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J. W. Spedding-Tyler

Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor

on Sunday Morning. May 12.1974.

Lesson. John 3.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12.9.

I can say before you, as the late dear Mr Bradbury said once in this pulpit many, many years ago after he had announced this Text; "You may inquire why I read before you this Scripture. It is because it suits the preacher." and on the strength of this word alone do I stand before you this morning. If it were not for this it would be impossible to stand here on the journey or through the path of tribulation in this world to the promised rest. So the answer to all the cries, anxieties, fears, and all that dismays and all that afflicts, tries and distresses is this from the mouth of God to all His beloved people in all circumstances; the young, those loaded with responsibilities; those who are older, breaking under the strain and stress of life; in trouble, distress, in death itself; in every age and path; in pain and distress of soul and spirit is this comprehensive word of God to all His dear people. "My grace is sufficient for thee." So I am able to stand before you by the Holy Spirit in the Name of God, and know that none of you who fear God can miss the blessedness of this supreme promise. You have anxieties, trials; you feel unable to continue in the journey of life. He says; "My grace is sufficient for thee."

So in the strength of this grace we come before you on this Lord's Day morning. I want by the same grace of God,- because if I just make an observation on grace you will see why it is complete and comprehensive. What is grace? Would you be able to give a brief sentence of summary concerning grace? It is grace alone saves sinners. That is the absolute reason why the grace of God is so comprehensive; it is complete. The sacred interpretation and summary of grace is the amazing gift of God the Father of His only begotten Son for our salvation, and through His cross all our blessings flow. There is grace. So if you want to explore,

to get into the treasure house, go to the throne of God and see the heart of God that has given His only Son. There is grace, Grace is the free, loving favour of God to sinful mortals deserving hell,- the gift of God to save. If you want to receive more, child of God, go to the cross by the Spirit, and see, feel, receive all the blessings of His grace flowing to you through Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There is grace. "My grace is sufficient for thee." Grace has saved you if you are His; grace has redeemed you. Grace covers every facet of life; responsibilities, trials, sorrows, pain. It is the answer; not just vocally as you hear me say it, but to have the efficacy of it in your soul every moment. You say; "What shall I do?" "My grace is sufficient for thee." "What shall I do about the future?" "My grace is sufficient for thee." "What about to day?" "My grace is sufficient for thee."

How wonderful this beautiful evangelical word of promise is! To give a further observation on it, take responsibilities; a dear mother with a little family. So often we tend to take it for granted. Think of it! year after year she plods on in the background, often ready to faint, to give up, and on her knees she looks up to her Maker and Lord and He whispers; "My grace is sufficient for thee." And the man going to work, to his profession, battling against life with its difficulties and problems. The secret is looking to the Lord and praying; perhaps to stop the car for five minutes and look up to God. "Lord, I do not know what to do with this problem." and He says from the heavens; "My grace is sufficient for thee." and you go on cheerful and expectant, knowing He will fulfil His faithful word, and He does. And with the old and afflicted, in trouble, there is the same cry; "What about the uncertain future, before I reach the shore? What shall I do? I am worried. I am almost paralysed with fear as to the future." and He whispers, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

It gives me great pleasure to bring this to you, and in reference to the happy Jubilee services of Mr Stanley Delves this is the answer to it all; "My grace is sufficient for thee." I have seen the dear man when he appeared to be on the point of death in hospital. What is the answer to it all, to be brought through fifty years? "My grace is sufficient for thee." See how wonderful it is! You could not do without it. Each day opens before you: what will you do? It is only because His grace is

sufficient. Will you get out of the fire? He will bring you through because His grace is sufficient. You find yourself in deep waters: the day arrives to go to hospital for a major operation, and the hour comes when the premedication takes place, and soon you will be unconscious and close to death. These are deep waters. It may be death: you may never see another morning in this world. These are deep waters; and the Lord stands by and says: "My grace is sufficient for thee." We know what it is for the Lord to so be with us that all fear is completely removed; we have not an anxiety in the world, and to feel our soul bathed in heavenly peace and joy.

