

Bold, Part 20: “Boasting in Weakness”

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Rev. Andrew Jun

[SERMON MANUSCRIPT]

Introduction

We're still working through the book of 2 Corinthians, in this series we're calling "Bold." Today's sermon is from 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 and is titled, "Boasting in Weakness." We'll have time for sharing and praying together in breakout rooms again this Sunday Celebration. I'm not planning on doing this *all the time*, but frequently enough so we have opportunities to minister to each other- even though we're meeting online. As I mentioned last time, I want to invite us all to participate in this time of interaction! We're trying to tweak how to make it more effective for those of us who had a hard time last week. And if you are still too shy or just don't want to, no pressure- just join and listen!

To start my sermon, I want to share the testimonies of some other gospel workers that I know. They shared recently in a meeting we had and their testimony fit in nicely with today's sermon. Two weeks ago, a handful of them went to a remote island to bring the gospel to an unreached people group there. One of them wrote this: "Day 1, the outboard motor that usually works wouldn't start. Day 2, we spent all day working on the motors. Day 3 we left in a wooden boat with one of the best captains in the province. A little storm blew up and he did something I've never seen before. He lost direction and headed out to the middle of the ocean. I've never seen him that fearful. Not wanting to bury the nose of the boat in the waves, he headed home. The team finally left on the fifth day in the same wooden boat."

Later on this same trip, the team found out that the man who was their primary contact (he had previously been miraculously healed after not being able to walk before) had passed away suddenly. Also, one of the Indonesian gospel workers found out that her mother passed away unexpectedly. In her preparations to go back to her hometown, she tested positive for COVID-19 and was not able to attend her mother's funeral. The same day, one of the team leaders was in severe pain due to gallstones. Due to living in a remote province and the hospitals being full due to the pandemic, she could not find adequate treatment in her city. Doctors in Jakarta did not allow her to come due to PPKM and because they were taking only urgent cases. So, she's had to wait it out and pray that it does not get infected, which would be a serious problem.

So, when we met online this past week, we had to acknowledge that they'd suffered a lot of losses recently! These are probably not what you expect in terms of testimonies, right? These were not "wins" but my point here is that Jesus' disciples also experience hardships and difficulties, which can still be a very positive thing.

Scripture Reading

This is what Paul points out as well in today's passage of Scripture. For some background again, there were these false apostles who had gained prominence among some of those in the Corinthian church. They attacked Paul's authority as an apostle, so Paul has been defending his ministry and way of life in this section of the letter of 2 Corinthians. Now let's read today's Scripture- this is God's Word...

2 Corinthians 11:16-33 (ESV):

16 I repeat, let no one think me foolish. But even if you do, accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little. 17 What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would but as a fool. 18 Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. 19 For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves! 20 For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face. 21 To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!

But whatever anyone else dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that. 22 Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. 23 Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more

imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness. 31 The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.

Amen!

Proposition

If I could summarize the heart of Paul's message here to the Corinthians and to us, it would be this;

Following Jesus includes embracing situations that make us feel our true weakness.

Organizational Statement

My sermon today will follow the flow of Paul's train of thought in 2 Corinthians 11:16-33, with him arriving at the conclusion for the Corinthians that ***following Jesus includes embracing situations that make us feel our true weakness.*** Here are the main points of his line of thought: 1) first, "Who is really the fool?" in verses 16-20; 2) second, "Who is really a servant of Christ?" in verses 21-28; and 3) third, "Who is really able to boast?" in verses 29-33. In each point, I'll also share a discipleship lesson from Paul.

Transition: Alright, are you ready to get into this? Here's what we need to do first...

Sermon Outline

I. Look at verses 16-20: Who is really the fool?

- A. In these verses, Paul confronted the Corinthians about the false apostles among them who- in truth- threatened their well-being.**
 - 1. Discipleship lesson #1:** Following Jesus is a narrow path that leads to life and all other paths deceive and enslave.
 - a) Remember, there were some in the Corinthian church who were under the influence of false apostles and were thinking that Paul was not qualified to be a true apostle- in fact, they labeled him a "fool." So Paul wrote this in verse 16- which I paraphrased to understand a bit better: "I am not a fool- that is for sure- even though you still might think so. So I'm going to act like a fool and boast a little myself...but it might surprise you what I boast about."
 - b) Once again, with a touch of irony in his writing, he turned the tables on those in Corinth who were thinking this way. He basically said something like this in verse 18: "Many of you Corinthians boast about fleshly things that are not that important to Christ or special status symbols in his kingdom- stuff like wealth, knowledge, status, followers, and power. You think of yourselves as so wise but you tolerate such foolishness! This is what these people do to you..."

