



RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

II Corinthian 12:1-9

Learning To Live With a Limp, Part II

□ From the Pulpit of Morning Star Baptist Church Rev. T.L. Lewis, Senior Pastor

Why is Paul's thorn considered a mystery? It is a mystery because we don't know what it was. Puzzles remain puzzles as long as they are unsolved. Mysteries only remain mysteries as long as you are unaware of what it is.

We know that Paul had a thorn in the flesh because he told us so. However, you can search the scriptures from cover to cover nowhere will you find out what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. For hundreds and hundreds of years, theologians and bible scholars have been speculating about Paul's thorn, but it still remains a mystery.

Dr. Jimmy Allen, the past president of the Southern Baptist Convention tells the story of a bible college professor who was having problems with one of his students falling asleep during class. One day he caught the student napping so he woke him up with this question: "Tell us brother, what was Paul's thorn in the flesh?" The young man woke up, trying to pretend like he was sleeping, and said, "Sir, I did know, but I forgot." The professor said, bible scholars have been searching the archives of human history for centuries trying to find out what Paul's thorn in the flesh was and you know, and you forgot."

One theologian says that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a spiritual temptation to give up his apostleship. He just didn't want to be the burden of having to carry the gospel to the gentiles.

Another says his thorn was the constant battle with those who tried to undo his work. Some say it was his tempter.

The Roman Catholic church holds the view that Paul's thorn in flesh was an insatiable sexual appetite. Though he didn't commit fornication, the temptation constantly plagued him.

It has even been suggested that Paul's thorn in the flesh was his physical appearance. Some believed him to be ugly and disfigured.

Some scholars believed that he had epilepsy, eye trouble, severe headaches, rheumatoid arthritis.

One writer says that when he was shipwrecked in the deep he contracted malaria and constantly gave him trouble which was why he had to take along like the physician with him on his missionary journey.

Then there are those that believe that Paul's thorn in the flesh was whatever is giving them trouble and tribulations. For example, some husbands believe that Paul's thorn in the flesh was a nagging wife.

Be that as it may, Paul's thorn remains a mystery. And part of the reason I believe it remains a mystery is simply because we would be comparing ourselves to whatever it was that plagued Paul. Some folk would say Paul would not have been so great if he had to put up with what I put up with. Some would say if that all bothered him no wonder he could do such a good job. If that's all I had to worry about I'd be criss-crossing planet earth on missionary journey after missionary journey.

But since it is a mystery no excuse is valid for failure to be about our father's business.

My second point is the mastery of the thorn. Although thorns cannot be removed they can be mastered. They can be conquered to the extent where you can successfully do the will of God.

There are those who say, if it wasn't for this thorn I could do so much for the kingdom. Well that person is lying. The text says that the thorn was

sent to humble the apostle lest he be exalted above measure. It didn't say it was sent to hinder and handicap him from being a productive worker in the kingdom enterprise.

We can master the thorn and go on to do great work for the kingdom because we have an example before us; the apostle himself. In spite of the thorn in his flesh he was the writer of over two thirds of the new testament. In spite of the thorn in his flesh he made over three missionary journeys. In spite of the thorn in his flesh he endured hardships and kept on pressing toward the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

Thirdly, a thorn in the flesh makes us aware of our need for God. For when we are aware of our need for God we stay prayerful. We stay in tune with God. Thorns have a way of making us keep the lines of communication between the creature and the creator.

As long as the thorn remains in our lives, God who is the giver of every good and perfect gift is able to bless us. And we are able to deal properly with our blessings all because of the presence of the thorn.

Oh, if the Lord would remove those thorns, many of us would quit depending on the giver and start depending the gift. We would cling to the time bound rather than to the eternal. We would attempt to become settlers instead of sojourners in this barren land.

Not only does the thorn makes us aware of our need for God but it also makes us aware of the power of God. Paul sought the Lord three times to remove the thorn from his flesh and God told him, "My grace is sufficient for thee. My grace is all you need for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

For as long as Paul suffered with his limp, his thorn God was able to get the glory from his life.

This spiritual experience blast some modern theology right out of the water. The prosperity prophets who believe that God wants everybody healthy, wealthy and wise. You just tune in on their blessing plan and all your troubles will be behind you.

