

Series: Words of Counsel and Correction

BLESSING OUT OF BUFFETINGS

2 CORINTHIANS 12

Text:

Introduction:

Once a little girl found a cocoon hanging from a limb in the forest. She took it to her room and placed it in a jar, expecting one day to see a butterfly emerge.

One day, she saw the butterfly within the cocoon trying get out. It was struggling and trying to push its way out of the tight opening.

In an effort to help the poor insect, she very carefully slit open the cocoon.

After that, the butterfly was able to easily exit the cocoon. But, a strange thing happened.

Instead of spreading two beautiful wings, the butterfly had two withered, shriveled, useless, ugly wings hanging by its side.

Why?

God designed the butterfly and his cocoon so that the tight opening would straighten and strengthen his wings.

Without the pressure of the tight opening, the butterfly was robbed of the beauty of his wings, and more importantly, he was robbed of the ability to fly.

He was condemned to a life of walking around on the ground!

Now, we are not butterflies, but we need the pressures and trials of life, if we are to develop into all that God desires for us to be.

In our text, Paul tells us why he was able excel in his day.

He tells us that it was the pain and the sufferings he endured that gave him the power with God enjoyed.

As we look into this passage, I want to talk to you about the buffetings Paul mentions. You see, what he endured can teach us a lot about the problems, suffering and trials of our own lives.

What we can learn here will give us the ability to rise above the ordinary Christian life. Just like that butterfly, we will find that the trials and the sufferings of life will refine and prepare us to take flight.

Let's look into this passage as we consider this thought:
“Blessings Out Of Buffetings.”

Let's learn how that benefits can come out of the problems in our lives.

Note:

1. THE PAIN OF THE BUFFETINGS (VS. 7)

2 Corinthians 12:7

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

As we think about the Pain of the Buffetings notice:

A. The Personality of This Pain

Paul tells us about the nature of the trial he endured by the two words he uses to describe it: thorn and buffet.

We have all endured being pricked by a thorn and we know the piercing, nagging pain they can produce.

The word “thorn” comes from a word which refers to “a sharp wooden stake to torture or impale someone”.

The word “buffet” means “to strike with the fist, to mistreat”.

Whatever it was that Paul endured, it was, to him, like being beaten with an open fist or being impaled on a stake.

No one knows for sure, what this thorn was, but it made the task of preaching and ministering to the churches far more difficult for Paul.

Also keep in mind that whatever it was that afflicted this great preacher, it was part of God's plan for his life!

Note:

You may be going through a time like this right now. If you aren't, you can rest assured that there is a time of pain just down your road. In fact, we are all going to experience many periods of thorns and buffetings in life. No one likes them, but they are part of the human experience.

Note: Job 14:1 & Ecclesiastes 2:23

Job 14:1

¹ Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.

Ecclesiastes 2:23

²³ For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.

When the thorns pierce you and the buffetings shake your foundation, you need to remember that nothing can touch your life that is not part of God's plan.

Romans 8:28

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

It's probably good that we are not certain what Paul's problem was.

Why?

If Paul had named his thorn, then we might conclude that the promises of God associated with that thorn were only good for others with the same problem. But, since we don't know what he suffered from, we can apply the promises he received to the situations we face.

Note not only the Personality of This Pain but also:

B. The Place of This Pain

Paul's thorn was "in the flesh".

It afflicted his physical being.

Often, the thorns and buffetings we endure in this life will reveal themselves in the physical realm, through sickness and other forms of physical suffering.

At other times, we will endure emotional pain, such as depression, loneliness and heartbreak.

Sometimes our thorns will be spiritual in nature, as we doubt our salvation, struggle with holiness and battle spiritual pride.

Suffering can come in many shapes.

We should never be surprised at how the thorns of life reveal themselves.

Note not only the Personality and Place of This Pain but also:

C. The Persistence of This Pain

The word "buffet" is a word in the Greek language that means to afflict in a continual nature.

In other words, he lived with this thing all the time!

When this problem came, it came to stay!

He even asked God three times for relief, but the problem endured!

Note:

We need to understand that the things we may be called upon to endure may not be over in an hour or a few days.

Some people, for God's own reasons, are given thorns and buffetings that seem to endure for years.

Why?

We may find some answers in the next few verses, but for some of these things there are no answers.

When the thorns and buffetings of life come our way, and they linger in our life, do not be discouraged!

God is doing something special in your life, and in His time, He will make that perfectly clear!

