

Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden at Galeed, Brighton, on Lord's day morning, Jan. 8th, 1961.

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Text: II Cor. xii. 9.

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This most kind word was spoken to the Apostle Paul, but not for his sake only, but for His people throughout all time who should be brought to know what weakness is. Paul had been caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it was not lawful or possible for a man to utter, and in order that he should not be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given unto him a thorn in the flesh. So that even the Apostle Paul was in danger of being lifted up with spiritual pride. Pride will lift us up. We need a ballast. Paul needed it, and how much more do we. He had this thorn in the flesh. Some people have tried to investigate, to find out what the thorn was - a very unprofitable task. It is sufficient that the nature of the thorn is shown to us. It was the messenger of Satan to buffet him. What message it was we are not told, but it came from hell. A messenger of Satan does not come from heaven, and perhaps some of you may know what that is, to have a messenger from hell. And when it comes, you will know what the Psalmist knew: "The pains of hell gat hold upon me". You may depend upon it, my friends, if we are being prepared for heaven, we shall know something of an experience of hell in our souls.

Paul needed it. He was perhaps one who had a greater measure of grace than any; but what he had he received. "Who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou hast not received?" And the Lord taught Paul that what graces he had he received, and he needed a thorn to keep him in his proper place. Do you wonder then that we have thorns and a crook in the lot? If we lose sight of God and of what we are and our deserts, if we so lose sight of ourselves that we feel the Lord deals unjustly with us, we shall never find any yoke fit, but we shall rebel and fret under every cross.

But this thorn in the flesh so rankled the Apostle that he besought the Lord to remove it. Of course, you cannot have a soft thorn. It is of no use to have a thorn that you cannot feel, and as a rule a thorn will fester and produce inflammation. Do you understand this in your soul experience? Have some of you got something in your lives, some secret sorrow that you have to carry from day to day, and the Lord does not remove it? It was not wrong in the Apostle to ask the Lord to remove the thorn. If you have a heavy burden or some secret grief - some of you may have a secret besetting sin that haunts you every day and all your life long. It seems left there to pierce your side and in your conscience continually. It is not wrong to ask the Lord to remove thorns. It may be a temptation of the devil to suggest to you that to ask the Lord to remove it is in the nature of rebellion and insubmission; but in my judgment it is not so. And we have the pattern of the Lord Jesus in this respect when in the Garden of Gethsemane, and that terrible bitter cup, full of the curse and wrath of His holy Father, put into the hand of that innocent, sacred, holy, harmless Lamb of God. He said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Thine be done". And it was not the will of God that that cup should pass from Him. If it had, we should have to drink it in hell. Oh the love of God

in Christ! And this was grace - grace. And Paul writing to this same Church says, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich" - rich as God, rich in His infinite Being, rich as the Creator of all things, rich as the Possessor of all things, "yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be made rich". That is grace: "My grace is sufficient for thee; My strength is made perfect in weakness."

The richness and the efficacy of the text is in these two "Mys". At least they are but one - "My grace" and "My strength". And some of you are in such a condition as to feel that nobody-else's grace or strength would be sufficient and of no use to you. And how blessed this is! This is a part of that fulness that it pleased the Father should dwell in the Lord Jesus, for He came "full of grace and truth". There is natural grace. It would be very gracious in our Queen to receive at the royal court a commoner and to bestow some royal favour. But that would be but the grace of a creature, and while we would give honour to whom honour is due, it is sometimes to bring before our view the greatest dignity in this world, the greatest of men, and to view them but as men, and to see God by faith and to feel Him. He has made Himself knowable, possessable, feelable, experienceable in His dear Son, by the Holy Spirit communicating to poor sinners of His actual life and of His saving grace and of the benefits of the Gospel. My grace for thee is sufficient, whatever your case may be. It is divine grace, imperishable unlosable grace. I believe the text, but I want it. Perhaps some of you read the Scriptures, but you want what you believe. You want that living faith that receives the things revealed in the Scriptures.

"And He said unto him, My grace is sufficient for thee." And this grace is sufficient for everybody who is the object of His love. It is invincible grace. It is the grace of God, the God of all grace. The grace of the Father in His everlasting love and His sovereign will set upon the election of grace, whom He did foreknow before the world began. That was the grace of the Father, who sanctified the church, elected them, set them apart. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, to which we have referred. And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ was exercised in His infinite condescension, and in the 2nd. Colossians we have this wonderful word, and this is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the God-head bodily" in human nature. The grace of God incarnate. The grace of God bodily in the incarnate Son of God, so that that grace in all its virtue, life, and power can be communicated by the Spirit in regeneration in the creation in the heart of a new creature, in all the graces of faith, and hope, and love, and humility, and the fear of God., and heavenly wisdom. It is sufficient.

