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“Giving God Thanks, in the Midst of Circumstances!”

I Prayer

II Setting and Background Information

It’s now November, and we’ve entered a peculiar time of year. With the observance of Daylight Savings Time, it’s getting darker much earlier. Moreover, with the change in seasons comes a focus on the holidays, Thanksgiving and Christmas. Although this is supposedly a festive time of year—especially with the celebratory season of Advent—it is also statistically proven to be the time when depression is at its worst. So often, during this time of year, people focus on broken families, missing loved ones, and financial constraints, instead of finding peace and happiness, in spite of their circumstances.



In light of this reality, the remaining Pastor’s Bible Studies for calendar year 2017 will focus on “Giving God Thanks, in the

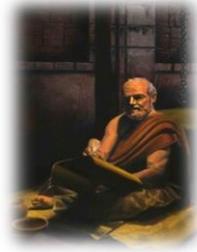
Midst of Circumstances!” During the Advent Season (beginning **Holiday Depress is REAL!** December 3rd), as we prepare for the joy of Jesus’ birth, our studies will focus on members of Jesus’ family who came from “less than perfect” situations. *Matthew*’s genealogical account of Jesus’ family (*Matt* 1:1-16) shows people like Tamar, Rehab, Bathsheba, and Ruth. I believe *Matthew* lists them to show that because no family is perfect—not even Jesus’—we must find happiness in the “Midst of Circumstances!” In the lessons prior to Advent, as we lead up to Thanksgiving, we will also focus on “Giving God Thanks in the Midst of Circumstances.” This evening, our focus begins with the Apostle Paul.



Paul on the Road to Damascus

What do we know about Paul? We meet him in *Acts* 8 & 9, as “Saul,” a strict Pharisaic Jew, who is a sworn enemy of the “Followers of the Way,” because he believes their practices violate Jewish law. As he was out persecuting Jews, headed to Damascus, he had a major conversion experience and accepted Jesus as his Lord and savior. As you will recall from our study of *Acts*, in the time immediately following Pentecost, Paul traveled from place to place, in an itinerant ministry, setting up churches. He kept in touch with them by writing letters that often responded to situations. In *Second Corinthians*, Paul is responding to while he’s away in Macedonia.

Paul wrote at least 4 letters to the church at Corinth, even though only two of them are part of the biblical cannon. In *2 Corinthians* 11 & 12, Paul is writing to literally defend himself before the church he founded, after being criticized for his physical appearance, inability to speak (preach) as well as other things, and is accused of being fake, by what appear to be the original “prosperity preachers.” Although Paul’s feelings have been deeply hurt, in the midst of circumstances, he finds reasons to give God thanks! There’s no better place to being this Pastor’s Bible Study series on “Giving God Thanks, in the Midst of Circumstances,” than with Paul in *Second Corinthians*.



Paul, an apostle of Jesus, in prison

III Foundational Text: 2 Corinthians 11 & 12 (NIV) (read out loud)

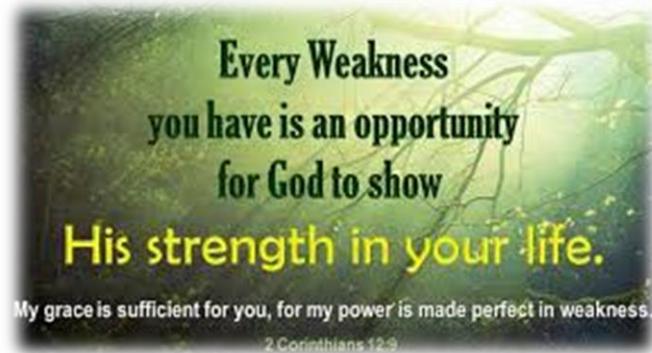
IV Breaking Down the Text and Applying it to Our Lives

- In looking at 11:1-4, how do you think Paul felt? Does he sound defensive? Agitated? Upset? How would you feel if you purely gave your life to a cause and then people questioned you and you had to defend yourself?
- In 11:5-16, Paul is directly responding to criticisms of him not being a real servant of Christ because he lacks the ability to speak well and/or his physical appearance is not attractive. In the Black church tradition, how do we treat/talk about preachers who, as some say, “can’t preach.” Does that inability invalidate their calling? Does it make them less sincere? What about the fact that Paul “preached” without being paid, for a start-up congregation, but was compensated elsewhere? Does doing something for free mean the service is not valuable? Personal story: *in my first church, the salary was \$300 dollars a month. I drove back and forth to Hammond and tithed to the church. Does that mean it wasn’t “valuable?”* How would you feel about a preacher that focuses on money, instead of the Good News of Jesus?
- In 11:16-33, we again find Paul defending himself and refusing to boast, but expressing contentment for what God has given him, in spite of his circumstances! Are you thankful for what God has given you, in spite of your circumstances? Is any life perfect? Is it possible Paul gives us a model, especially as we approach the holidays, for being content and giving thanks, in spite of ????

Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. His servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.

Be sober, be vigilant because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. I Peter 5:8

- In chapter 12, Paul emphasizes that he will not boast about himself, except for his weakness (12:5). Paul goes on in versus 6-10, “bragging” of his weaknesses, because they are made perfect in Christ. In other words, where Paul is weak, he depends on God to make him strong. Paul readily notes that his “issues” keep him humble and he thanks God for them, because his humility keeps him close to Christ. How does this



attitude relate to your “issues?” Can you find

Is God's grace sufficient for you?

happiness in the ability to go to God or do you become depressed, thinking of what you don't have?

- In 12:11-16, we again focus on money. Paul is defending himself against the “super apostles” criticisms that he can't be a real apostle because he didn't ask for money from a new church that he established. Clearly, the so called “super apostles” did ask for money, and used their request as a justification that they were “better” apostles than Paul. Are you ever suspect when preachers ask you for money? How do you think “genuine servants” feel about discussing money? How do you think “false servants” feel about the same? Can you separate the two?

VI Comments and/or Questions

- Can you find genuine happiness in your relationship with God, by focusing on the blessings God gave you, instead of focusing on God's blessings for someone else?
- Can you be thankful to God for whatever your situation might be, and use that situation as a means to draw closer to God?

VII Closing Prayer