You just name it and claim it. Just blab it and grab it. And whatever

you want will just be at your fingertips, and they would have you to believe that the only reason you don't have it is because you lack faith in God.

Well, that's not necessarily true because here was the apostle Paul, a man of monumental faith, who is considered to be the greatest Christian who ever lived. He sought the Lord three times to remove the thorn from his flesh. He named it and claimed it three times. He blabbed it and grabbed it three times but still God persisted in saying no. "My grace is sufficient for thee."

And that's how the Christian life is really lived, by the grace of God. Sometimes up and sometimes down, but by the grace of God. Sometimes on the mountain and sometimes in the valley, but by the grace of God.

God grace is that power to endure no matter what situation or circumstance you find yourself in. His grace will see you through.

ALBINA MINISTERIAL ALLIANCE/ USDA CARE FOOD PROGRAM

The Albina Ministerial alliance announces the sponsorship of the USDA Child Adult Care food Program in its 12 Child Care Centers and 175 Family Day Care Homes. Meals will be available to enrolled children at no separate charge without regard to race, color, handicap, age, sex, or national origin. Any person who believes that he or she has been discriminated against in any USDA related activity should write immediately to: Secretary of Agriculture, Washington D.C. 20205.

The Albina Ministerial Alliance Child Care Centers are located throughout the

NORTH PORTLAND BIBLE COLLEGE FALL BANQUET

On November 2, 1990, the North Portland Bible College will be holding its 2nd annual fall banquet at the Westminster Presbyterian Church on NE 16th and Hancock Streets. Tickets are on sale for a donation of \$15 per person. If you attended last year's, then you shouldn't want to miss this year's banquet. For more information, call 288-2919. Rev. Michael Lindsey, Dean.

KEEP CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS
The Keep Christ In Christmas committees are all geared up and are preparing for another tremendous year of excitement, decorations, singing, crafts and fellowship. This year's festival of events will be held at the Miller Hall World Forestry Center on November 25, 1990 from noon through 6pm. Call 254-8312 for more inquiries.

PORTLAND YOUTH FOR CHRIST
Come support the Christian Youth of Portland! An auction will be held on Saturday, November 3, 1990 at the Hilton Hotel (Downtown). A silent auction

will begin at 5pm. A dinner, \$25 per person, will be served at 6pm. All reservations must be in no later than October 31. Then, at 7pm the oral auction will begin. There will be entertainment from the George Fox College Jazz Band. Over 200 items will be available for auction, such as: week-end trips, medical and tax services, Winter Hawk tickets, overnight hotel stays, home improvement items and more.

Portland Youth For Christ is an outreach organization which has approximately 1,000 youth from all over the city doing work in the high schools, the juvenile detention hall and street ministry to the homeless youth of our city. The organization is a non-denominational group of young people. All proceeds from the auction will go to benefit youth ministries throughout the Portland area.

For reservations and more information concerning this important event, call 234-9776. Ask for Julie.

CURTIS SALGADO TO FRONT THANKSGIVING GOSPEL CRUISE

This year's Thanksgiving Gospel Cruise aboard the Sternwheeler Columbia Gorge will feature Northwest R&B recording artist Curtis Salgado and several well known Portland musicians. Curtis will be accompanied by Janice Scroggins, John Mazzocco, Jeff Minneweather, Norman Sylvestre, Wanda Thompson and the Wilder Wards Gospel Singers. This gospel cruise is one in a continuing series of entertainment cruises sponsored by Henry Weinhard's Private Reserve aboard the Sternwheeler Columbia Gorge.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES!

Reverend and Mrs. C.T. Vivian, right, veteran civil rights activists, explain to participants in the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's Brain Trust Issues Forums why scores of demonstrators gathered recently on the Capitol steps to urge President Bush to sign the 1990 Civil Rights Bill. Two of the attentive listeners included Betty Shine, left, a Media Supervisor for Pepsi-Cola and Sam Hall, Manager, Community Programs, Pepsi-Cola Company. The 1990 Civil Rights Bill has been passed by Congress and was on the President's desk during the demonstration. A member of the late Dr. Martin Luther King's executive staff during the height of the civil rights movement, Rev. Vivian has worked more recently through his own organization, 'BASIC,' to fight racism on several fronts.

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