

Paul had a vision or visions of such unusual intensity he was reluctant to talk about his experience, using the third person as a way of avoiding appearing boastful about something that was God's initiative.

5-7a I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, or because of these surpassingly great revelations.

87b-9a Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."

*"Thorn in the flesh" – the meaning of this is disputed. Many commentators explain this by a physical affliction like malaria or migraine*

**In practice** This passage can present difficulties in reading it, because Paul uses an elaborate language and style to try to insulate the person, Paul, from being defined by an astounding and life-changing spiritual experience. As if the blinding vision on the Damascus road wasn't enough... Paul's point is that it is all about God and not about him, all about what God does, not what he does, and all the dishonour and difficulties simply serve to beat down any sense of human pride and self-sufficiency. Boasting about our weaknesses doesn't seem so counter-intuitive in this understanding of God needing a clear, and therefore humble, channel for His grace to flow. And God's way of clearing the channel, through allowing tests, opposition and difficulties that make us rely on Him more, then seems a little less unreasonable!

**Question** Could you give an example of God's strength being able to work, as a result of your own obvious absence of strength?

**Prayer** Lord, I hate being mocked and dishonoured, not to mention all the other kinds of spiritual opposition. But I want to learn to pray with authority, to minister to others You may send me to and to bless others with a growing sense of Your kingdom order and peace in their lives. Help me to trust You more, and become more resilient and Jesus-like, as I learn to see the tests of life from Your perspective. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

attacks. However, the phrase is used in the OT of a personal enemy, Numbers 33:55, Ezekiel. 28:24 and Paul had persistent opponents – and often quoted the Scriptures we call the Old Testament.

*"Three times" – like Jesus' threefold prayer, Mark 14:32-41, a way of saying that he has prayed to completion and received his answer.*

9b-10 Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

*The Corinth church had a problem with self-appointed and self-congratulatory leaders, who considered themselves more polished speakers than the small, bald Jewish man who had introduced them to Christ. Paul, by contrast, wouldn't let anything, any 'success' of man, get in the way of his utter focus on Jesus as Lord. Divine power only finds its expression in our human weakness, and our recognition of our need of the Lord's empowerment – and Paul is forthright about his need of this help.*

# The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, July 8, 2018 with commentary notes

Church calendar readings for **Sunday, July 8**, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – or read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

**Theme: How dishonouring treatment brings out God's greatness**

2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 – After years of dishonour, David is crowned

Mark 6:1-13 – Jesus experiences dishonour in his hometown

2 Corinthians 12:2-10 – Paul says dishonour emphasises Christ's power

## 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10 » After years of dishonour, David is crowned king

### **The northern tribes seek unity under one monarch**

1-2 All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood. In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"

*"Your own flesh and blood" – Despite a separation between Judah and the northern tribes, they still had a strong sense of kinship. Under David, they came together.*

3 When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.

*David had been made king over Judah by his tribe, and over Jerusalem by conquest. His kingship over the northern tribes came by covenant, or treaty. This was the third time David was anointed.*

4-5 David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven

years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

*"When he became king" – David had been anointed by the prophet Samuel as a youngster, 15-20 years earlier. The tribal elders had been very slow to recognise the working out of the Lord's commission through Samuel for David to become 'shepherd of Israel' as recalled in verse 2. God Himself was Shepherd of Israel, Ps. 23:1, Hebrews 13:20. To use this of a human leader meant one who would lead carefully in God's way (unlike typical tyrannical rulers of the time). David's God-fearing leadership had been seen by all.*

9-10 David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward. And he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him.