- c) Then in verse 20 Paul mentions the specific effects from the teaching and influence of these false apostles. These false teachers preached a message that didn't free them from sinfulness and condemnation, but actually enslaved them into greater sinfulness and condemnation. They actually "devoured" true faith and new life in Christ by steering them away from Christ. They actually took advantage of the Corinthians by profiting financially at their expense. They "put on airs" of authentic spiritual power and truth, but were actually counterfeits of the real thing. They actually abused the Corinthians, striking their faces and telling them that it was good for them.
- d) If you think about it, these were almost the same reasons that Jesus rebuked some scribes and Pharisees too, as recorded in Matthew 23. This is what Jesus said about them: *They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people's shoulders (v. 4)...they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues (v. 6)...they shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces (v. 13)...they make their converts twice as much a child of hell as themselves (v. 15)... they were like blind guides (v. 16)...they tithed mint and dill and cumin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law (v.23)...they cleaned the outside of the cup and plate, but inside they were full of greed and self-indulgence (v. 25)...they also outwardly appeared righteous to others, but within were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (v. 28).*
- e) Context: Remember the truths from the previous section, from verses 1-15 (which I preached on last week)? Our goal as a church is to stay on the path of sincere and pure devotion to Christ until he returns! Tied into this is that as we walk that path, our responsibility is to faithfully embody Christ's values, no matter what the results may be. We won't be perfect in this, but as we imperfectly follow Christ this way, we will continually see our growing need for Christ; and by his grace, Jesus will keep changing us from the inside out. Jesus gave this warning:
- o Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV): *13 Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*
- f) Context: Can I just share a huge worry and concern with you all here? I worry that some of us are deceived or will be deceived into counterfeits of the gospel of Jesus Christ. *Show americas-new-religion.jpg*. I read an article in a secular newspaper- the *Washington Times*- titled "America's New Religion: Fake Christianity." In the article they talk about how so many people in America who think they are Christians are actually "moralistic therapeutic deists." This quote from George Barna from this article explains what this means:
- o "The moralistic perspective is we're here to be good people and to try to do good...The therapeutic aspect is everything is supposed to be geared to making me feel good about myself, ultimately to make me happy. Deism is the idea that God created the world but has no direct involvement in it. Basically, according to MTD, there is a distant God who just wants everyone to be nice, and the purpose of life is to be happy." – George Barna
- g) Context: Church, I fear that many of us, if we don't carefully look at what the Bible says and thoughtfully discern truth together, will also be misled down this broad path to destruction. Contrary to this, let's grow to discern the true, biblical gospel of Christ together as a church! Discipleship lesson #1 is that **following Jesus is a narrow path that leads to life and all other paths deceive and enslave**. This is why I think the Christian life is aptly described as "following Jesus": we simply follow him! We follow him with a child-like faith always, trusting that in him is salvation and life. We follow his footsteps in how he lived, what he valued and lived for, and to whom he obeyed. We follow his leadership as he speaks to us through his Word and as he guides us with his Spirit.

Transition: So in verses 16-20, Paul addressed the question, “Who is really the fool?” Second, let’s...

II. Look at verses 21-28: Who is really a servant of Christ?

A. In these verses, Paul went into a lot of detail about the great suffering he experienced as a genuine servant of Jesus Christ.

