

Last Sunday, we defined that Easter People are not perfect people, but they are the successful failures, like Jesus' disciple Peter, who get up repeatedly by fully relying on God when they fall. We, as Easter People, partner with God in His perfection to work on our imperfection by practicing the simple exercise of ABC—admit, believe, and choose—until we are perfected at the return of our Savior. Resilience is the first character of Easter People.

Today, we will look at another character of Easter People—contentment—through the life of Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11-12, Paul describes one of the most challenging things for us to grasp and believe about the life of faith: God purposefully blesses us with weaknesses for the sake of our benefits.

So-called “super-apostles” had found their way to Corinth. These parasitic charlatans had followed in the wake of the Lord's servant and were siphoning off glory from God and discrediting Paul to inflate the appearance of their self-importance.

If it had only been about his reputation, Paul would not have wasted his ink. These super-apostles, the super-self-righteous people, were not only maligning Paul, but they were also distorting the gospel. They were accusing Paul *in order* to distort the gospel. The situation demanded that Paul call these imposters out and contrast their doctrine, character, and labors with his own. But it was torturous for him. He said, “I am talking like a madman” (2 Corinthians 11:23). Reluctantly Paul cataloged revelations he had received, suffering he had endured for the gospel and the church, and how he had never financially benefitted from the Corinthians.

But it's essential to see that there was far more behind Paul's reluctance than self-conscious awkwardness. He was conscious of the danger that in drawing attention to himself, he might obscure the grace of God.

Test yourself. When you read of Paul's lashings, beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks, danger, hunger, exposure, and mind-blowing revelations, what are you tempted to think? If you're like me, you might think, “This man had faith, brains, guts, endurance, and a work ethic second-to-none. I'm a sorry excuse for a Christian compared to him.”

And *that* is the danger Paul feared. Because at that moment, we are tempted to look away from the cross of Christ and the sufficiency of His grace to our achievements for our justification.

Here's what I mean. Our fallen nature craves self-glory. We seek the admiration of others. We love the myth of the superhero because we want to be one. So, we want our successes to be known and our failures hidden. And since people who achieve remarkable things earn the favor of others, we are tempted to believe that they earn the favor of God as well.

That's the last thing Paul wants us to believe. Paul knew that it is not human achievements that showcase the grace of God. It is human helplessness. Paul viewed himself as the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Apart from God's grace, all of Paul's achievements were considered as "rubbish" (Philippians 3:8-9). Paul knew who had brought him to faith (Acts 9:5), called him to be an apostle (Romans 1:1), sent him to make Gentile disciples (Romans 1:5), and called him to suffer for His sake (Acts 9:16).

Yes, Paul knew that he worked harder than just about everybody. But he also knew that it was not him, but the grace of God that was with him (1 Corinthians 15:10). And one reason he knew this so profoundly was that Jesus had disciplined him.

Knowing how Paul's indwelling sin might respond to the power and fruitfulness he would experience, Jesus gifted him with a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7). It would be a continual reminder to Paul that he depended on Jesus for everything. Like us, Paul did not immediately recognize the thorn as a gift. He pleaded for deliverance. But Jesus replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This opened up a world of insight to Paul. God showing His strength through weak things was laced all through redemptive history, culminating in the cross. That's why Paul said, "If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness" (2 Corinthians 11:30). He even went beyond that by saying, "For the sake of Christ, then, I am *content* with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Are we content with the weaknesses we live with? I don't mean sin—Paul is clear that we are to put sin to death (Romans 6:12). Neither do I mean foolishness

(Proverbs 26:11). But we all live with different kinds of constitutional limitations or illnesses or disabilities, or circumstantial adversity. And what God wants us to know through today's scripture is that He has given them to us for the sake of our benefits. This is the challenge for us, and yet it is the truth we need to rely on.

Here's the secret. The more aware we are of God's grace, the more humble, prayerful, thankful, patient, gracious, and joyful we will be. Simply, we, Easter People, can be content in all circumstances as we are aware of God's grace.

We can say, "I am strong when I am weak. And I am rich when I am poor" because we are aware of God's grace more when we are weak and poor. In our weakness, God's strength is often more clearly displayed than any other times. Are you struggling with your weakness today? If so, I pray that our Lord will grant you the eyes to see God's strength in your weakness today. Amen.