be difficult. But in my third point of verse nine, it's this. The design is for a display.

Look at verse nine with me, church. But he said to me, by the way, this he is not a small he. Watch the Lord enter. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in, what's that last word there?

Weakness. Weakness. Oh, I really wish that word weakness was not there. I wish it was any other word other than weakness. Do you realize that from Paul's pleading from the Lord, this thorn is serving him by taking him to the Lord in dependence, and now the Lord is answering his prayer.

[21 : 20] The thorn is creating a beautiful two-way dialogue between a saint and his God. God hears the plea of Paul.

May I encourage you, whoever you are in front of me, he hears your plea. Whoever you are, whatever you're going through, he sees you and your plea and your situation.

And God answers his plea here, and he goes, my grace is sufficient for you. It's a weird way to answer the prayer up front, isn't it?

Like, I was hoping for, okay, thorn gone, gone, no problem. But the Lord doesn't even take away the thorn. The Lord starts by talking about his own goodness in Paul's dependence.

My grace is sufficient for you. Think of that word sufficient for a second. What words come to your mind? More than enough, plenty, ample.

[22 : 26] The Lord is saying to Paul, what I have for you in this is not less than, it's more than. But you will never experience the more than unless you depend on me, Paul.

God delights in giving sufficient grace to Paul. And do you know why that's good news? Because the same word is true for you here today.

There is a Savior named Jesus who delights to give you grace for what you are walking through.

And then God follows it up by saying, my power is made perfect in weakness.

I feel like I could study this verse as a counselor the rest of my life and still not get to the full depths of its riches. God deems to use Paul's thorn to create dependence in Paul on the Lord so that the Lord's power may rest on Paul.

God is saying something so countercultural here. Because if I'm being honest, again, I don't know much about BC culture.

[23 : 45] I'll speak about Ontario culture though. I think it's all the same. And it's this, you ready? We're being indoctrinated. You are enough. You're all you need.

You got this. And the Lord is saying, no, no, no. The Lord is saying, I'm enough.

I've got this. And I've got you. Depend on me, Paul. How beautiful is it that it's the soil of the weakness of our lives that God deems to use powerful displays of who he is in us and through us. Can you ever leverage that in your life history? A moment where you feel like the wind is taken out of you and you've got nothing, anything more. You've tried every tactic. You've tried everything under the sun and just nothing works.

And then there's the but God moment in your life. God's never used the cultural narrative. In fact, God doesn't use that type of person because God is most invested in himself and desires for his power to be made in and through us, not our power because we don't even have it.

[25 : 14] But then God says this beautiful counter narrative. When my children are dependent, when they cry out to me, when they feel broken, when they feel weak, that's the son, that's the daughter that I see, that I move towards, that I love, that I meet, and that I empower.

In fact, with what God just said, in weakness, my power is made perfect. I can create two different equations right there. Are you ready for the equations?

If you're a note taker, highly encourage you to write them down. Are you ready? My weakness plus my dependence on God equals a display of his power.

My weakness plus my dependence on God equals a display of his power. But I'm going to create a far more frightening equation.

No weakness and no dependence equals none of God's power.

[26 : 32] The first equation, that's the saint that I never worry about. The second equation, I've got this, I'm strong, and I don't need him, is the type of person that God chooses not to give his power to and equip and encourage and use.

Can I have another bleeding moment? My heart's so inclined to want the second equation. There's still a part of me that wants to go, I don't want to be weak.

I don't want to depend on the Lord. I don't want to, and by the way, can I just say, in that moment is a sweet moment for me to come back under the Lord's narrative. You ever needed that in your life? So we see that the design is for dependence. We see the design can be difficult. We see that the design is for a display, which is ultimately of God's power.

But my final point is this. The design leads to delight. Look at verses 9 through 10 with me, church. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

[27 : 57] For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Church, do you just see what happened in a handful of verses? Jesus, Paul goes from pleading, take it away, take it away, take it away, to now he's going, I'll boast in it.