1. **Discipleship lesson #2:** Following Jesus includes carrying our crosses by sometimes suffering for the sake of Christ.
 - a) Now as Paul continues his train of thought, let me paraphrase verse 21: “My team and I do not buy what those false apostles are selling- you think we’re weak, but we’re really not! Let me do a little boasting of my own in order to convince you that we know what we’re doing!” Paul actually wrote it with a lot more irony than this, but this was his point. Then he continued by presenting his perfect pedigree or family background: By calling himself a “Hebrew,” he said that he was not only Jewish by religion, he had family roots in the region of Palestine itself; he was an “Israelite,” among the people of God who were direct descendants of Abraham, their patriarch. Paul wrote elsewhere that he could put a lot of confidence in his ethnic and religious heritage.
 - b) But verse 23 is really the key to this middle section of his reasoning- look at it: *Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one- I am talking like a madman...* What he really took pride in was that he was a servant of Jesus Christ himself- and a far better one than these false apostles who opposed him in Corinth. What proved his point- what he *really* could boast about- was this extensive list of external hardships that he faced in his life as he followed Jesus. These were strange things to boast about but let me explain as we go through them.
 - c) Paul said that he’d experienced *far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death*. These were weird things to measure himself by: He had been subject to more hard work, more times being put in jail, more times getting beaten up, and more near-death experiences than his opponents. He had suffered the inglorious punishment of forty-minus-one lashes with a rod- not once, but five times. This was the most severe type of beating that was allowed by the Scriptures, and it was done by synagogues when Paul was accused of blasphemy because he preached that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures as God’s promised King.
 - d) He said in verse 25 that three other times he was *beaten with rods* for disturbing the peace and even one time he was stoned, a method of execution by blunt force trauma from rocks being thrown at him. All the way through verse 27, Paul listed all the other dangerous situations he had faced: shipwrecks and being adrift at sea while traveling by boat, threats of robbers and bandits while journeying by land, betrayals by people pretending to be his friends, nights when he couldn’t sleep, days when he didn’t have enough to eat and drink, and times when he didn’t have any shelter from the cold.
 - e) To top it all off, Paul said this in verse 28: *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches*. It’s so encouraging for me that the apostle Paul admitted to struggling with anxiety! He’s just like me and many of us here during this pandemic! He had the burden of responsibility to care about what was going on in all these churches like in Corinth- congregations that he started or helped and that he was worried about. He felt this pressure every day; he had anxiety every day over their health and well-being in the midst of all the bad things that could happen to them.
 - f) This is a long, long list of hardships and suffering that Paul experienced as a follower of Jesus. Some of these were directly a consequence of when people did not agree with what he believed about Jesus. Some of these were because he simply obeyed Jesus’ call, which put him in some dangerous situations. Did these hardships and sufferings prove that he was not a true apostle? Not at all! In fact, these were part of the calling to

follow Jesus as his disciple, as Jesus Christ himself said many times. He warned his disciples in Matthew 10 that they would face a lot of opposition- even from their families- because they followed Jesus. It could even be said that Jesus *caused* these kinds of conflicts! Jesus taught his disciples this:

- o Matthew 10:38-39 (ESV): *38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*
- g) **Context:** This is the call to follow Jesus Christ! Now, we don't need to masochistically create our own suffering, but we shouldn't be surprised by it either! We will suffer sometimes as we follow Christ simply because many people oppose Christ or oppose what he stands for; we will suffer sometimes as we follow Christ because sometimes obedience in this world puts us in difficult situations. This is what Jesus means by "taking up our crosses" when we follow him- we are willing to take the pain. Discipleship lesson #2 is that **following Jesus includes carrying our crosses by sometimes suffering for the sake of Christ**. Listen closely and listen well, family and friends: Any so-called gospels that don't have this part in it is NOT really the biblical gospel of Jesus!
- h) **Context:** So Paul teaches here that following Christ will be- not all the time but definitely sometimes- uncomfortable, conflict-creating, painful, or even dangerous. It can sometimes be uncomfortable: There will be different viewpoints on issues like sexuality, business ethics, or entertainment that will conflict with friends. It can sometimes be conflict-creating: Your family members might be upset because of activities you chose to do or not do as a follower of Jesus. Now just as a disclaimer, for these two examples, this doesn't mean that we can be rude, unloving, arrogant, or fleshly- which we have to humbly deal with in our hearts- but sometimes discomfort or conflict is unavoidable.
- i) **Context:** Following Jesus can also sometimes be painful. It might be painful to make financial decisions like tithing faithfully to the church or giving generously to worthy causes even though that means having a lower bank balance. And finally...you know, if we really want to share and show the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unengaged, unreached, or unwanted groups of people- disclaimer here with this too: these groups of people might be "unwanted" by society but are loved by Jesus- then we might find ourselves in some dangerous parts of our city or country.
- j) **Context:** Let me be honest with you- as I thought about this sermon I had to preach today, I had to wonder if I'm carrying my cross and denying myself enough. Do I experience suffering *enough* as a disciple of Jesus? This is what I have to say to myself as well as to all of us as we are challenged (or possibly feeling guilty): We don't have to create these kinds of situations, but as we follow Jesus, we will sometimes experience uncomfortable, conflict-creating, painful, or even dangerous situations. Don't be surprised when it happens because Jesus has said from the beginning that this will be the case; these hardships are not a mark of God's lack of care for us or control over situations on earth- they are for our good and for his glory!

