

# WATTS CHAPEL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

## DISCIPLESHIP LESSON



January 29, 2012

“By the Grace of God”

**Basic Scripture:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:1-10

**Focal Scripture:** 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians: 12:9

### AIMS

At the end of the lesson, disciples will be able to:

- a. *Relate how Paul’s “Defense of His Apostleship” parallels with present day leadership issues/concerns in the Body of Christ.*
- b. *Name examples of “thorns in the side” that believers encounter in the Christian walk.*
- c. *Share the sufficiency of God with the “thorns” in their lives.*

### 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

#### Paul’s Vision and His Thorn

<sup>1</sup> I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.

<sup>3</sup> And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—<sup>4</sup> I was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. <sup>5</sup> I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses.

<sup>6</sup> Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth.

But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, <sup>7</sup> or because of these surpassingly great revelations. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassing revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.

<sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

## **BRIDGE:**

Every minister for Jesus Christ must be willing to go beyond the “Call of Christ”. The commission to “Go”, “Teach”, and “Baptize” involves laboring and suffering for the “Cause of Christ” and the “Salvation of Humanity”. Scripture records that the Apostle Paul was a prime example of this kind of minister. His pastoral laboring is recorded in the Books of Acts - Titus and his pastoral suffering is summarized in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11:23-28 as Paul prepares his “Boasting Defense” in response to negative apostleship charges.

## **BACKGROUND**

The false apostles/false teachers, anxious to receive honor, boasted about themselves through “letters of recommendations”. The Apostle Paul, not of this mindset, allowed God to honor him, knowing that God’s honor alone, is the only honor that counts in eternity.

Paul was charged by these “false apostles” with *weak* credentials, a lack of spiritual experiences, and a questionable “Call” to the Gospel Ministry as an apostle of Jesus Christ. The false apostles charges were based on the fact that Paul had not received the same training and spiritual experiences that they had been privy to. Paul must have felt some “spiritual indignation” and thought, “Excuse me - how dare you!”

Though Paul had preached that boasting about one’s self was unprofitable, he felt compelled, “By Any Means Necessary”, to kill this “Satanic Attack” by Satan’s messengers (false apostles), before it destroyed the Corinthian churches. Paul reminded his critics that the “Damascus Road Experience” was proof enough that God had called him as an apostle. Paul stepped up his “Boasting Defense” by challenging the false apostles to “Check the *Good News Record*”, namely, the Epistles and compare themselves to him as a faithful Hebrew and an effective worker and sufferer for the “Cause of Christ”. No doubt, Paul had done more for the “Cause of Christ” than all of them combined.

## **THE LESSON**

In our lesson today, Galatians 6:14 provides a safe launching pad for Paul as he presents a “Boasting Defense” for his authentic apostleship for Jesus Christ:

“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ,  
by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14)

In Paul’s “Boasting Defense”, the intent of his heart was to always lift the name of Jesus, not himself. What a lesson for us! Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ alone, not our personal experiences, Jesus promises, “If I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me”.

## **Paul’s Vision and His Thorn (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.

Though Paul preached that boasting is unprofitable, he continues his “Boasting Defense” against the false charges that have been brought against him by cautiously and selectively sharing the deep visions and revelations which the Lord had given him. The focus of these visions and revelations is on the Lord, the Author and Giver of the vision, and not on Paul, the receiver of the vision.

<sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body, I do not know – God knows.

**Paul had taken a celestial journey to glory and was caught up in the third heaven – the dwelling place of God. Paul is actually speaking about himself as, “the man in Christ”, though he shares his spiritual experiences in the first person, lest he appear boastful.**

<sup>3</sup> And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—

**The Damascus Road Experience was not a part of these spiritual experiences because 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians was written approximately twenty years later. God, in His Grace and Mercy, may have allowed Paul to have these spiritual experiences in preparation for the strenuous work of Paul’s Three Missionary Journeys. During these spiritual experiences, Paul didn’t know whether he was in his body or having out of body experiences. Paul declared, “Only God knows!”**

<sup>4</sup> was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

**Paul described this place where he was “caught up” in as “Paradise”. In Paradise, Paul had indescribable experiences where God met him in very special ways. There was nothing in the realm of his human experience that he could compare with these deep visions and revelations from God. He heard and saw things that God forbade him to share with anyone! These intimate experiences between God and Paul (liken to the intimacy between husband and wife) were not to be shared with anyone! Our intimate experiences with God are not to be shared (boasted about) with others. These should be “God and Me – Me and God” Experiences!**

<sup>5</sup> I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast in myself, except about my weaknesses.

