

{Slide: Logo}

Big Boys (don't) Cry

Christianity is a journey, it's not an event.

If it was an event we wouldn't need most of the Bible because God could have just said, do this and leave it at that.

We can see the elements of this journey if we follow Paul through the NT, where he spent some 30 years cycling through existing churches, starting new churches, teaching, training, correcting, rebuking, literally modeling Christianity for us. And there is a lot to learn from his teachings.

That was the external stuff.

Paul also spent some sharing with us what was happening internally and that is what we are going to look at today.

It's another side of the Christian journey called self awareness.

(My journey, started 23 years ago
BtL, Elder, Kitchen cook, KZ teacher, KZ coordinator, Marriage counselor.
Made many friends, saw many leave the Lord
Joan and I have done a ton of stuff
But only recently started looking at becoming more self aware)

If Paul, one of the greatest evangelists ever, needed to grow in his self awareness, then there is a journey that we as lesser mortals need to be part of.

The process of becoming more self aware often breaks out in some of his passages.

Have a look at 2 Cor 11v21.

We catch him in what sounds like a frustrated rant because there was an element in the Corinthian church that tried to discredit him and in his defense he gets quite emotive and personal as he shares several proofs as to why he should be considered part of the 'super apostles', as he calls them (2 Cor 11v5).

Let's try read this in its emotional context, to get into the mood.

{Slide: 2 Cor 11v21-31}

2 Cor 11v21-31

Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. ²²Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I. ²³Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more.

*I have worked much harder,
been in prison more frequently,
been flogged more severely,
and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴
Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.
²⁵Three times I was beaten with rods,
once I was pelted with stones,*

*three times I was shipwrecked,
I spent a night and a day in the open sea,
²⁶I have been constantly on the move.
I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow
Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at
sea; and in danger from false believers.
²⁷I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep;
I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food;
I have been cold and naked.
²⁸Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.
²⁹Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?
³⁰**If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.**
³¹The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is to be praised forever, knows that I am not
lying.*

If anyone in here wants to hear a message about prosperity and blessings, you picked a bad day.

Paul is up in arms because about what people have been saying about him and during part of his defense we get a glimpse into the life of Paul that would make even our modern computer graphic enhanced movie action hero look quite tame in comparison.

Take your life and hold it up next to Paul.

So what are his Christian credentials.

- Been in jail more often than the other apostles
- Been flogged more severely, receiving the 39 lashes 5x
- Regularly exposed to death
- 3x beaten with rods
- 1x pelted with stones
- 3x shipwrecked, spending a day and a night in the open sea
- Constantly moving
- Constantly in danger from rivers, bandits, fellow Jews, Gentiles, in the city, in the country, at sea and from false believers
- Laboured and toiled and often gone without sleep, food and water
- Been cold and naked
- Then he still had ministry pressure, concern for the churches, feeling weak for the weak and burning when some are led into sin

So Marc, how has your day been?

I did get a bit cold and had to spend some time with a hot water bottle and a blanket. My breakfast was cold by the time I got to my bacon and eggs.

But we haven't even reached the point of the scripture yet

Personally I'm convinced that he is doing a great job.

Anyone who would put up with this lifestyle, as a job description, he's hired.

- You want commitment, check
- You want passion, check
- You want zeal, check
- You want beyond the call of duty, check

- You want selfless, check
- You want focus, check

Then he gets to V30 and says, actually, thats nothing.

{Slide: 2 Cor 11v30}

³⁰*If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.*

Paul weak?

This other stuff is what I do, it is not boasting he says.

You want to hear me boast.

When I boast, I talk about, *“the things that show my weakness”*.

What?

Here we have a man who could have been the mentor for Bear Grylls and yet he doesn't want to talk about all the great things he's done, he wants to talk about those things that he doesn't do well.

That's what is really important.

His weaknesses.

What weaknesses?

Not enough jail, floggings and bandits?

No, things that were exposed in his character, while he was doing the work of the Lord.

And he ends with V31 and says that God Himself knows that he, Paul is not lying.

Now some of you might be thinking?

Hang on, I spend a lot of my prayer and God time asking to be taken **out** of my current situation, that's what God is for right?

To bless me.

To straighten my path.

Help me find the right job.

Move to the right house.

Find the right wife.

Paul was obviously not praying hard enough about his situations.

Or maybe, and this is a tough one, it's not about the situations.

How do know this?

Let's keep reading.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v1-10}

2 Cor 12v1-10

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. ²I 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. ³And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but

God knows—⁴was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

⁵I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, **except about my weaknesses.**

⁶Even 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, ⁷or because of these surpassingly great revelations.

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸Three times I **pleaded** with the Lord to take it away from me.

⁹But he said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, **so that Christ’s power may rest on me.** ¹⁰That 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.

Paul tells us a little about his conversion in V1-4, with the emphasis on little. One gets the idea that he was shown things that he was not allowed to share but then he gets to the middle of verse 5 and we pick up the thread again.

We may have thought that his weakness comment may have been a bit of a slip of the pen in a moment of weakness, so to say.

And yet here it is again.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v5}

⁵I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, **except about my weaknesses.**

But why is that important for us to understand?

What is your point Paul?

What spiritual insight is there in it for me?

V6 starts giving us more of a clue.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v6-7a}

⁶Even 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,** ⁷or because of these surpassingly great revelations.

