II Corinthians 12:1-21

Review...

- I Corinthians 10 The problem of the false teachers Judaizers...
 - o Judaizers were religious teachers from Judah who taught you had to keep the Law...
 - o In order to fight and win the battle Paul needed the right weapons Word of God...
- I Corinthians 11:1-15 Do not be deceived...
 - o 1st Learn the lesson of Eve satan is trying to get us to question the Word of God...
 - o 2nd Not all leaders are alike the false ones demand money...
 - o 3rd Watch out for the Angel of light they try to deceive by looking like the real thing...
- I Corinthians 11:16-33 Boasting in the Lord...
 - o 1st Boasting is foolishness we have nothing we have not received from God...
 - But since the church in Corinth liked to put up with the boasting of the Judaizers..
 - Men who enslaved them stole and slapped them Paul would also boast...
 - o 2nd The boasting of Paul...
 - Judaizers boasted they were Jews so was Paul not that it mattered Philippians 3:7
 - The Judaizers boasted they were ministers Paul more so shown in his hardships...
 - 1st Paul was always in trouble for the Gospel but it was worth the cost!
 - 2nd Always in danger for the Gospel but nothing could keep Paul from preaching Jesus!
 - 3rd Paul suffered for the Gospel because he loved and cared for God's people!
 - o 3rd Boasting in the Lord...
 - If Paul boasted he boasted in his weakness so men would not look to him...
 - He knew the Gospel was not about Paul but the Good News of Jesus Christ!

STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS... (3 THINGS)

- 1st Boasting in visions... vs. 1-6
 - o Though boasting really served no purpose Paul went on to boast in his visions... vs. 1
 - Paul had received many different vision and revelations from the Lord...
 - The Gospel message itself was not given to Paul by a man...
 - **Galatians 1:11-12** "The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man... but through the revelation of Jesus..."
 - While on his way to persecute and kill Christians in Damascus Jesus met Paul...
 - Acts 9 Paul heard the Good News from Jesus Himself and was saved!
 - o The greatest of Paul's visions was of heaven itself...
 - Paul told the church 'I knew a man'...
 - Paul is hesitant to admit the vision he is talking about was his own experience...
 - He refers to himself in the 3rd person 'I knew a man' in a effort of humility...
 - 14 years before he wrote the letter to the church Paul was taken to the 3rd heaven...
 - The 1st heaven is the sky above us / the 2nd heaven is outer space...
 - The location Paul describes the 3rd heaven is the dwelling place of God...
 - Paul did not know if he was physically there or if he had died...
 - Likely this experience is the result of Paul being stoned to death Acts 14

- He died and went to heaven but apparently God was not done with Paul...
- So God sent him back down and Paul was revived...
- We never have any reason to fear when we are serving the Lord...
- We will not leave this world one moment before the Lord calls us home...
- If God is not done with us yet He can even send us back if He need to!
- There in 'Paradise' Paul heard things he was forbidden to repeat...
 - The suggestion is that what Paul heard was too wonderful to put into words...
 - **I Corinthians 2:9** "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."
 - Heaven is not the most amazing place we could imagine beyond our imagination!
 - It will take ages literally 1000s of years in heaven for God to reveal it all to us!
 - **Ephesians 2:7** -"In the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."
- o Though Paul certainly could have boasted about this he would not...
 - Paul had already seen what could happen...
 - In Lystra they had called him a god because he healed a lame man Act 14...
 - In Malta they thought Paul was a god because a viper did not kill him Acts 27...
 - Imagine what people would have done if they knew Paul had been to heaven!
 - Paul knew he was just a man and did not want people depending on him...
 - People tend to put spiritual leaders / pastors up on a pedestal...
 - There is the impression they are somehow bigger / more holy than others...
 - The danger in men looking to a person/pastor is that they will fail...
 - And if we have put our faith in a flawed man rather than in a perfect Lord...
 - When the man stumbles makes a mistake we will fall with him!
- 2^{ND} Boasting in weakness... vs. 7-10
 - o To keep Paul from being prideful God gave him a thorn... vs. 7-8
 - God had blessed Paul with an abundance of revelations and visions...
 - There was a very real temptation for Paul to become arrogant prideful...
 - So God gave him a thorn a 'messenger of satan' to keep him humble...
 - We are not sure what Paul's thorn was he does not elaborate...
 - Some believe it was a physical problem...
 - o We do know that Paul had a problem with his eyes Galatians 4:15...
 - o That is why Paul did not personally write any of his letters...
 - o Other men wrote down the letters as Paul dictated it to them...
 - Some believe it might have been a problem with a person...
 - o Paul was a Pharisee perhaps a member of the Sanhedrin Acts 26:10
 - o You had to have a wife in order to be on the ruling counsel of Israel...
 - o But when he wrote this letter he was no longer married I Corinthians 7:7...
 - o Perhaps his wife died or perhaps she left him because of his faith in Jesus...
 - o A bitter ex-wife would be a difficult thorn for the apostle to carry around...
 - Some believe it could also have been a temptation...
 - o Paul was an ordinary man he undoubtedly faced temptations just like us...

