

Authentic Grace

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Date: 06 October 2019

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[0 : 00] It would be good if you grab a sermon's handout today or actually grab a transcript because that may be helpful for you.

I actually forgot to do an English-only transcript, so choose a simplified traditional. They are all the same in the English part. Have you or your family ever been to a treetop experience yet?

One that you do obstacles from high above ground, you do flying forks, and you climb road nets.

We went a couple of years ago with a couple of other families.

While the youngest kids have their own little program, little course to go through, the older children join us to do the junior and adult course.

The term and condition says, practitioner must be 10 years and older, at least 1.4 meters tall, and under 120 kilograms.

[1 : 15] One adult must accompany a junior to make sure they follow all the safety instructions and get no exception to age, size, or weight.

So we start on the easier course, and the course gets longer and harder as we approach lunch. It was still a lot of fun, and kids have a great time.

However, I noticed that every time when I fly back to the platform, the wheel will get so hard, it will stop short, about 10 to 20 meters away from the platform.

So I literally, the whole morning, was doing this. For the last, every course I've gone through. And there is a weight limit on the condition for entry for a very good reason.

Even though I'm under that weight limit, I'm very close to it as well. So while experiencing the challenge on top of the tree, I have my weight and the gravity as my enemy, which is very hard to overcome.

[2 : 31] However, the enemies that Paul is facing in 2 Corinthians are beyond what we can imagine. Paul is facing enemies from within and without, from those that were his colleagues, went to the same school with him, pursued the same ideal with him before he became a Christian.

People that are his kinsmen, but now trace after him to destroy everything he worked hard to build. It started as soon as he became a follower of Jesus.

What he mentioned in 2 Corinthians, the last will of chapter 11, would most likely be the same incident that happened in Acts chapter 9, verse 22 to 25.

Straight after he became a follower of Christ, he was preaching about Jesus in Damascus. And it says from verse 22, Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is a Messiah.

After many days had gone by, there was a conspiracy among the Jews who killed him. But Saul learns of their plan. Day and night, they kept close watch on the city gate in order to kill him.

[3 : 51] But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket for an opening in the wall. If you follow along Acts, you will see the suffering Paul go through for the sake of Christ.

In chapter 9, verse 26, it says people are afraid of him, not believing he really was a disciple. And then, just a couple of verses after that, it says he speaks boldly in the name of the Lord, talk and debate with Hanunistic Jews, but they try to kill him.

And then I feel a chapter later in Acts 13, in verse 6, it says, in pathos, faced with opposition from false prophets and sorcerers.

And in the same chapter later on, when he went to Poseidon's Antioch, the Jews were filled with jealousy of their popularity and began to contradict what Paul was saying and heaps abuse on him. The Jewish leaders incited the God-feeling women of high standing and the leading men of the city. They stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from the region.

[5 : 05] We go on in the next chapter, in Iconium, was a plot afoot among both Gentiles and Jews, together with the leaders to mistreat them and stone them.

And later in the same chapter in verse 19, in Nesra, some Jews came from Antioch and Iconium and went to crowd over. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. Next chapter, Paul and Jew, a very sharp disagreement with the person that was his mentor and companion and they parted the company. A couple of chapters later in chapter 17, in Thessalonica, some of the Jews were pursued and joined Paul and Silas as did a large number of God-feeling Greeks and quite a few prominent women.

But other Jews were jealous so they ran off some bad character from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city. Then later on, when the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God in Berea, some of them went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.

And then, the next chapter in Corinth, where this, what we're looking at today, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him to a place of judgment.

[6 : 35] And next chapter, the silversmith of Ephesus' idol brought the whole city into an uproar against Paul. From Paul become a Christian in chapter 9 to chapter 19, it's roughly about 20 years have passed.

as at chapter 19 is where Paul written the letter that we've seen today. With all this happening to Paul, Paul keep on going, telling people about Jesus, keep on being an authentic follower of Christ. So I'd like to look at three areas to find out why he can say, what he said today in chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians. The three areas that we look at is not what you know, but who you know.

