

## Sermon

### **"Blessed By a Messenger of Satan"**

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7-9a)**

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**Introduction: A new attitude about the attacks of the devil:**

**Luther: "You should tell the devil: Just by telling me that I am a miserable, great sinner you are placing a sword into my hand with which I can decisively overcome you; yea, with your own weapon I can kill and floor you. For if you can tell me that I am a poor sinner, I, on the other hand, can tell you that Christ died for sinners and is their Intercessor...You remind me of the boundless, great faithfulness and benefaction of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The burden of my sins and all the trouble and misery that were to oppress me eternally He very gladly took upon His shoulders and suffered the bitter death on the cross for them. To Him I direct you. You may accuse and condemn Him. Let me rest in peace; for on His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins and the sins of all the world." (Pless, *What Luther Says*, 403)**

- A. Luther took this very simple approach with God's Word and wisdom from the Holy Spirit: an attack from the devil translates to our turning to Christ thereby turning the attack into a blessing.**
- B. That is, the LORD uses that which is intended to harm us for good in our lives. Remember Joseph who said to his brothers:**

**Genesis 50:20: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..."**

- C. This is a recurring theme in Holy Scripture.**
- D. Here is the story of our Savior Jesus Christ as our Silversmith. Before the story, allow me read Malachi 3:3 which is a description of the LORD:**

**Malachi 3:3: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver..."**

**Now the story...**

**"[After studying Malachi 3:3, a] woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining...As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities...She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, 'How do you know when the silver is fully refined?' He smiled at her and answered, 'Oh, that's easy – when I see my image in it.'" (author unknown)**

**Part I: But why must we go through refinement to begin with?**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:7a: *"To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations..."***

- A. St. Augustine said that the greatest sin was the sin of pride.
  - 1. It is the opposite of humility which he said was the greatest virtue.**
  - 2. Pride was the original sin of the devil when he fell from grace.**
  - 3. Pride was what drove Adam and Eve to rebel against God.****
- B. St. Paul was a great and holy apostle, and yet he was threatened by the same problem: pride.**
- C. Unfortunately, in our sin, we have the exact same problem. We are full of pride.**
- D. We have been given great revelations...great blessings and gifts from God in almost every aspect of our lives, and wouldn't you know it, these lead us to be smug, over-confident, and lovers of self. The pride that ran through the veins of the devil, Adam and Eve, and St. Paul – whose pride required great help from God – runs through your veins and runs through mine.**
- E. But recall that this sin of pride drove a great angel from heaven and our first parents from paradise...what of us?**

**Part II: The LORD permits messengers of Satan...believe it or not, to help us:**

- A. We must immediately qualify this stupendous Scriptural insight. This is not a return to medievalism that treated suffering as a meritorious sign. We do not adopt a mentality of penance so as to embrace suffering as a badge of contrition and worthiness...no!**
- B. Nor do we go looking for messengers of Satan...we do not choose for ourselves the crosses we bear.**
- C. However, as we live in faith and are daily confronted with this dreadful sin of pride, the LORD may permit a messenger of Satan to visit us.**
- D. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12 the Word of God describes it as a "thorn." A sharply pointed sliver! The kind that gets into you and won't come out.**
- E. This produces a sharp, piercing pain as it is driven deeply into the flesh...which piercing pain may also stand as a metaphor for a great psychological and/or spiritual struggle (even while possibly including a physical ailment and/or social persecution).**
- F. And there is no doubt about the purpose of this messenger of Satan: it is sent to "torment." This is a unique word, because it is a word that means to make a fist and hit as hard as you can. Not a slap, but a hard punch! In martial arts the way the hand is held is radically significant. Certain hand techniques are more devastating than others. This hand technique represented in the word "torment" is powerful. God allowed the devil to strike, closed-fisted blows upon St. Paul.**

### **Part III: How Can This Be From The LORD of LOVE and MERCY?!**

- A. How do we make sense of it?**
- B. Wisdom from the head varsity football coach...**
- C. Wisdom from the Army drill sergeant...**
- D. Wisdom from my parents...**
- E. Wisdom from GOD...think of Job...and yet see what the LORD produced in this man's life!**
- F. The LORD works this way because we are threatened by sin both from within and without...these are countermeasures so that we are not swallowed up by sin...the LORD is in this way preserving us.**
- G. This quality of the true faith is diametrically opposed to the world's philosophy about what "religion" should be:**
  - 1. Popular motives for religion are about pleasure and happiness.**
  - 2. The world is offended that any religion would recognize thorns and torment as ever being necessary...this is true because the world refuses to confess sin...it refuses to confess its pride.**
    - a. A world in which religion is about our will, not God's will.**
    - b. A world in which raising children is about entertaining them, not training them.**
    - c. A world in which marriage is about fickleness, not faithfulness.**
    - d. A world in which the purpose of life is selfishness, not service.**
    - e. The world turns things up-side-down...it is no wonder it takes such offense at the idea that God would permit a "thorn," and that God would permit "torment."**
    - f. But even as Christians who cling to the Word of Christs, we struggle to understand, we struggle to reconcile this truth with the fact that we are dearly loved by God.**

**Part IV and Conclusion: So let it be said as clearly as possible, there is only one way to reconcile these truths:**

- A. We must -- as we said at the very beginning -- turn to Christ.**
- B. The messenger of Satan led to St. Paul to cry out to the Lord...no longer clinging to pride, but seeing in full view his weakness.**
- C. Seeing our weakness puts us in the position -- by God's grace -- to forsake ourselves and seek our only Savior who is LORD.**
- D. And when St. Paul was led back to His DEFENDER and SAVIOR, he testified to what the LORD said:**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12:9: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."***

- E. But of course it is, because it was when our Savior took upon Himself the thorns in the form of 5-7 inch-long spikes driven through His hands and feet that His power was perfected in weakness.**
- F. It was when He took the tormenting blows of the wrath of God for ALL of our sin, for ALL of our pride that His power was perfected in weakness.**
- G. In His own weakness – even to the point of death – His power was perfected, since on that cross He proclaimed the kind of "perfection" St. Paul wrote about in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 12; that is, Jesus said, "It is finished (John 19:30)."**
- H. Finished is the threat of your sin and pride; finished is the power of Satan in your life; finished is all fear from the struggles that mark our path towards heaven...the LORD will let nothing take you from His refining work...yes, the day is coming that we will see Him as He is – when His refining is all done – but even now, make no mistake about it, the Father already sees you in Christ dear Christian...and in Christ, His power is made perfect in your weakness. So when the messenger of Satan comes knocking, say, "Thanks, I will just turn back to Christ...take it up with Him!"**