We have considered The Pain of the Buffetings let's now consider:

2. THE PURPOSE OF THE BUFFETINGS (VS. 7-8)

2 Corinthians 12:7-8

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. ⁸ For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

Understand:

A. Buffetings Regulate Our Flesh

For Paul, the buffeting came his way to keep him from being “exalted above measure”. This phrase means “to lift oneself above one's place”.

Because of all the blessings Paul had been given, and because of all the mighty ways in which God had used him, there was the danger that Paul might try to take all the glory for himself.

Note these verses again:

2 Corinthians 12:1-7

¹ It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the

body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. ³ And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) ⁴ How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. ⁵ Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. ⁶ For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. ⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Therefore, God gave Paul this thorn in the flesh to regulate his flesh.

It was sent to remind Paul that this thing was about God and not about Paul!

In other words, it was sent to keep Paul humble!

Application:

We have that same tendency don't we? When the Lord uses us for His glory, there is something within us that wants to claim that glory for ourselves. But, sufferings

and troubles tend to keep us anchored firmly to the earth. We are reminded of just what we are and of just what we can do without Him in John 15:

John 15:5

*⁵ I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: **for without me ye can do nothing.***

So, one of the purposes of the thorns and the buffetings of life is that they remind us that we are made of flesh and that we need Him and His power to get anything done!

There is nothing like a time of crisis to remind us how weak and frail we really are!

We don't like that, but we sure do need it from time to time!

Understand the Buffetings not only “Regulate the Flesh” but also:

B. Buffetings Rejuvenate Our Faith

Notice that Paul's trials drove him to his knees. When he began to hurt, he began to seek the Lord.

Application:

When the path of life is easy, we forget how much we need the Lord.

We get lax in our devotional lives and we tend to become a little too self-sufficient.

When trouble comes knocking, when we are pierced by one of the thorns of life and when the blows of buffeting begin to fall upon us, we are brought back to reality once again.

Difficulty will drive one to their knees!

Since this is true, and since the Lord knows that we are more apt to seek Him when we hurt and when we have a need, doesn't it make sense that He will allow us to find ourselves in that position?

There are times when we play around with spiritual things, but when we hurt, we get serious with God!

He knows that, so He allows us to walk through some desolate places so that we might seek His face!

We have considered The Pain of the Buffetings and their Purpose let's now consider:

3. THE PROMISE IN THE BUFFETINGS (VS. 9)

2 Corinthians 12:9

⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul said in verse 7: “there was given to me...”

The word “given” is interesting!

Paul speaks of his buffeting, and his thorn, as a gift!

When we are going through a time of severe trial and pain, we may not see it then, but that time is a gift of God!

How you may ask?

There are a couple of promises revealed in these verses that are fulfilled during our time of buffeting.

A. We have the Promise of Sufficiency

Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed. The Lord's answer was this: “My grace is sufficient for thee.”

The Lord is telling Paul, “Paul, I know you have a big task to accomplish.

I called you to that task. I know you feel weak and inferior for the need.

Paul, you need to know that I have the power you lack.

You will never be enough, but I am always enough!"

Application:

How many times have we looked at our situation and said:

- "If only this problem was solved or this thing over here was somehow different, then I could really serve the Lord!"
- "If I could just feel better, I could do something for the Lord."
- "If my husband or wife was a Christian, it would be much easier for me to serve the Lord."
- "Oh, I wish I was younger, or smarter, or more talented, then I could be used of God."

The problem with that kind of thinking is that it is all wrapped up in self and what self can do!

It says, "I am all I need and if I could just work out a few little details, then I could be so much more."

In truth, we are nothing and we can do nothing without the Lord!

If you are saved and you are walking in the will of the Lord, then you are right where He has you, problems and all.

Psalm 37:23

²³ The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.

Psalm 40:2

² He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.

What we need to understand is the truth that we will never be enough, but He is always more than enough.

Ephesians 3:20

²⁰ Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

What the Lord says to Paul, He says to us: "I am in control! I will meet your need and I will take care of you!"

The Lord says that “my grace is sufficient”. Grace is “the undeserved love and favor of God”. He will give grace to support and sustain regardless of what we may face before we get out of this life!

There will be grace to stand for Him, grace to serve Him, grace to live for Him, grace to die for Him, grace to face life for Him.

There will be grace, amazing, matchless, and marvelous grace for every bump in the road of life!

Not only is the promise of a Sufficiency but also:

B. We Have the Promise of a Solution

The Lord Jesus tells Paul that He is working out a divine, plan in Paul's life.