Paul says he has lots to boast about, all of it truthful.

He says I have a valid opinion.

But he chooses not to, he **refrains**.

Because, he doesn’t want to come across as more important than what his actions or his words warrant.

Why?

Because then it becomes about him.

How against our sinful nature is that.

- When I hear some juicy news, I want to feel important and pass it on
- When I have a strong opinion, I burn to share to feel important.
- When I've done something right, that's the only thing I want to share
- I like to feel important
- To feel validated
- To feel liked

Refrain - you must be joking.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v7b}

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.⁸ *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.*

Therefore, For this reason, the fact that he may be tempted to make it about him.

To help him, Paul, **God allowed** a certain condition to be present.

A condition that Paul prayed to God to take away from him.

Why was this condition allowed?

Because God knew that Paul's natural tendency was to become conceited (excessively proud of himself)

To be too full of himself

God himself had to intervene to keep Paul spiritual, grounded.

Paul's struggle was to empty himself, so that God could fill him.

That scares me.

Because if Paul needed a thorn to keep him from becoming conceited.

What do I need?

(Arthritis in the hands, broken knee, stiff joints, a house not selling)

It means there is a very real human problem here, one that affects you and me.

Self importance.

The need to come across better and stronger than what I really am.

The need to hide my real weaknesses by only highlighting my God given strengths.

You see Big Boys don't cry.

We are taught not to show weakness.

This is what we have achieved.

This is what I drive

Look at the size of my muscles.

Listen to the strength of my opinion.

We grow up overwhelmed by trying to keep up an image, because what people think of us, is everything, or so the sin drenched world leads us to believe.

Almost like Adam and Eve who believed the twisted truths the serpent was spinning.

This is the lie that we all buy into, that Life is a lesson in self promotion

And so Paul keeps developing this argument.

He says I have every reason to be considered great and yet ...

He leads us along the path of self discovery by sharing his struggles with us.
His weaknesses.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v8-9a}

*⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹But he said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**”*

If there is a self important bone in your body still clamouring for attention, the news gets worse.

Because here is the core.

My grace is sufficient - my attention is enough, you don't need more.

The power of God

Is made perfect, the creation process of perfecting us, reaches its highest point and greatest strength.

I grow immeasurably by God's power at that time.

In my weakness, when I take responsibility for who I really am.

When I grow up and mature emotionally.

In **my** weakness, not of how on top I am of the weakness of others.

The state of my spirituality is exposed by how much I blame external circumstances for my current condition.

Paul had every reason under the sun to blame his tough spiritual life on his circumstances.
And yet.

Not once in this whole revelation has Paul mentioned anyone or anything else.

God made sure that Paul was prevented from letting it all go to his head by pointing him in the direction to where his focus should be ... **his** weaknesses.

- Not in my importance
- Not in blaming others for my condition
- Not in elevating my opinions
- Not in pushing my agenda
- Not in dominating conversations
- Not about explaining in infinite detail what a brother or sister did to me
- Not about all the proofs I have about what a bad spouse I have

God's power peaks, when I get in touch with who I really am.

When I look only at the Great I Am.

When I become self aware.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v9b}

***Therefore** I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses,
so that Christ's power may rest on me.*

Therefore - because of that reason that God's power comes together when I am at my weakest point.

When I get this.

When I grow up and mature spiritually.

I will boast, be proud of, share with those who are willing to listen.

All the more, because I fully understand why that is important.

Gladly and with great joy, concerning my weaknesses.

So that, I have an agenda, a reason for doing this.

The whole of the power of Christ rests on me.

Who doesn't want that?

That is when I am peaking as a Christian on the path to maturity.

(You know, I worked out the other day why I have chosen to work alone, most of my life.

Because then no-one can comment on what I do.

Why was that important?

Because I noticed how quickly a comment can make me **feel stupid**

From 0 to stupid in a blink.

It happened again the other day)

Then Paul hammers the final nail into the coffin of our pride and self inflated importance.

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v10}

¹⁰*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.

That is why, my whole argument above

For Christ's sake, not my own

I delight when I go through tough times because then my weaknesses are best exposed.

God is not punishing me through my existing circumstances, however

He uses my circumstances, to expose in me, my weaknesses,

Which I have to become aware of

So that his power can be perfected in me.

That is why Big Boys and Big Girls do cry out to the Lord

Christians on the journey of maturity

Not focused on what the world and people are throwing at them.

They are focused on what the process is exposing in their own hearts.

And begging God to mature them in the way they are dealing with it.

And this process of showing weakness

has been ongoing since the beginning of Biblical time.

David

{Slide: 2 Sam 22v7}

⁷“In my distress I called to the LORD;
I called out to my God.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came to his ears.

Solomon, giving us all advice from the OT.

{Slide: Pro 2v1-5}

*My son, **if** you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
²turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding—
³indeed, **if** you call out for insight
and **cry aloud** for understanding,
⁴and **if** you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
⁵**then you will understand the fear of the LORD**
and find the knowledge of God.*

and finally Jesus

{Slide: 2 Cor 12v10}

⁷*During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with **fervent cries**
and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his
reverent submission.*

It’s OK to be weak.

To admit, I am weak, in these areas.

In fact it’s a critical element of your ongoing journey on the path to becoming a mature Christian.

{Slide: **Logo** + “For when I am weak then I am strong”}

For when I am weak, then I am strong.