"And not a wave of trouble roll

Across my peaceful breast." (474)

and it is the same in death. So see the wonder of it! Are you not seeking to give praise and worship to God for the gift of His only Son, and the grace you receive through His cross day by day, and grace will bring you through and grace triumphant reigns. Do you see how we rely exclusively on this grace?

We have in the chapter one of the most amazing revelations of the Book of God,- our own apostle transported to Paradise and seeing and hearing glorious things not lawful to utter with mortal tongue. Although we do not claim to have been to that degree, I believe the people of God do know in the journey a taste of the same blessing. There is a season, a moment when they seem to be transported from the world. So great was the exercise of joy he was unconscious of his body. You have seen it with your loved ones. I have witnessed it with some who have gone to heaven who are dear to you, and you remember seasons when the Lord so blessed them they were lifted to heaven. There are doubts, fears, dark seasons, but, my friends, you have had your favoured times.

The amazing revelation is, God saw fit to spare him to come back. Would it be right before God to say, often you wished when you had gone into a path of tribulation the Lord had taken you when He so blessed you? Job lamented that he was not cut off before the darkness. He wished that God had severed the thread of mortal life before he went into adversity. I have often wished I had gone in 1930 (perhaps it is not right to name it) when I was in the full enjoyment of the love of God and forgiveness and

the beauties of the Happy Land. It would have been lovely to have gone then. Are you able to appreciate this? not a doubt, not a fear or misgiving. To go to heaven in the sunshine of God's love is amazing. Some seem to have been favoured in this way; to get deliverance in the last six months of the journey, as Mr Cottingham, and to stay in it and go straight to heaven in it, the Lord excluding temptation, and to go to heaven in the bliss of sunshine.

It was the purpose of God to spare Paul; to extend his mortal life and for him to come back to earth. I wonder what you would say about this? Could you name your biggest disappointment in life? I would think it was the biggest of all to come back to earth when you thought you were about to enter heaven, and to open your eyes and you ^{are} back on earth, and you wished to be with Him. Some are able to echo their disappointment. Another point is he came back to earth and one would think, go and tell the Church of God, and the people of God, and others of the glory of Christ and so on in a peaceful and comfortable manner. Yes, that part: but to come back to something almost inexplicable; to come back to a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him. Those of you in this experience will understand: a thorn in the flesh to prick, tear, lacerate, wound, distress, and with a great measure of Satanic influence, a messenger of Satan, who took advantage of everything to add to his grief, trouble and distress.

My friends, if you fear God, or those who fear God, where is the man or woman or young person who is immune? Are you immune? You will say; "Certainly not." One great point concerning this is the Lord never disclosed and Paul never disclosed what it was. I am quite certain this spells out for you who fear God, your thorn in the flesh you never disclose. There is a part in life no one knows only God and you, and you walk it. You may talk of the common difficulties and trials of life: this is something that is uncommon; no one knows and you never speak of it, such is the construction and tie-up of things in your life. You have a thorn in the flesh, and how Satan torments you, and disturbs your peace and breaks your rest. The apostle had this, and naturally and spiritually too, as I would judge from the fervency of his prayer, there was an expectation that God would take it away, and possibly fairly soon. So

thrice, to make it complete, he besought the Lord that it might depart from him. You say and feel; "Lord, is this the way I must live? Surely it is not. Is there no other way? Must I live with a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me?" This is logic, I know. You look round and say; "It is not everyone lives in this way." You do not want to be among those Asaph speaks of; "For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." (Psa.73.4-5) do you? After all, it is the end that counts. What if you have your wish and get off free from all and have a marvellous life, free from thorns, buffetings and trials, and come to the end and find it is hell? What good would a few years of ease on earth do you? It is soon over. There are many of us in the Sanctuary for whom it will only be a few years now, so what about it? You will find the choice people of God come into this. There is a thorn in the flesh, everything is marred; it is not an easy path. The whole point is, you cannot walk it without God: you could never live without His grace. It is only because His grace is sufficient that you live; you would have fallen long ago without. That is the promise.

