2nd Corinthians

Series: Tough Love

August 19, 2018

Message 3

**Growing in Spiritual Strength**

2nd Corinthians 12

*Guests - Connection Card - Table - won’t call or visit -*

*See the details in the handout about our Growth Track today! You are invited!*

*Generosity -*

**Intro:** There’s probably a reason why I’ve been preaching for nearly 40 years and in full-time ministry for 34 years before teaching all the way through 2nd Corinthians - it takes some experience and maturity to have the personal experience, understanding, and guts to address some of these passages -

Last week: Hard commitments are required to have an influence for Christ in our culture.

* Don’t let anyone steal you from Jesus.
* Recognize the sacrifice of a true servant.
* Be a faithful follower of Christ, not of man nor methods.
* Endure difficulty.

**Big Idea: There is something very different about true spiritual strength.**

T.S. True spiritual strength is so much different than what the prevailing culture thinks is strength - and it is often very different than what even the church thinks is true strength.

Remember - Paul is writing to a leading church - two of the longest letters in the New Testament to the same church - a church that prides itself in its spirituality - Paul says, “There’s something very different here that you’re not quite getting.”

3 statements:

**> Endurance can be greater than ecstasy.**

2nd Corinthians 12:1-10 - This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don’t know—only God knows. Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell.

That experience is worth boasting about, but I’m not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won’t do it, because I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Paul had an experience that was absolute ecstasy … what he saw is beyond anything that has been written in Scripture - beyond anything we could even imagine -

Exodus 24:9-11 - Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel climbed up the mountain. There they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there seemed to be a surface of brilliant blue lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself. And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!

Gene Edwards account …

John in revelation -

Revelation 4:1-6 MSG - Then I looked, and, oh!—a door open into Heaven. The trumpet-voice, the first voice in my vision, called out, “Ascend and enter. I’ll show you what happens next.”

I was caught up at once in deep worship and, oh!—a Throne set in Heaven with One Seated on the Throne, suffused in gem hues of amber and flame with a nimbus of emerald. Twenty-four thrones circled the Throne, with Twenty-four Elders seated, white-robed, gold-crowned. Lightning flash and thunder crash pulsed from the Throne. Seven fire-blazing torches fronted the Throne (these are the Sevenfold Spirit of God). Before the Throne it was like a clear crystal sea…

What Paul saw was beyond the telling …

He went from that to an experience of pain that he begged for it to be taken away -

A messenger of Satan … spiritual battle - spiritual attack - manifested in physical form -

Beyond his beatings … (look at last chapter) -

2nd Corinthians 11:23-29 - I’ve worked much harder, been jailed more often, beaten up more times than I can count, and at death’s door time after time. I’ve been flogged five times with the Jews’ thirty-nine lashes, beaten by Roman rods three times, pummeled with rocks once. I’ve been shipwrecked three times, and immersed in the open sea for a night and a day. In hard traveling year in and year out, I’ve had to ford rivers, fend off robbers, struggle with friends, struggle with foes. I’ve been at risk in the city, at risk in the country, endangered by desert sun and sea storm, and betrayed by those I thought were my brothers. I’ve known drudgery and hard labor, many a long and lonely night without sleep, many a missed meal, blasted by the cold, naked to the weather.

And that’s not the half of it, when you throw in the daily pressures and anxieties of all the churches. When someone gets to the end of his rope, I feel the desperation in my bones. When someone is duped into sin, an angry fire burns in my gut.

Paul experienced the highs and the lows …

What have you prayed for to be taken away that has not been taken away?

Chuck Wood … many others …

Keep praying - keep believing - but determine that you will endure no matter what! That’s a decision!

And that decision can be based on the fact that God knows what is best for us - and sometimes He knows it is better for us to endure difficulty than to experience the ecstasy of deliverance.

Remember Jacob in Genesis 32 - compared to Bethel …

The first experience was the ecstasy - seeing God - seeing angels - receiving a promise -

But he didn’t change -

The second experience was pain - difficulty - born out of fear … but he endured - and in the end, he walked with a limp the rest of his life - but he was no longer a cheater, liar, deceiver - just an ordinary man - from that point on he was God’s man - and everyone who saw him knew it!