*David has gone north to Jebus which was a terraced area south-east of the modern city and below the rock, or stronghold that became the rebuilt City of David, Jerusalem. It was a strategic move: central, naturally fortified and between Judah and the northern territories.*

**In practice** David was anointed for high office as a teenager - and then had to live with that call on his life, being faithful to God in the face of much public dishonour, even being treated as an outlaw. It was many years before even his own tribe recognised his leadership in Judah, and then another wait before he could bring the northern tribes on board. Later he was to write, Psalm 18:25, "To the faithful you show yourself faithful..." Was he faithful? He made mistakes, even serious mistakes like sending Uriah to his death, but he recognised his faults and learned from them, and was revered as a good and godly king who established just rule, the way God wanted. The lesson for us is that our loyalty and trust of God will be tested, and He allows this testing to be like a blacksmith's heating and hammering, to forge strength and resilience.

**Question** *When you feel you are being dishonoured, where are you between blaming God for not standing by you, or accepting the test that strengthens, knowing that God is faithful?*

**Mark 6:1-13** » Jesus experiences dishonour in his hometown

**The Twelve are empowered and sent out in twos to minister in the villages.**

1-3 Jesus left there and went to His hometown, accompanied by His disciples. When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were amazed.

*Probably the same event as Luke 4:16-30 where Jesus reads the beginning of Isaiah 61: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor..." (etc).*

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given Him? What are these remarkable miracles He is performing?"

"Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us?" And they took offence at Him.

*"Isn't this the carpenter?" - people had known Jesus in His 'ordinary life' prior to His baptism. To them, He is 'just a carpenter' and implied in "Mary's son", of illegitimate birth, unlike his brothers and sisters.*

*"Took offence" - in Luke's account, real anger, as*

*the crowd hustled him to the brow of the town hill and tried to push him over the edge.*

4-6 Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

*"Without honour" - this rejection in Nazareth (the last time in the Gospel where Jesus is associated with a synagogue) is a small version of the much greater rejection to come in Jerusalem. The dishonour shown to him results in a lack of fruit there.*

7 Calling the Twelve to him, He began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

*"Two by two" - the OT requirement for 'authority' was two witnesses, Numbers 35:30, Deut. 17:6, 19:15, Matt. 18:16. Spiritual authority over spiritual iniquity or "impure spirits" would be needed on the mission.*

*"Authority over impure spirits" - the*

*proclamation of God's kingdom comes in actions and deliverance, including healing, not just words (vv.12-13).*

**For further study** see Matthew 10:1, 5-15; Luke 9:1-6

8-11 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff - no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them."

*Nazareth had proved to be hard-hearted and*

*scornful with only a "few sick people" healed. This was a lesson to the disciples, to discern which people were open to God by seeing who would welcome them and receiving their hospitality.*

12-13 They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

*"That people should repent" - not so much a 'hard message' as God working through the disciples. Proclaiming and showing the goodness and grace of God results in willing change of hearts and lives - repentance - among those who receive the Good News.*

**In practice** With the revelatory insights that Jesus possessed, the "wisdom that had been given Him", it is hard to imagine Jesus being amazed at the rejection and lack of faith he experienced in his home town. He both demonstrated and explained who He was - the signs of the kingdom in His ministry left little doubt of that - but those who had known him as a carpenter/builder were scornful, asking him who He, just a regular working man like them, thought He was.

Often it is those near and dear to us, and those who we would naturally expect to be affirming us, who can present the most difficult opposition. Becoming a Christian by asking Jesus into our lives does change us and does make us seem different - progressively more like Him! And that can be threatening to others. But if Jesus was so dishonoured and rejected, should we be upset if we experience a little of the same?

**Question** *If Jesus gave His first disciples authority over evil spirits, how are we to view a life made miserable with a spiritual dimension to it?*

**2 Corinthians 12:2-10** » For Paul, dishonour shows Christ's power more

**Paul's testimony of a heavenly encounter which God initiated has made him especially aware of his reliance on God**

*stars, but the unseen realm of God's uncontested presence, the place of blessedness where God dwells, referred to in the NT as paradise, Luke 23:43, Rev. 2:7. Jesus is "exalted above the heavens", Hebrews 7:26.*

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know - God knows.

*"Third heaven" - not the atmosphere where birds fly, and not the higher 'heaven' of sun, moon and*

3-4 And I know that this man - whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows - was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.