How are your do or say, tell about you, and what are you feeling now? Paul has shared something very intimate in chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians.

In a way, it also seems very strange. Let's read it again from verse 1. 2 Corinthians 1. I must go on boasting, although there is nothing to be gained.

[7 : 59] I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was called up to the third heaven. Whether he was in the body or out of the body, I do not know.

God knows. I know that this man, whether in the body or out of the body, I don't know, but God knows, was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself except about my weaknesses. Paul, in this passage, seems to be talking about himself, but in a third-person way.

He kept this supernatural experience and knowledge for about 14 years without telling anyone. I think for a lot of us, it's so natural for us to be drawn to all things that are mysterious.

It gives us a sense of adrenaline rush, like watching horror movies. We have a very strong curiosity towards things unknown or not permitted, especially when we are much younger, when our sense of fear and self-protection or preservation were much weaker.

[9 : 20] Have you ever wondered why? From my observation, it has a lot to do with trying to prove that we are capable to be independent.

We believe once we master the unknown, we somehow can master life better. We are well on our way to master our own life, which means your life will get somewhere.

And when we think we got it, like most kids, when they master a new skill, what would they do naturally? They would say, look at me, look at me. We like to show what we know or can do.

But Paul held back for 14 years because even though what he knows and experiences is so great, that's not the things that he's chasing after or wanted to boast about.

It's who he knows that he values and treasure and want to tell people about. in chapter 12, verse 1, Paul says, those visions and revelations are from the Lord.

[10 : 32] And repeating the fact that he does not know it was in the body or apart from the body experience, seems to point to the fact that they have great experience, but they are not originated from him.

There are things outside of him beyond his control, so it's not something that he can plan to master or trace after. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11, 31, which is the chapter before that, that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus knows what he is doing.

And twice in our passage, we say, only God knows what is going on with him. He seems very confident that God knows him and he puts himself as a man he knows in Christ. Where does he get that sort of confidence? I think he most likely gets it from Jesus because it was exactly what Jesus prayed for his followers in John 17, 26.

Jesus said to God, I have made you known to them and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

[11 : 55] Paul is confident that God knows him because Jesus is his mediator, because Paul is in Christ and he knows Christ. I don't think I need to say much about the value of knowing the right person.

You'll find out if you ever go to Chayam Cha. I always like to go to Yom Cha with certain people because we get a table straight away. There's no need to get a number and wait because this person is known by all the captains, all the waiters and waitress in the whole restaurant.

When it comes to understanding about Christianity, it's important to ask the right question, not to get distracted to chase after some super spiritual experience.

Our focus in understanding the Bible is to know who we should believe and to be known by him. In 1131, it says, God and Father of the Lord Jesus is to be praised forever.

Why is that so? What does this verse tell you about the relationship between Jesus and God the Father? Why do we call Jesus the Lord?

[13 : 12] Those are questions we should be asking when we read God's Word in the Bible. If you are just looking into Christianity, those are very helpful questions to keep in mind.

But if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, no matter how long you have been one, it's even more important for us to ask why we call Jesus our Lord. Who is Jesus to you?

Who is God to you? The God and Father of the Lord Jesus is to be praised forever because of the gospel that reveals God's grace to us.

God sent his Son into the world to live a perfect life, die as a substitute for sinners, absorb the anger of God, take away our guilt, provide the gift of right standing before God, and give eternal joy through faith in the Lord Jesus alone, apart from any words or obedience on our behalf.

This quote is printed in our handout today because it's so important. I want you to be able to go and revisit this quote whenever you can. That is such a great message to be shared, but very often we confuse the greatness of the message with the greatness of the message bearer, the messenger.

[14 : 36] We think a great experience and great knowledge add value to our life, and when we think God would, a voice inside us would cry out saying, look at me, look at me, that Paul did not boast about himself or the great spiritual experience.

He said in verse 6 of chapter 12, even if I should choose to boast, I will not be a fool because I will be speaking the truth, but I refrain so no one will think more of me than is warned by what I do or say, or because of this suppressing great revelation.