Transition: First in verses 16-20, Paul addressed the question, "Who is really the fool?" and second in verses 21-28, Paul addressed the question, "Who is really a servant of Christ?". Third, let's...

III. Look at verses 29-33: Who is really able to boast?

- A. In these verses, Paul concluded for the Corinthians that in light of the gospel, he boasted of the things that showed his weaknesses.
 - 1. **Discipleship lesson #3:** Following Jesus includes embracing situations that make us feel our true weakness.

- a) Now please listen very carefully as I talk about this last point! Think about this: Why in the world would we want to suffer like this? For some of us here, Paul really does sound like a madman, doesn't he? Or maybe is it just Paul- like he's some super-spiritual, masochistic person who likes suffering? For regular people like you and me, why would we *want* to choose this life of following Christ if it involves such suffering? This is where we have to really look at verses 29-30 very carefully- this is the crux of his reasoning!
- b) The English Standard Version of verse 29 that we read earlier is a little confusing, but the New International Version is a bit clearer for us: *Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?* Do you see this? Paul shares more personally here- so the Corinthians or us don't think that he is some super-spiritual masochistic person who likes suffering- that he is weak like everyone else; Paul still burns with desire to sin and does sin like everyone else- including and especially in these situations of suffering!
- c) Then verse 30 is his thesis statement: *If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.* In other words, Paul embraced all these experiences of hardship and suffering because it reinforced the reality of his own weakness- to himself and to others. These situations helped him to *feel* weak- which was good because he was truly weak; these situations helped him to feel the burn of his own fleshly desires- which was good because he was truly fleshly. And then even greater, this helped Paul *know* that he needed Christ and that God's salvation was 100% an act of grace! *THIS* is why suffering was worth it according to Paul! When he denied himself and carried his cross to follow Jesus, he saw more clearly the new life that Christ died to pay for and give to him as a gift! Discipleship lesson #3 (and our "one thing" for the entire passage) is ***following Jesus includes embracing situations that make us feel our true weakness.***
- d) Context: Some people have this unrealistic idea that people like Paul just glowed with holiness and savored misery. But I don't think that's true at all. In fact, Paul just confessed that when he faced "fires" in his life, "thorns" came out of his heart. This is true for all of us! Take a look at this graphic that we use often to illustrate what happens from *How People Change* by Paul Tripp. [*Show how-people-change.jpg*](#). First, look at the top where it says, "Heat: What is your situation?" There will be those situations, especially hardships and suffering, that kick off this process. Second, there is "Bad Fruit: How do you react?" These are the actions and behaviors that comes out of the heat. This leads to third, "Bad Root: What do you want and believe?" Our actions and behavior indicate what is actually in our hearts.
- e) Context: This is where, as disciples of Jesus, we go to our Savior and King, submitting to him again. Fourth that's where it says, "Redeemer: Who is God and what does he say and do in Christ?" We grow in awareness that God is more holy than we knew before; we grow in awareness that we are more sinful than we knew before. But the good news we preach to ourselves is that God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for those bad roots and bad fruits in our lives. We receive again his grace by faith. He changes our hearts, which is fifth, "Good Root: Seek God in repentance and faith." And lastly- sixth- there is "Good Fruit: Respond with love." Or in Paul's words in verse 30, we can boast of those things that show our weakness, because Christ is bigger and bigger in our eyes.
- f) Let's use the example that Paul himself gave in his weakness in verses 32-33- with a little of colorization on my part. The historical account of what happened is recorded in Acts 9:19-25. Paul was on his way to Damascus to arrest and execute Christians there; but on the road Jesus encountered Paul and caused him to believe in him as God's Savior and King. He was taken in by the Christians in Damascus and Paul began to boldly preach about Jesus in the synagogues there. The Jews plotted to kill him, so Paul escaped Damascus by hiding in a basket that was lowered down the city walls via ropes. Imagine how Paul might have felt in that "heat" situation: maybe what came out of him (thorns and bad roots) was anger at his enemies; maybe it was fear for his life; maybe it was embarrassment as he had to hide like a coward. But then he went to Jesus again,

embracing his call to be saved by grace and to preach the gospel to Gentiles. Maybe as crouched in that basket, he repented of what came out of his heart and renewed his trust in Christ's calling to be his disciple (the good root). Looking back, he could genuinely and joyfully praise God (good fruit).

