

## Continued Boasting

- Picks up where he left off at end of chapter 11
  - like he doesn't think he's quite driven home the point enough!
  - he's able to boast, but chooses not to - or rather, chooses to boast of those things that draw attention to Christ...
- And here he goes again:
  - he could boast of his spiritual experiences
  - *"I know a man..." commonly understood to refer to himself*
  - (see v.7, "to keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations" and v.6, "if I should boast... I would be telling the truth")
  - what he appears to be referring to is a God-given vision of heaven, of the wonder of what glory will be like
  - so amazing that he struggles to find words that capture the sense of it - **third heaven, paradise, in/out of body, inexpressible things, surpassingly great revelations, caught up...**
- God gave such an experience to Paul, for his encouragement, as a taste of what is to come...?
  - but Paul is careful not to boast in - or rest his authority on - such an experience
  - it happened, it was real, it was true, but it doesn't make him a better Christian, it doesn't make his words carry more authority than others
  - such experiences are not to be scorned or dismissed, but neither are they to be the basis of new directions away from Scripture
- Paul's point here is that **these visions are good but still not to be the focus of authority for the believers in Corinth**
  - rather, the boast of someone who is truly for God will be of his weaknesses - those things that draw attention and glory away from self and on to God...
  - (we can speculate that the false apostles were dropping into conversation visions and dreams, making themselves seem super-spiritual)

## Thorn in the flesh

- How did Paul learn this discipline?
  - of boasting in weakness, not in his own strength?
  - of relying on God's ability, not his own ability?
  - of focusing his own and others attention onto God and not himself?
- Through a thorn...

### What was the thorn?

- Don't know!
  - could be a physical problem - a literal thorn in the flesh
  - could be a metaphor for a nagging problem...
  - some have thought it was a person who riled, annoyed, undermined or mocked Paul, and yet who he had to deal with... who was around the mission team, yet didn't grow in faith and in grace, who lied, who was spiteful...
  - here Scripture is, I think, wonderfully ambiguous and deliberately applicable to all sorts of situations!

### What effect did the thorn have?

- Drove Paul nuts!
  - tormented him...
  - he asked for it be removed (no hint that this was the wrong thing to ask, incidentally!)
  - and each time the answer was "no..."
  - (intriguing that he asked again... and again... still without any hint that this was the wrong thing to do)
- The answer was more than a simple, bald "No":
  - *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* (v.9)
  - the Lord says to Paul: **"what I've already given you, my grace, that is enough. I**

may, but I don't need to, lift difficulties, challenges, sufferings. What I'm concerned about is where you are relying - in me, or elsewhere? For when you are weak, when you can't do something yourself, when without me you'd give up or back off or walk away - then my power can be seen, because you don't...

Lesson learned?

- So Paul describes how he learned that his real strength in ministry is the Lord's power:
  - and that is most visible, most accessible, when he is weak...
  - so he delight in those occasions when he is weak - not masochistically revelling in his own discomfort, but glorying in Christ's strength displayed, the Lord's arm at work

**For us?**

- God is more interested in our relationship with him - our spiritual maturity - than he is in our "success" in ministry:
  - so a good question to ask of ourselves is, [What is my boast?](#)
  - when I come to church, what do I subtly feel makes me worthy of being here?
  - when I go into a gathering of other ministers, what is my boast - the number of converts in Fintry, or my own weakness?
- Is his grace sufficient for you?
  - when have you seen his power being made perfect in your weakness?
- *(Quiet reflection leading into singing "Be still my soul" seated)*