**Paul said that if he knew a man who had such spiritual experiences, he *would* boast in that man. Paul didn’t want to be judged by his spiritual experiences, but by the testimony of his life and the Gospel he preached and taught. He realized the danger in exalting people without, being intentional about, giving all glory to God, the Father, God, the Son, and God, the Holy Spirit. The songwriter penned it well: *Glory be to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. AMEN!***

<sup>6</sup> Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say,

**Paul makes the point that if one has been caught up in a mystical experience with God, it is something to boast about; however, boasting can lead to arrogance rather than to humility. Realizing the danger in boasting, Paul refrains from boasting for fear people will think more highly of him (Paul) than they should.**

<sup>7</sup> To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.

**Paul realized that his deep and intimate heavenly experiences with God could be the reason why God allowed Satan to “Buffet” him with a “thorn in his side” to keep him humble. Scripture warns us, “Not to think too highly of ourselves than we ought to, but to think soberly” (Rom. 12:3b).**

**Many have tried to explain Paul’s thorn, but Scripture does not identify what the thorn was. In our own suffering, God has taught us that it is not the *physical identity* of our “thorns” that matter, but the *spiritual* relevance of the “thorns”. Like Paul, our “thorns” teach us how to rely on the grace of God and not our own strength.**

<sup>8</sup> Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

**Since Acts 9:9 records that Paul was blinded for three days at his conversion and other Scripture references possible eye problems (Gal. 4:13-15; 6:11), let's assume that Paul's "thorn" was eye trouble. The thorn pricked and bothered Paul, distracted him from his work, and gave him the appearances of being sick and weak. So painful was this thorn that Paul prayed three times for God to remove this painful tool of Satan and deliver him from his suffering.**

**We are reminded that Jesus prayed three times for the suffering of the Cross to be removed. God did not remove Paul's thorn, neither did He allow the cup to pass from Jesus. Though God does not always "take it away", the thorns will always be accompanied by God's enduring grace.**

<sup>9</sup> 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.

**In Paul's suffering and weakness and in response to his plea for deliverance, he heard the voice of God say, "My Grace is Sufficient" for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9). God's unmerited favor is enough for us. Through all spiritual and physical attacks, "God's grace is sufficient".**

**Paul was able to realize that this own weakness could be boasted about because his weakness was more than compensated for in the power and strength of Almighty God. It pleases God to make His power and strength perfect in our weakness.**

<sup>10</sup> That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

**For the sake of Christ, the Apostle Paul could declare, "I would rather glory in my infirmities because the power of God can overcome any weakness". When we as believers are weak, we are strongest, because the power of God empowers us to overcome all infirmities, weaknesses, and temptations.**

**Lord, we are weak, but Thou art strong. EMPOWER us with Your Shekinah glory! Then we can say, "Hence messengers of Satan, get behind us, for we are covered, BY THE GRACE OF GOD!"**

#### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION/DISCUSSION:**

1. How do the false apostles' charges against the Apostle Paul relate to leadership issues in present day leadership? Give examples. (Bridge, Background, Gen. Info)
2. How did Paul authenticate his apostleship? Read 2 Cor 6:3-10; 11:21-30
3. How can boasting be detrimental to our witness for Christ? v. 6. Why doesn't Paul play the boasting game of the false prophets? Read 2 Cor 4:5-7; 10:12-18
4. How has Paul's thorn affected his life?
5. How do you feel about God's promise in verse 9? Why doesn't God simply take the pain away?
6. How do you react to God's apparent silence in response to urgent prayer requests in your life?
7. What will you do to develop trust in God in times of weakness?