

2 Corinthians

“Winning Through Weakness”

III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10

D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness

2 Corinth. 11:23-33

“Giving up on gifting”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 23-27 Activity

III. Vs. 28-29 Anxiety

IV. Vs. 30-33 Taken to the curb

I. Intro.

Allen Redpath took the title of his commentary on 2nd Corinthians from this very section titling the book “*Blessings out of Buffetings*”. But when you consider the Lord's words to in Acts 9:16 to a reluctant Ananias whose house a blinded Saul landed when the Lord told Ananias: “*I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake.*” None of Paul's experiences of suffering should have been a surprise to him. The conclusion we could come up with when considering the success of the gospel in our lives is that the only thing necessary for us being useful in God's work is our failure and suffering. Last week Paul spoke of the first of three things that the false teachers wrongly boasted about, “Ancestry”. Today we will take up the next two along with the secret of a successful servant.

II. Vs. 23-27 Activity

1. Vs. 23-27 Activity: “*Are they ministers of Christ?*” The next thing that these false teachers were boasting in was their activity. Notice, here that Paul explains what

he had in mind in this verse when he says “*in labors*”. In that day “*labors*” didn’t always mean a larger church or greater numbers of “*decisions for Christ*”. It often meant more stripes, more time behind bars and more difficult situations to endure. I can imagine these fellows getting together and taking off their shirts to count scars instead of talking about how many people filled the chairs in their churches or came forward at the invitation. And just like today numbers seem to matter as you would get an audience simply based upon the amount of time you were sent to jail or beaten for proclaiming Jesus. Oh today it’s different; you will get to speak before your peers when you have good enough numbers but they are counting different things. But if that was the case Paul said he had better stats and most didn’t know because he never talked about them. **Here foolishly he speaks of five of them:**

- a. Vs. 24 Five times I received 40 stripes minus 1: This was purely a *Jewish form of punishment*. The Law of Moses prescribed that for certain offenses you could be publicly whipped with forty lashes. But it also said that if more than forty were inflicted the man who did the whipping had to receive forty lashes himself. So to prevent that they were careful not to go quite to forty; they made it thirty-nine, “forty less one.” **FIVE TIMES**, Paul said his own people had applied the severe punishment of the Jewish law to his back and if you could see his back you would count 195 stripes. Yet other than this statement here these beatings are never mentioned.
- b. Vs. 25a Three times I was beaten with rods: Now this was *Roman punishment* and even though Paul was a Roman citizen and as such it was

against Roman law to beat a citizen with rods Paul had endured such a beating three times. Mobs would get so angry with him as he shared the love of Jesus that they would take matters into their own hand and lawlessly beat him.

Amazingly there is only one record of Paul being beaten by rods in Acts 16:22 in Phillipi and we know nothing of the other two times.

- c. Vs. 25b Once I was stoned: The stoning Paul is talking about here is not by drugs but by rocks. This is recorded for us in Acts 14:19-20 outside the city of Lystra. It was the *most severe punishment in the Jewish law and would be the death penalty*, so Paul says that he literally was a “*dead man walking*”, and had it been an official punishment he would have been dead.
- d. Vs. 25c Three times I was shipwrecked: There is an account of a shipwreck in Acts 27 but it happens 4 or 5 years later than this letter which means that Paul’s three shipwrecks aren’t recorded for us. I think after surviving three shipwrecks I’d stay out of boats, I don’t think I’d even take a bath even if you provided me water wings! Remarkably, this is the only place Paul mentions the other three ship wrecks and one of them caused him to spend a night and a day in the deep.
- e. Vs. 26-27 In journeys, perils and toils: I read through this list and I ask myself what do I know of hard ship? What do I know of heartache and suffering in my activity for the gospel? As I reflect upon this personally I wonder how I’d respond to such things if required of the Lord for the blessed privilege of proclaiming the gospel. Would I willingly go through such hardship to proclaim Jesus’ love to a dying and desperate world? The second thing I

wonder is if such “activity” was a sign of anointing and I was called upon to endure such things would I not speak of such “activity” so that I could proclaim God’s goodness and greatness instead of my own?

