

Men's Breakfast :: December 12, 2015

As we strive to follow Jesus every day and everywhere with everyone, we are going to have moments that tangibly reveal God bringing about fruit through the ministry we engage in. These moments feel like great successes. However, there is no doubt that we will also have moments of questioning.

God, what are you doing?

God, why did you allow that to happen?

If we are to be honest, as we inhabit the space between the two advents (the birth of Jesus and the second coming where the world is completely renewed), our lives reflect more of a combination between what feels like success and what feels like failure. When things don't seem to be working, we may wonder what God is doing.

Take a moment to read the story of Elijah in 1 Kings 17-19

Think about a time in your life, maybe you are in it, when God's actions seemed indiscernible or confusing to you. What did you do in the midst of that?

Elijah had lots of ups and downs. Check out some highlights from his story:

1. The Lord tells him to go to the widow
2. The Lord provides
3. The widows son becomes ill
4. The son dies
5. Elijah doesn't understand
6. He cries out to the Lord
7. The Lord acts
8. Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal
9. Elijah's life is threatened
10. Elijah runs away and wants to die
11. God takes him to the dessert mountain to speak to him

Now perhaps most of you have felt like Elijah at one point in time or another. But still you might think, "Ya but look how God tangibly interacted with him. I wish that could happen to me."

Well, think about Paul. Most of us think of Paul and think of him as the founder of much of the theology we practice today. But read this passage from 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 11

But whatever anyone 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 descendants of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman—I am a better one: with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. ²⁸ And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, 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 (blessed be he forever!) knows that I do not lie. ³² In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas guarded 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 from his hands.

2 Corinthians 12

¹ It is necessary to boast; nothing is to be gained by it, but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³ And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows— ⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ⁵ On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Notice all the hardship that Paul experienced in his ministry. I have to imagine that by the third shipwreck he had a couple questions for God about what was going on. Not to mention all the pure physical pain he went through. After all, you're not really supposed to survive a stoning. But through it all he was faithful. He wrote letters, started churches, and said yes to what God seemed to be calling him to. We think of him as the founder of so much of the church, but at the time they were just small house churches. He didn't have the perspective we have reading the Bible 2000 years after the events that took place.

But he did have a very important perspective. He had the perspective of someone who truly understood that God's grace was sufficient. In the midst of the hardship, questions, and pain, his sense of worth was not tied to what success looked like in the moment. Rather, it was connected to the grace of God being enough.

Is God's grace sufficient for you?

As men of impact, we will inevitably have our low moments. What gets us through is not the next success, but rather connection to the God who lavishes grace upon us. And that grace is enough.