He reminds Paul that God's plan will only be accomplished through God's strength.

It was not the power Paul that would get the job done. It was the power of God!

When the Lord says that His “strength is made perfect in weakness”, it simply means that God gets more glory from using the weak things of the world that He does by using the things of greatest strength and power.

1 Corinthians 1:27

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

By making Paul weak, God could display His power and strength! That sounds like a impossibility, but it's true!

God gets more glory out of weaker vessels!

Look at the disciples. They were ordinary, weak men, but God used them to alter the world for His glory!

Remember:

When the Lord allows the thorns to pierce us and when He allows the trials and sufferings of life to buffet us, remember that He has a plan and He is getting glory out of your weakness.

Illustration:

Fanny Crosby — blinded at the age of five by a wrong prescription given by a doctor. But, in her 90 years of darkness she penned some 8,000 gospel hymns.

Her pain has brought more glory to God than she could have ever imagined.

We have considered The Pain of the Buffetings and their Purpose and Promises let's now consider lastly:

4. THE PRIZE OF THE BUFFETINGS (VS. 9-10)

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

⁹ And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

As Paul closes His thoughts in this passage, he reminds us that the thorns and buffetings of life are not in vain. There is much benefit to be derived from the pains we endure in life. Of course, Paul does say, "...for Christ's sake". The things he endured were not the result of foolish decisions on his part. He was suffering for the Cause of Christ.

Much of what we face is the result of our own foolish choices and fleshly decisions.

It doesn't minimize the pain or the need to get to God, but it does emphasize the need for us to walk in His will and not our own!

Notice the Prize of the Buffetings.

Notice:

A. The Prize of Power

Paul says that when the infirmities of life have him pressed beneath their weight, then he is stronger than ever!

Why, because the power of God is able to work in his life.

His own power is subdued by his sufferings and the power of God is able to move in a way that it could not under other conditions! Paul says, "It doesn't make sense, but when I am at my weakest after the flesh, I am the strongest spiritually!"

When we are broken by the buffetings of life, we are brought to a place where God can move in us, on us and through us in extraordinary ways!

If we want the power of God to rest upon your life then, prepare to hurt!

God will not share His glory with another.

Before He will use us in a great way, He will first put us in a position of dependence upon Himself!

If you want the power, then you have to pay the price!

Not only is there the prize of power but also:

B. The Prize of Praise

Note the words the Paul used:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

⁹ *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. **Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities,** that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore **I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses** for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.*

These words indicate that the Lord, through grace, had taught Paul the secret of rejoicing in the midst of difficulty!

Most of us can rejoice when the battle is over, or when life is running along on an even keel, but we have real trouble rejoicing when heartaches and trials come our way!

Paul's sufferings had taught him how to praise the Lord.

Job also learned this valuable lesson.

Job 1:20-22

*²⁰ Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped,
²¹ And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. ²² In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.*

Neither Paul nor Job was enjoying what they were facing, but they had learned the truth that God is in control, He knows what He is doing and He is using the pain for His glory!

Paul was seeing beyond the thorn and beyond the buffeting. He was seeing the power and the glory that was coming because of what he was facing! That is why he had peace and could praise the Lord in the middle of his buffeting.

Not only is there the prize of power and praise but also:

C. The Prize of Peace

Paul names all these things that he is “in”.

Yet, he tells us that it is “in” these things that he has found peace and contentment!

He had learned a secret that many never get a handle on.

Paul had learned the truth that God is just as real and just as powerful in the battles of life and He is during the times of peace and prosperity!

Application:

We spend a lot of our time praying for God to get us out of trouble or to keep us out of trouble?

- How long has it been since we thanked the Lord for our trials or trouble?
- How long has it been since you thanked Him for putting you in a place where you had to trust Him?
- How long since you thanked Him for His grace, for His sufficiency, for His touch upon your life?

We always want God to get us “out” or keep us “out” of something, but how long has it been since we thanked Him for putting us “in” something that we must depend upon Him to see us through?

Close:

Maybe you are being buffeted. The blows of life are landing leaving you bleeding, bruised and battered before the Lord.

Maybe you are being pierced by the sharp thorns of physical, emotional, or spiritual affliction.

If you are, God promises that His grace will be sufficient.

Maybe this evening you need help for your valley, or need to find that prize in your pain, if so we should do as Paul did speak to the Lord.

Let's bring our thorn to Him.