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a message of Satan to torment me. Paul said he did not want anyone to think more of him than is warned by what he do or say, or because of this suppressing great revelation.

Because we want to build a certain perception in others' mind, we want others to think of us or value us in a certain way. We sometimes talk ourselves up, or talk ourselves down.

We say one thing but we go and do others. So, it's what you do and say really match up. If you call yourself a Christian, are you really living out your life as a follower of Christ?

[16 : 11] Paul warns us not to do things like a fool, even when we are boasting. How does a fool live out their life? Well, they will always be looking for something to gain.

or ask him what is in it for me. A fool definitely cannot hold on to a suppressing grace revelation for 14 years.

They will tell things that is not permitted if they could make others think more of them. A fool will not be speaking the truth and will not be able to refrain themselves from becoming conceited.

But who can really keep oneself from becoming conceited? Who can really keep themselves from chasing after fame or from talking themselves up?

Even Paul said he was given a thorn in his flesh to keep him from becoming conceited, a messenger of Satan to torment him. He was given some kind of physical suffering to keep him from puffing himself up.

[17 : 13] What is your view on suffering? Suffering is such a mysterious mystery that we could not be able to work out within our lifetime.

We can be suffering for many different reasons. One person can be suffering because it's a natural occurrence of their body of being a human as they are growing and heading towards a grave.

I remember a friend telling me that her kid is so sensitive to pain that as they are growing and their body are stretching, they need painkiller to ease off their discomfort.

Someone can also be suffering as a consequence of being foolish or sinful, disobedient to God, engaging in behavior that end up hurting themselves and others.

As I have mentioned earlier, we all have a natural tendency and inclination to be independent and be a master of our life. That in itself is nothing wrong about it.

[18 : 22] However, as theologian J.I. Parker put it, if we allow it to become an energy of irrational, negative, and rebellious reaction to God's call and command, allowing it to become a spirit of fighting God in order to play God, we are committing sinful acts.

The root of sin is pride and enmity against God. Sinful acts is expression of a willful opposition of the fallen heart to God's claim on our life.

However, suffering can also be a way of God working in our life to build us up, to make sure what we do and say warren how others think of us.

As a case for Paul, having a great surprising experience of visiting paradise can lead to pride, which will develop in different kinds of scenes.

So God gave him a thorn in his flesh to keep him humbled and to build his character. what would people normally do with suffering?

[19 : 35] Some will try to run away. Some will try to ignore it. Some may try to suppress it by painkillers or other means, like my friend treating her kid.

Some may look at suffering and say suffering is a proof that God does not exist. And even if he exists, he's not loving. Because how would a loving God allow so much pain to exist.

What we do or say about suffering tell us what we know or do not know about God. We can allow pain and suffering to push you away from God or we can allow pain and suffering to draw you closer to God like what it did to Paul.

You will read on from verse 8. Paul said three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to him, to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. It's not clear how long Paul had been living with the thorn in his flesh. The best estimate would be about 14 years. And the way he said that the message of Satan to torment him, it seems to be indicating it will be ongoing.

[21 : 01] Even at this point of sharing with the Corinthian church, he's feeling the pain right there and then. And that feeling is compounded by what he's already feeling for the Corinthian church, shown in 1129.

Who is weak? And I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin? And I do not inwardly burn. I feel very challenged recently with a few sufferings of departure and loss.

On top of that, with the ongoing unrest in Hong Kong, combined it with being confronted about not being impartial about this issue, and even being unloving towards what's happening in Hong Kong or towards the protesters.

And I come to be reminded of my often very patronizing superiority feeling towards people during a refreshing in college.

And then remembering about 25 years ago, a sister stopped me right in the middle of conversation to tell me stop patronizing her. I consider those as my thorn in my flesh, a reminder of how sinful I am.

[22 : 19] We have not been told what exactly the thorn is referring to in this passage. It's good we haven't known it because then we can freely relate to Paul in whatever way we can.

But we are shown in how to deal with it. As he feels the torment of the thorn in his flesh, as he feels the indignation within his heart, Paul recalls he pleaded with the Lord.