He set the family on a course to change the history of the world -

Because he endured - and the endurance was more powerful than the ecstasy!

**> Let your life be your loudest voice.**

2nd Corinthians 12:11-12 - You have made me act like a fool.

You ought to be writing commendations for me, for I am not at all inferior to these “super apostles,” even though I am nothing at all. When I was with you, I certainly gave you proof that I am an apostle. For I patiently did many signs and wonders and miracles among you.

Paul was saying that he shouldn’t have had to defend himself in this letter the way he has been the last few chapters. He record speaks for itself.

His ministry was evidenced among them by their changed lives - and by miracles -

They should not have been led astray by the deceivers that came through attacking him for their own benefit.

Paul didn’t take any money from them - he served for no salary -

2nd Corinthians 12:13-18 - The only thing I failed to do, which I do in the other churches, was to become a financial burden to you. Please forgive me for this wrong!

Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don’t want what you have—I want you. After all, children don’t provide for their parents. Rather, parents provide for their children. I will gladly spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.

Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But others still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery. But how? Did any of the men I sent to you take advantage of you? When I urged Titus to visit you and sent our other brother with him, did Titus take advantage of you? No! For we have the same spirit and walk in each other’s steps, doing things the same way.

Even the key members of Paul’s team didn’t take any salary from them -

He actually apologized for this … he failed to teach them the blessing of giving and supporting the ministry -

But - he says he is going to do the same thing the next time - because they are in such need of being corrected, that there are much more important things for them to deal with than even learning how to be generous in supporting the ministry.

Earlier in the letter, he was writing to them about giving to others, but not about supporting those who ministered to them - he’s reminding them of that most likely because the false apostles came at them and deceived them while taking their money - Paul served faithfully while never taking anything from them.

We don’t have any ministers today who are only in it for the money do we?

We don’t have any ministers who only preach positive good things - never challenge anyone - and just ingratiate themselves with great personal wealth today, do we?

**> Live above rebuke.**

2nd Corinthians 12:19-21 - Perhaps you think we’re saying these things just to defend ourselves. No, we tell you this as Christ’s servants, and with God as our witness. Everything we do, dear friends, is to strengthen you. For I am afraid that when I come I won’t like what I find, and you won’t like my response. I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior. Yes, I am afraid that when I come again, God will humble me in your presence. And I will be grieved because many of you have not given up your old sins. You have not repented of your impurity, sexual immorality, and eagerness for lustful pleasure.

When Paul wrote to Timothy about qualifications for leaders in the church - one of them - “Above reproach” - beyond disgrace -

Here to the Corinthians Pauls states he wants all Christians to live beyond rebuke!

Rebuke is no fun for either side - the one being rebuked, or the one rebuking -

But if we don’t follow through with this sometimes, we all fail.

Sometimes parents don’t rebuke their children … it’s awful.

There were times I disciplined my kids, then went into my bedroom and cried - and wondered if I was completely blowing it.

This is often the place of the pastor -

* Should I address this subject? Should I let it pass?
* Does this person need to be addressed? Does their behavior and attitude need to be addressed? Should they be involved in leadership? Should I get another leader to address the issue?

What will their response be? Will they get angry? Will they run away not only from the church, but from God as well?

You know what Paul is telling this church?

Just live right! Live above rebuke!

Look at his list - this is the church! This is supposedly a very spiritual church (that’s in their own estimation) - this is a church that supposedly openly exercises so many gifts - but these aren’t passages we focus on very much. But they are just as much Scripture - this is the Word of God.

What in that list looks like fun?

What in that list draws us closer to Christ?

What in that list helps us bring other people to Christ?

What in that list actually causes people who don’t know Christ to want to have nothing to do with us?

What in that list leads us to ultimate failure?

What in that list deserves godly, loving rebuke?

Let’s just live above rebuke.

How? The power of the Holy Spirit -

The REAL power of the Holy Spirit - not momentary manifestations and emotions - but really living in the power of the Holy Spirit enables us to live in holiness - and live in unity and love.

Some of us are just hard to love - unless we have the power of the Holy Spirit.

Are we convicted by anything in this list?

Invitation -

**Don’t forget the Connection Card**

**Blessing**