"My grace is sufficient for thee." It is invincible. And it will be shown to be sufficient for the most uttermost sinner, the chief of sinners. The ingredients of the grace of God are all the virtue and power of His love manifested in the gift of His dear Son, who "brought immortal blessings down". It is everything that constitutes salvation. It is the whole of the rich full Gospel of the grace of God. It is sufficient for everything for body or soul, time and eternity. And that grace was in the fulness of it flowing

by the Spirit in those streams in the salvation, the experience of salvation to everyone that believeth. We may look at some extreme cases. Who would ever have thought, when Saul was going to Damascus with authority to cast the saints into prison and persecute them; who would have thought that when Saul of Tarsus held the clothes while they stoned Stephen to death, that he was an object of the love of God, and would be a subject of this invincible grace? But it is sufficient to save to the uttermost those that come unto God through Him.

And grace must be free, otherwise it would not be grace; and the greatest insult that we could give to grace is to bring in works. The works of the flesh are the greatest insult to the Lord Jesus, in whom is all the fulness. Oh what shame would cover us if we did but realize this! I know there is a way that seems right unto a man, to bring something commendable unto God, something in ourselves or our lives that we feel is presentable to Him, but it is an insult.

"While we can call one mite our own,

We have no full discharge."

And therefore the Lord by His Spirit, and this is in His grace, empties whom He fills. He will empty His people, "wipe them out as a dish", it is said in the Word. He will kill them with the sentence of death in everything that they are and have, that they may not trust in themselves, but in this grace, in God that raiseth the dead. Oh the sufficiency of divine grace!

This grace then is in Christ Jesus, in His fulness, in His Person, but it was manifest in His life. Oh the grace, the favour, the love of Christ in all that He undertook! I was looking at that word this morning in Ezekiel - what grace was there! Some of you may have felt it. We shall be taught it if the Lord is gracious unto us. "Now when I passed by thee and looked upon thee, behold thy time was a time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine". That is grace; it was sufficient. That sets forth our condition in our fallen nature. The same thing is "looking into the pit from whence we were hewn", and the Holy Ghost will give us a sight of that pit. It was grace that went to Adam when he fell, and "fled His Maker's face". He never fled before. He went to hide himself among the trees of the wood. They were naked and attempted to hide their nakedness; but God saw it. But He would not let them go. That was grace, and that same grace must reach every poor sinner now. He called after Adam. Oh if He had not, but let him go, we should all have perished! "Adam, where art thou? Where is that beautiful image, My image, in which thou wast created? Adam, what a forlorn creature thou art, how deformed; where is thy beauty? Where art thou?" And the Lord will say that to everyone virtually. Has He ever said it to you? If the Lord says it to open our eyes and give us to see sin and feel it and our ruin, that every grey hair, every infirmity, and our increasing evidences of mortal decay, and change and decay in all around us are evidences of sin, and that this world is a city of destruction. Has the Lord ever spoken to us? A mercy if He has, if He ever says to us, "Where art thou?" He will not leave us. He left not Adam. He made clothing out of the skins of

beasts, a type of the Lord Jesus, His righteousness, His precious life of perfection and obedience, and His vicarious death. He cast His skirt upon that wretched infant and covered its nakedness, and entered into a covenant and said, Thou art Mine. It is grace, divine grace, and is sufficient for thee.

So it is with respect to the pathway through the wilderness. It is a mystery that the children of the heavenly King, the royal seed, that it should be appointed that they should through much tribulation enter the kingdom. It is otherwise with an earthly monarch. Our royal family have not that tribulation that the ordinary people have in poverty, and trials, and oppressions of this life. But says the Lord, "My kingdom is not of this world", and we little know what love the Lord has in His chastenings in some of these thorns that we cannot remove, and that He sees fit shall remain there, perhaps all the days of our life. But oh what teaching there is in this pathway! My friends, we are not half fallen, and when I consider what I am, what my nature is, and then my trials and tribulations, I must say, "The Lord hath not dealt with me after my sins, nor rewarded me according to my iniquities". The grace is sufficient because this grace has in it all the perfections of Jehovah. It is the grace of heavenly infinite wisdom, which is profitable to direct. And oh it is grace too of a Conqueror, an ascended Lord Jesus exalted at the right hand of God, infinite in His wisdom and power, "mercy joined with power"! So that this grace contains in it every ingredient for the strength. He is the heavenly light, the revealing light in the understanding of a poor sinner.

