

“MAKING SENSE OUT OF
SUFFERING”

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

INTRODUCTION

There were several people who experienced a rapture in the Scriptures, with Paul being one of them. As a result of this Paul gets to an important point about his suffering and his weakness. He had a "thorn in the flesh", a messenger of Satan. First Corinthians has been about suffering, but also consolation. The Lord wants us to be comforters of others, just as we have received comfort. Every religion has some kind of answer for suffering, but Christianity has the right view of it.

THORN IN THE FLESH

In **chapter 11**, Paul's sufferings were even more than Job's! Job's suffering was much more contained and later he had much more restored to him. Paul had none. If we don't process suffering the right way it could lead to wrong conclusions and horrible decisions.

Many have wondered what the "thorn in the flesh" was. The word *thorn* could mean a tent stake. One view is that it was a demonic messenger that was used in the false teachers to dog Paul. (**v.8** says that it was an "it" not a "he"). Another view is that it was something physical such as epilepsy, seizures, malaria, or eyesight. We just don't know. The Holy Spirit doesn't tell us, possibly so this could be a general application for all who suffer in this life.

Paul recognizes that this came from God! A sovereign God ultimately gave the thorn to him. God allowed this and Satan was the instrument. There are other situations where God uses Satan to carry out his purposes: **Job 2**, **Luke 13:16** - a woman bound, and **Isaiah 53** - the cross. Why did he allow this? To prevent the exaltation of Paul! Paul understands this and is not mad at God. He doesn't doubt His love for him. We would all do well to process suffering this way. God can accomplish good things out of evil.

REASONS FOR SUFFERING

Why do we suffer? So we can comfort others, **chapter 1**. We are aging/decaying. The outer man is perishing, **chapter 4**. Because we obey the Lord, **chapter 11**. (Paul suffered because of the lies of others. see **2 Timothy 3:12**).

There were 4 main reasons for Paul's sufferings:

- 1) To prevent pride. This was a reality check for him, so he wouldn't get exalted above measure. Suffering keeps us from taking the credit for things. **Psalm 119:67**. God used the most prideful being, Satan, to keep him in check.
- 2) This brings him closer to God, **v.8**. Crises causes prayer! Unfortunately, some get bitter during the process, rather than better. **Psalm 18:6**. Our treasure is the Lord Himself!
- 3) God's answer to his prayer was "no". In **v. 8** and **9** it indicates that rather than remove the thorn, He gave him sustaining grace to continue!
- 4) To experience the power of Christ! Paul was given a supernatural strength. He took pleasure in his weakness. When he was physically weak, the power of Jesus showed through!

CONSIDER

Unfortunately, many today use suffering and weakness as a reason for *not* serving the Lord. Some even use trivial things as an excuse. Paul did not do that! He served the Lord *despite* the weakness and drew closer to Him! If this approach worked for Paul, would it not work for any of us? Have you given up? Allow the power of Jesus to help you fulfill your calling!

PRAY.....

- * That the Lord would unite us in prayer for a spiritual awakening in New York State!
- * That He would help us to be a people of prayer in 2020.