- o Perhaps temped by women / or money / or even fame and glory...
- Whatever is was it was bad enough Paul called it 'a messenger of satan'...
 - o I like that we do not know for sure what the thorn was...
 - o Because each one of us likely had our own version of a 'thorn'...
 - o Maybe it is a physical problem a pain or discomfort we live with every day...
 - o Or we might have a person in our life which we just wished would go away...
 - o Or is could be a temptation something that is a constant struggle for us...
 - o And we do not understand why God does not just remove it from our lives!
- o Paul asked God three times to take away this 'thorn'... vs. 9-10
 - And three times God answered and told him no the thorn stayed...
 - Jesus also asked three times in the Garden for God to take away His 'thorn' cross...
 - **Hebrews 5:8** "Though a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things he suffered..."
 - Often God does not take away problems –He may even allow them to get worse...
 - When hard times come our first reaction is to look to depend on us...
 - But God can 'turn up the heat' till we can no longer handle our problems...
 - So we learn God's grace is enough...
 - If everything in life were perfect Paul would not depend on the Lord...
 - He would have been left to depend on be limited to his own abilities...
 - Our efforts our abilities are often what 'limits' the work of God...
 - When we trust in ourselves our abilities our understanding we are weak...
 - But in our weakness God's strength is perfect ...
 - We pride ourselves in our strength but what is our strength compared to God's...
 - Strength does not come from money / power / influence / even who you know...
 - True strength comes when we realize we are not strong in fact we are weak...
 - The problem is we are limited limited time / talent / money / ability...
 - But God had limitless He has all the time / talent / money we could ever need!
 - In realizing this we don't depend on our strength we depend on the Lord's!
 - When we look to the Lord depend upon the Lord we are unstoppable!
 - Rejoicing in troubles...
 - Therefore Paul said he boasted in his weakness so he could display Jesus' power!
 - So when Paul was insulted / persecuted / in need / or in trouble he was happy...
 - Because when the problems came he knew in his weakness he was strongest!
 - We often get into the most trouble in life when we think we are all right in life...
 - That is when satan can sneak in because we are most vulnerable...
 - We are depending on our strength we are not clinging to Jesus...
 - I Corinthians 10:12 "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."
 - So next time life seems to fall apart start rejoicing God is keeping you strong...
- 3^{RD} The heart of a father... vs. 11-21
 - o Paul was embarrassed by his 'boasting'... vs. 11-13
 - There should have been no need the church should have been boasting about Paul...
 - Paul was no less of an Apostle in any way Paul had patiently proved himself ...
 - Apparently he had done mighty signs and wonders at the church...

- None are recorded for us by Paul likely because he did not want to boast...
- We can assume they were much the same as those recorded in the book of Acts...
- Paul healed the sick / cast out demons / even raised the dead!
- Paul did not record his own signs and wonders because he knew he was nothing...
 - **Proverbs 27:2** "Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips..."
 - If you come across a teacher/pastor who loves to talk about his 'mighty works'...
 - You might want to leave and go attend another church...
 - God may use us and even do incredible works through us but...
 - We get any credit for the work all the credit and glory should go to God!
- o One thing Paul was not a burden to the church 2 reasons... vs. 14-19
 - 1st Paul did not want to 'numb' the church with constant requests for money...
 - Paul had never allowed the church to support him financially...
 - The 1st time when he established the church / the 2nd before the severe letter...
 - Now Paul would come to Corinth for a 3rd visit and it would be the same...
 - When people constantly are asking for money it wears down the people...
 - You start to dread the pastor coming by opening his mouth...
 - It numbs you to the Word because you assume he is just talking about money!
 - 2nd Because children should not take care of their father...
 - Paul was not interested in what he could get from the church...
 - o He was coming because of his great love for the people in the church!
 - o In fact Paul was willing to SPEND all he had for the church...
 - o He would have given them his last peso / his last ounce of strength...
 - Even though he knew the more he loved them the less he would be loved...
 - o A good father is willing to do anything for his kids so they grow up strong...
 - o But Dads have to put up with a time when their kids do not appreciate them...
 - o We call them the 'teen years' no matter what a Dad does it is not enough...
 - o And the church of Corinth was going through those 'teen' years...
 - o It is easy to love someone if they love you back are a blessing to you...
 - o How about if they spit in your face if no matter what you do it is not enough...
 - o The mark of the Love of Jesus is even being able to love your enemies!
 - o Luke 6:27 "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you..."
- o Excuses to cover up sin... vs. 20-21
 - Paul was still being accused of taking advantage of the church...
 - He challenged them to explain how Paul had never taken any money from them...
 - All who came with Paul Titus / brother never took any money (same spirit)...
 - Paul was not saying this to defend his actions he was preparing the church...
 - When he came he was afraid of what he would find a church sinking in sin...
 - Full of jealously / quarreling / anger / selfishness / gossip / immorality...
 - All the problems Paul had addressed in his first epistle still a problem...
 - The accusations being made against Paul were an attempt to divert their guilt...
 - Paul was not going to be distracted he would love them too much to let the sin slide!
 - Like a father to a rebellious teenager he would correct the church when he came...
 - When people are caught up in sin and do not want to change...

- They will try and pass their guilt onto others blame them to feel better...
- To try and take the focus off of them so people do not see their sin...
- But in the end we must be willing to overlook the attacks insults...
- Love people enough to confront their sin so they can be restored to Jesus!