- g) Context: In summary, from this perspective, hardships and suffering are a blessing from the Lord. God can use them to help us see in greater measures our need for Christ, bearing the good fruit of humility and dependence on God. God can use them to help us see in greater measures the folly of earthly values and pursuits, bearing the fruit of holiness and freedom from idols. And God can use hardships and suffering in our lives to help us see in greater measures the grace of God and the worthiness of Christ, bearing the fruit of thankfulness and passionate worship. Let me share how to think about this from another point of view. It's a quote from Floyd McClung in his book *Apostolic Passion*:
- o "Passion means whatever a person is willing to suffer for. In fact, that's the root meaning of the word. It comes from the Latin *passere*, to suffer. It is what you hunger for so intensely that you will sacrifice anything to have it... The Father's passions have become your passions. You find your satisfaction and significance in Him. You believe He is with you always, to the end of life itself. You are sold out to God, and you live for the Lamb."
- h) When we experience knowing Christ more and the power of his death and resurrection through suffering, what comes out is incomparable, out-of-this-world JOY. The joy of knowing Christ this way helps us to understand that any suffering we face is worthwhile- we can endure them- because we trust that God will bring about the good fruit in our lives of treasuring and glorifying Jesus Christ above anything else in this world!
- i) Context: For our friends here who do not follow Jesus Christ yet, I want to tell you that we're not trying to sugarcoat it or trick you into following Jesus. This is everything that you need to know! When you follow Jesus, there will be situations that are uncomfortable, conflict-creating, painful, and dangerous- so you should count the cost! But if you trust in Jesus Christ as your Savior and King, he promises to save you from your sins and give you new life- a new heart to know and love God and eternal life even after our earthly lives end. If you follow him, you can also embrace situations that make you feel true weakness because it will help you treasure and glorify Jesus more!

[Conclusion: 3 minutes - 0:30-0:33]

Transition: First in verses 16-20, Paul addressed the question, "Who is really the fool?" and second in verses 21-28, Paul addressed the question, "Who is really a servant of Christ?". Third and last in verses 29-33, Paul addressed the question, "Who is really able to boast?" Now let's think about the...

Conclusion

IV. Life Application

A. Here are the next steps I'd like to recommend to take in light of Paul's "one thing" that following Jesus includes embracing situations that make us feel our true weakness.

1. First, acknowledge the suffering you face: What uncomfortable, conflict-creating, painful, or dangerous situations are you facing? How are you reacting to these situations?
 - a) I'd like to encourage you to do something very biblical: lament! In other words, you can grieve over hardships and suffering you face- this is something that happens in the

Bible a lot. God can handle all the complaining, questioning, and arguing that you can give.

- b) Do some honest reflection too, of what is coming out of your life and out of your heart. What actions, thoughts, and feelings are coming out? You can bring those to Jesus too, as you are more aware of your sinfulness and need for him! This is a very good thing!
2. Second, embrace your suffering by faith: What are the ways that you appreciate Jesus and grasp the gospel more in these situations? What good fruit is God producing in you?
- a) The other part of biblical lament is confronting these difficult situations we're in with faith in God. We might not understand all the reasons *why* God is doing this in our lives, but we can trust that he cares for us and he is in control of everything going on.
 - b) In fact, if you want reassurance of this, look at the cross! God's eternal plan was to send Jesus to the cross and he did it because he loves you greatly! He wants you to find your greatest joy and satisfaction in Christ alone!

Transition: We'll go to breakout rooms in a moment now. As I said in the beginning of this sermon, we won't do this *all the time*, but I do think that this is a great chance for us to disciple each other by intentionally building each other up. You can either share your direct thoughts from the life application (which we'll send out right now in the Zoom chat) or share what is on your heart, prayer requests, or anything else. Just try to keep it focused (don't just small talk) and save some time at the end to pray for one another. If you totally feel weird about participating, then just say so in your group and just listen to others share. We'll get back together after 10 minutes to close out our Sunday Celebration today.