I will now boast in the very thing I was just asking you to take away because Paul's greatest desire in his life is not his comfort. Paul's greatest desire in his life is that I would have more of Christ.

May I ask you, church, is your heart aligned with Paul's today? Do you want more of Christ?

Because he's not found when you put yourself together and you put a veneer on it. He's found in the hard and dark and often difficult seasons.

[29 : 07] And if he was faithful there to save, how much more is he faithful in your life here today? And Paul goes, I will boast in all of my issues because it creates in me a dependence on the one that I'm made for and the one that I love.

And when I'm dependent and broken on him, his spirit and his power falls on me. I get more of the one that I long for.

So go ahead, thorn. Serve me. Because the more the thorn, the more of the Lord. In fact, you can read 2 Corinthians 12.

You can hear about Paul. You can hear about the thorn. But can I tell you, Paul's not the point of 2 Corinthians 12. The thorn is not the point of 2 Corinthians 12.

It's the goodness of God that is the protagonist of 2 Corinthians 12. Which is why Paul says in verse 10, for the sake of Christ, I'm going to be content in this.

[30 : 24] Because when I am weak, I am strong. When I hit my ceiling, it's a divine appointment for me to meet my Savior.

Savior. Look at all the saints that God used from the book of Genesis to Revelation. He uses the weak.

And usually, the more they're used, the harder the affliction. Like BK was saying, like last week, you guys got to see a sermon series starting on how the world is broken.

Both the Christian and the non-Christian can look at everything that's happening right now and go, something's not right. Finally, the Christian and the non-Christian can come to the same plate and go, yep, we'll both check that box.

Do you know what the world needs? Christ. It's not a new political system. It's not... The world needs the love of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 34] And you know what? One of the greatest ways that Christ has deemed here today to unveil himself? Through you. Spirit-filled saints who acknowledge their weakness, go to dependence in the Lord, and that you are filled with his spirit and his power to go to the mission field of your workplace, of your home, of your kids, of your marriage, of the ski lifts and anything and everything between Squamish has to offer.

My question is, do you want more of him? Because one of the most dangerous things of Christianity can be a type of familiarity that leads to nothing.

Are you here today? Do you feel weak? Good. Do you feel broken? Good.

And I don't need to know who you are and I don't need to know what you've gone through to say this next thing. Are you ready? There's nothing that stops you from going to the cross of Jesus Christ.

If you need to give your life here today to him for the very first time, nothing hinders that. Go to the cross. If you've been in a season of your life where you love the Lord and you just feel broken and you feel weak and you feel like you have nothing, my encouragement is the exact same.

[33 : 13] go to the cross. There's nobody in this room who can go to the cross and not get what they need to have for this season of life that you're in.

Imagine a world that could look in at Squamish Baptist Church. Imagine a world that could look in at North Church in Brace Bridge and the world could go in and look at and go, they're broken.

They're not perfect. They hit their ceilings, but what is it about them? And we get to go, the goodness of a savior named Jesus Christ who meets us, not merely in the highs, but in the lows. How sweet is the cross of Jesus Christ that whether Ontario or BC, our homes, our marriages, our kids, our workplace, we would just be quick to take ourselves to the cross of Jesus Christ early and often where we can find comfort, rest, security, and equally boldness and power because of the sufficient grace that your savior loves to give to you.

Will you pray with me, church? So God, I come before you right now so privileged to open your word with your people here this morning.

[34 : 57] And God, I just ask whoever is before me and whatever is going on, would you use today as an opportunity for them to bring themselves and whatever is in their lives to the cross?

We do not need to fear you. You paid it all 2,000 years ago on a cross. And according to Hebrews, you welcome us to your throne to find grace and to find mercy in our time of need.

How else can we respond now, God? When we see your goodness and your closeness and we see your design and we see how you meet us as weak, fragile beings and you give us a strength that we do not have, a perseverance that we do not have, the only fitting thing to do now is to respond in worship.

Worship of who you are and what you have done. We love you, Jesus. In Christ's name, amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[36 : 31] Amen. Amen.