"My grace is sufficient for thee", whatever your circumstances are, and therefore you will find throughout the Word of God that His people were brought to an extremity in order that this grace might be magnified. I think the greatest promise concerning grace is in the Romans: "Sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace". And if grace were not greater than the law, there would be no comfort in that promise. But it is greater than the law, greater than sin.

And some of you will feel the comfort of this grace both with respect to your inward conflicts, as we have sometimes said and will continue to say for the comfort of those that are truly burdened and labouring under a sense of sin within and united trials without, that everything in the Lord Jesus is greater than everything in a sinner, and everything in the Lord Jesus is greater than everything in the devil, and that which is in Christ Jesus is greater than everything that is in this world. Therefore My grace is sufficient for thee, and the Lord knows your circumstances. He sees into your homes, sees into your family, into your business, into your trials and perplexities; but there is no death or condition into which you may come which will neutralize this gracious word, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" - perfect strength in perfect weakness.

Therefore to know it we must be brought to weakness, and this is very painful. We would be strong, strong in self, fools that we are. What Christians we would be, what creatures we would be, if we could! But the Lord sees to it. Do you want things burnt up, my

friends? You stand in a pulpit from year to year; it is a furnace. He will bring us to helplessness, and weakness, and ignorance, if His strength is made perfect in weakness. So Paul says, "When I am weak, then am I strong". It is a wonderful experience. Humbly I have known it a time or two. You will be amazed, feeling you have come to the end of your religion, your looking, your praying, feel it is of no use to attend upon the means of grace. Unbelief and these fiery darts from hell will come into your conscience and try to persuade you that there is nothing in anything at all. What then? To whom then shall I go? What other refuge or happiness have I? And therefore have to return and say, "Give me Christ, or else I die". And then you begin to feel a little of this strength of Christ being made perfect in your weakness.

For it has pleased the Father that in Him all the fulness of grace, all the fulness of life, all the fulness of strength should be. It is omnipotent strength, my friends. And it comes by faith beholding the glory of the Lord. Beautifully that is set out in Isaiah. By beholding the glory of the Lord there is a strengthening of the weak hands and a confirming of the feeble knees. There will be this more or less distinctly in every sinner's experience, that constantly you will find you are compelled to look out from your utter weakness and prostration unto the Lord, as did David: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help". And you will be brought to look out from that darkness that covers your nature to Him who is eternal light and life, look out from your death. Do you find it to be so for the most part? And this is worship, going out from everything that you are and feel in yourself, to everything that is revealed of the Lord Jesus. And there will be something very sacredly distinct in that simplicity of your faith, and it is teaching to profit.

"My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." You see how these two are connected - perfect in weakness. As much as to say that this power of grace is not made perfect where there is no weakness. There is more and more in that expression of Toplady than appears at first: "Nothing in my hand I bring", nothing at all. And I have felt that to be a very solemn word in the Proverbs, "Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, when he has no heart for it?" Oh that has brought a very solemn caution on my spirit before a service! Some of you may know what it is to be heartless, unconcerned, slothful in your spirit, and when a minister gets there and attempts to take a price to get wisdom when he has no heart to it, it will make you tremble. But the Lord will take it out of your hands, and bring a poor man into the pulpit like a fool. Oh but His heavenly wisdom then will be attractive! I believe that I have, though most unworthy, seen as it were the Lord Jesus in trying to speak of Him, and speaking of Him as I feel to be a piece of hell in myself, but looking to Him in whom is all my hope of heaven. Then it strengthens. As it did Daniel in the 10th chapter, when the angel came and touched him and brought him upon the palms of his hands and upon his knees, and touched him again and he stood trembling. To feel the rising of this blessed Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings.

"My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength" - blessed strength, spiritual strength, omnipotent strength, "is made perfect in weakness". "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities", rather than the thorn should be taken out. I have no grace and no strength and power of Christ resting upon me. I would rather glory in my infirmities, that I am a fool and my wisdom is from above, that I am poor and bankrupt but have unsearchable riches in Christ.

Well, may the Lord make His strength perfect in any of you who feel your weakness and are carrying a daily cross or thorn, that you might prove that His grace is sufficient, and will be down to your dying day; and then you will need dying grace.