Three times he pleaded with God to take the thorn away. His pain and suffering did not drive him to frustration or despair. It drew him closer to God.

What is your feeling now? Try to relate to Paul's feeling in whatever way you can. God did not change Paul's feeling towards God.

They did not make Paul doubt the ability of God. He knows God can heal him. He is confident that God can, so he asked for help. And what did God say to him?

[23 : 34] My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. God has a much better and greater solution for Paul's pain and suffering His grace His sufficient grace So what is grace?

Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve We deserve to be punished but instead we got a gift of forgiveness in a real life that's filled with joy It is a gift because we cannot work for it or earn it Grace means God is not angry with us because His anger has been assaulted by the price of Jesus' life paid on the cross Christ lives a perfect obedience life and dies as a substitute for sinners to take away our guilt Some have said grace G-R-A-C-E as God's riches are fallible at Christ's expense God's riches are fallible at Christ's expense God said My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness

Insufficient for Paul and for us because God knows us He knows what we are going through God knows what we are going through in no matter what we are experiencing within our body or out of our body Insufficient because God's grace is never ending He knows exactly how much suffering we need to deal with our pride so to stop us from being considered And so others will think of us exactly as what we do and say warrant God's grace is sufficient God's grace is sufficient and God is powerful so we can totally entrust ourselves to Him and depend on Him even at the time that He did not answer our plea as we have asked My true talk experience had taught me a lesson of dependency I was already tired from all the pooling before lunch and after lunch I think why would I be able to do a couple more courses you know to make sure I get the full value of what I pay for So I come to this course What do you need to do? You swing over to a big net and once you swing over there you climb up and then you just keep going So you know it looks easy I'm still I'm tired but still okay So I swing over and what happened?

I was at the bottom of the net and now it's like pull and pull and pull I just couldn't get up whole body just like So after about two to three minutes which is the longest two to three minutes I have felt I did what everyone would do and did what the instruction tell me Help!

[26 : 53] I was dangling waiting for help and I have to keep apologizing people would say oh sorry sorry so they have to move on to the next course Then the staff come to help me He was a young man and he was built like Tim Reed or Paul Powell both are not here today Built a bit like Jeff Would you mind standing up?

Imagine a young man about that size come and rescue me I was so helpless and embarrassed that at this point any help I can get to get out of here I'll accept it That poor man had struggled a lot to finally lower me down to the ground A nice tree top experience had ended up being a painful experience because I did not see myself as weak And then I was humbled I was rescued by someone that seems weak but know what he's doing and willing to go through the pain to set me free First I say 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 about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me That is why for Christ's sake I delight in weaknesses in weaknesses in weaknesses Apparently we got a weak battery as well just dying Paul is glad that he can boast about his weaknesses He is glad that God's power is made perfect in his weakness and God's grace is sufficient and do not leave him wanting It is for that reason that he delights in weaknesses in insults in hardship in persecution and in difficulties He feels delighted facing these things that make us feel cringing when we hear it How are we to delight in those things?

We'll be able to delight in those things by boasting all the more gladly about our own weaknesses He delights in them because when he faces them he's facing them for the sake of Christ with Christ's power rested on him He delights in weakness insults hardship persecution and difficulties was actually what make him strong because when he delights in them God's perfect power which is Christ's perfect power come rest on him and he become empowered Poor at knowledge he links God He relies He relies only on God's sufficient grace to handle the thorn in his life He values his supernatural experience with the right perspective without putting them over and above God and become conceited Whatever you're feeling in life right now maybe some sin that keeps occurring maybe you find it very hard to make sense of this

Jesus who called God his father maybe you're experiencing the torment of Satan in your life maybe there are a lot of shame that makes you feel like dangling midair go to God plead your case with him plead your case with the Lord be glad you can experience weakness insult hardship

persecution difficulties the way to become strong in Christ is not by having a lot of great spiritual experience the last sentence of the passage should they say for when I am weak then I am strong there is a sequence of events we are strong when we acknowledge our weakness when you are willing to admit you are weak you will be strong because when we acknowledge we need God's strength it can displace in us

[31 : 37] Amen