III. Vs. 28-29 Anxiety

2. Vs. 28-29 Anxiety: “*My deep concern for all the churches*”: I’ve had the blessing of pastoring for just shy of 24 years and I have had the blessing to bear some of the burdens, the sorrows, the pain, the heartache and tears of many of those I’ve been called to serve. And I confess that I have not always done so very well and at times I have stumbled under the weight of human suffering. This makes me even more amazed at Paul who bore under the burdens of dozens of churches that he founded. He wept with those that wept and rejoiced with those that rejoiced. Heard their needs and prayed for them daily. What a tremendous ministry of mercy Paul had! What empathy he showed what care he demonstrated! As you read a list like this you wonder: “*Why would anyone put up with this kind of life?*” Paul put himself through a gauntlet of personal agony because of his love for God’s people. Why? Well he answered why back in 2 Corinthians 5:14a where he wrote “*the love of Christ constrains me*”. It was his sense of gratitude to the risen Lord who not only had forgiven him and filled him and restored him but who went with him into these trials and sustained him in every one of them, turning them into experiences of joy rather than hardship. That love flowed through Paul to reach out to those around to whom he was ministering.

The point of Paul bringing this out is to remind them not of his works but to remind them of his love as he had done all of this out of love for Jesus and them.

IV. Vs. 30-33 Taken to the curb

Vs. 30-33 Now, he turns to **the things that a Christian can truly boast about**. We are not to boast about what we have accomplished, or even how much we have had to bear for Christ's sake, but there are some things we can boast of. In doing so Paul looks back at 20 years and says, *“If I must boast, this is the kind of thing I am going to boast of, the things that show my weakness.”* *“I’m going to speak on the things when I didn’t look so good, the pictures in my blooper reel!”* He then says in verse 31 that what he is about to share is the solemn truth. So what was Paul’s biggest blunder the biggest mistake that God used to turn his life around? Well it was the incident in Acts 9:23-25 when he was let down over the wall in Damascus in a basket to escape. **Listen up Christian: Paul’s life changing moment didn’t come on the heels of his greatest accomplishment or success but upon his greatest failure and defeat.** He had been a believer some 4 years, studied at the *Arabian Desert University* and was now able to prove that Jesus is Lord not just proclaim Him as such. Paul had a new zeal and looking at his years under Israel’s famed Rabi Gamaliel he just knew that his gifting and callings made him a perfect fit to go to the Jews and reveal Jesus as Messiah to them. He had all the qualifications, he lists them in Philip. 3:4-6 saying, *“though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which*

is in the law, blameless.” Yet in spite of all these things he just seemed to fall on his face. It all culminated one night in Damascus when the governor, at the instigation of the Jews tried to find him in order that they might seize him and put him to death. On hearing this, his friends took him out to one of the houses built on the wall of Damascus, and through a window in the dark of the night they let him down in a basket.

A few weeks back I told you about what that meant. You see in that time they didn't have toilets and garbage trucks and this is how they disposed of unwanted waste. So when Paul says that, ***“This night he became a basket case”*** in today's terms this was the night that all he thought about himself and his gifting was “*flushed down the toilet*”, “*taken to the curb*”. ***Amazingly Paul looks back and says that his greatest moment in his life after becoming a follower of Jesus was the day that all his plans and dreams of glory for Christ went down the toilet!*** It wasn't his natural gifts and talents, his experience and education that qualified him as a servant of Christ. Oh, that Christians everywhere today would understand this! We are elevating natural abilities, strong personalities, and speaking talents but that's a bunch of stuff that belongs in a toilet Paul says. News flash Christian: ***God doesn't need you and your talents and gifting even though He blessed you with it in the first place. He needs you broken and humble and out of the way so He can work!*** Listen to Paul again in Philip. 3:7-10 *“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know*

Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death..” In Matthew 10:39 Jesus said to His disciples “*He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.*” That is what Paul is talking about here the things that caused him to “*lose his life*” were the things that caused him to “*find what life was really all about*”. That is where we will pick this up next week in chapter 12 as Paul will speak of the things that will continually cause you to lose your life. Paul is giving us all the secret of being useful for the kingdom of God and it is not surprising to find out it is the very thing that Jesus taught His disciples: John 15:5 “*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*”