Now the prayer. "Will the Lord hear prayer? I am beseeching Him to remove the thorn; to take it away. Surely after going to Paradise I can live in a different way? Will the Lord hear prayer? will He answer?" Yes: the whole point is the Lord answers prayer in a different way to what we anticipate often. You ask the Lord and He answers you, as the hymn says, in such a way, as almost drove you to despair. (295) You never thought this would be the answer. That clock makes me think of January 1939, having begged of the Lord for a special token in the six months, and how the Lord answered, with overwhelming affliction and the seeming death of one so dear. It was as though the Lord said; "This is the token." and since that day I have thought we little know how God will answer. He answered Paul. He hears you and answers. To day you are in the path where the Lord is answering you, and it is so absolutely different from what you anticipated.

What was the answer? What a word! "My strength is made perfect in

weakness." It is complete. "You will be ready to receive the completeness of My strength when you are weak in yourself." There is no other way. If the Lord will make room for the gospel He will empty you of all else. If He will make room for Himself He will empty you of everything. It is painful to be stripped and emptied of everything, but it will be sanctified. The Lord will do it and He will make room for Himself.

The Lord also kindly discovered to Paul His divine purpose in it. It is a great thing to discover the purpose of God. Say you come into dispensations at the hand of the Lord,- it is His hand: we say it is this and that and that,- all the secondary parts, and I agree, but you get back to the hand of the Lord. If you come in this, are you able to understand the purpose of God in it as to why it is? This is one of the reasons why you have the word in Ecclesiastes; "In the day of adversity consider." This is only one of the things to consider, and it is important. What is God's purpose in it?

So to Paul He discovered His purpose, and it is one of the greatest of all because it related to God's own glory. He tells you the purpose of God,- "lest I should be exalted above measure." That is the purpose of God. He was exalted. There was the exaltation God gave him in regenerating grace, forgiveness, love, as He delivered his soul and anointed him by the Spirit to be an apostle. He also knew exaltation because of the dimensions of spiritual experience in being caught up into Paradise; also he had exaltation in the amazing gifts and talents and ability and knowledge, and in salvation he was exalted. There is a right exaltation, but, "lest I should be exalted above measure." I rather see in this in my own mind, the great man coming back from Paradise with great grace and a fund of spiritual experience and ability, and I wonder how he would have felt to those who hardly knew whether they had enough for their proper title.(484) That is a concept I believe expresses it. The thorn in the flesh and the messenger of Satan to buffet him, sanctified, brought him down to the lowest of God's people. What wisdom, that he should know the sanctifying grace of God in heavy trial and be brought to the blessed posture to descend to the level of the lowest part of the Lord's garden! and he delivers this to you at length. This was the Text at Hastings: "And I,

brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (1 Cor.1-5) It is put concisely in the first chapter. He says; "That no flesh should glory in his presence." and "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." That is the answer. The Lord has sanctified the thorn in the flesh, so He showed him His divine purpose.

The promise. "My grace is sufficient for thee." I have tried to give you the interpretation of grace. As I have previously named, it is the gift by God of His only begotten Son for our salvation: the free, loving favour of God in this priceless gift, and all the blessings of grace flowing to us through His cross. Stay there if you can. The government of Christ is a gracious one to His dear people. He rules and reigns in grace on the Throne of Grace, and every dispensation and government to you is in grace. His dispensations are gracious; they proceed from grace; there is no wrath, no terror. God is gracious to you. His government is kind, loving, fatherly. He reigns graciously, and you may approach His throne because He is the Throne of Grace, and He is ever ready and willing to dispense all the blessings of grace. His grace is sufficient for every need, every difficulty, for life and for death itself. "My grace is sufficient for thee."

The Lord's people are distinguished by their graciousness. Every quickened sinner, every saved sinner is in that way made very gracious. It is not their natural parts: it is that they are so enriched with grace that they are seen to be gracious; they are felt and known to be eminently gracious. "My grace is sufficient for thee." To spell it out, grace enables you to love, serve, and obey God, to follow Christ; to be a humble, loyal, loving follower. Grace in all its parts of faith, love, patience, meekness, grace enables you. "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Amen.