

## The Theology of Thorns

Text: II Cor. 12:1-10

**Intro:** Four weeks ago Joyce and I went to Lake Forest CA in Southern California to the Purpose Driven Church Conference. During those four days we got a double dose of "LA smog." It seemed to promote a cold for both of us. Joyce suffered miserably with a sore throat, fatigue, coughing and sinus infection. Only in the last few days has she felt better. It's tough enough to get sick, but then you have to explain what's wrong. Then you need to be prepared for the 101 cures that are offered.

Some people are not supposed to get sick. When I was a pastor there were two times when I was very sick and unable to administer funerals. It seemed like the people didn't understand. In the autobiographical letter of Paul to the believers in the city of Corinth he had to explain why he an Apostle was physically unhealthy. Just as some TV preachers say today there were those then who said, "An afflicted Christian is a disgrace to God." And then they added that Paul was a second class Apostle not on the same level with the "*super apostles*."

So the first 10 verses of Ch. 12 give us a theology of pain. I call it "The Theology of Thorns." Paul had kept this experience a secret for 14 years, but he knew his experience was a dramatic rebuke to those who felt that pain was a waste.

### GIANT CHRISTIANS ARE NOT EXEMPT FROM PAIN.

This was a man who received visions and carried them out. He had a vision of Jesus on the Damascus Road. He was not disobedient to that vision. He had a vision of a man in Macedonia crying, "Come over and help us." God gave him a vision when he entered the pagan society of Corinth. When 276 passengers despaired of life because of the constant pounding of the wind and waves against their ship, Paul had a vision that not one of them would lose a single hair from their head. Acts 26:19. But the grandest of all visions is the one he speaks of in II C.12. Still he was afflicted. Was it eye problems, migraine headaches, epilepsy, temptations, flashbacks, difficulty in speaking or malaria? We don't really know, but it was excruciating. (These maladies have been suggested.) And the best of Christians wanted to be relieved of pain. "***Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away.***" V.8

### 2. GIANT CHRISTIANS ARE ENRICHED BY PAIN.

1. Paul was saved from arrogance, vv.6-7. What would modern day preachers do with such an experience? They might sign for a book, a movie, or a television interview with Larry King? What problems pride has brought into our homes, church and nation because we are so proud. "***Only by pride comes contention?***" (Proverbs, KJV)

2. Paul experienced "sustaining grace." v.9. Alexander Mc Claren said, "Every affliction comes with a message from the heart of God."
3. He sensed the power of God was working in spite of his affliction, II Cor.12:9-10 See I Cor. 4, 7 "It is the power of God in earthen vessels." See. II Cor. 11: 33 where Paul admits to being a basket case.

**CONCLUSION:** I KNOW THAT SOME OF YOU ARE HURTING. IF YOU AREN'T YOU WILL. You are not alone. Jesus is greater than the evil one. He will not leave you, but will support. Heb.2: 10 "May our unrelieved pain be a sacrifice of thanksgiving that produces a harvest of blessings."