Gal. 4:12-20; II Cor. 12:1-10; Paul’s Burden I. The Burden of Bodily Weakness II. The Burden of Pastoral Ministry

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who here has struggles? Are there any here who face burdens and trials? Often in pastoral visits, I have the opportunity to visit with people as they face these trials. How will they respond- how have you responded to the struggles of the flesh? Pain, a difficult diagnosis, treatment, surgery- all of these are trials that we as a church have faced. It is comforting to know that we are not alone in this- even Paul endured many trials in his life. As he records in II Cor. 11- he was stoned, beaten with rods, shipwrecked, cast in prison and beaten with whips. So Paul was speaking from experience when he said- I have endured bodily ailment. But how did Paul respond? Did the thorn he experienced hinder his ministry? Today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ enables His servants to endure their burdens since His grace is sufficient.

**I. The Burden of Bodily Weakness**

In our first point we consider the burden of bodily weakness that Paul endured. In v. 13 he speaks of a bodily ailment- that he was weak in the flesh. Now this bodily ailment is a general term that describes infirmity, weakness, personal frailty or other health issues. This health burden was one of the reasons why Paul stopped in Galatia and remained in that town for a period of time. It was because of this ailment that Paul was providentially placed in that town to minister the good news. Now it could have been that Paul was receiving some treatment there- or that his ailment was so severe that he could not travel for a time. Now Paul had his share of trials. He knew pain. Acts 14 records one such incident where Paul was stoned and left for dead in the city of Lystra. Now you can imagine how a person would look- someone who had just been stoned and left for dead. Beaten, bruised and bloodied. Now called to be your preacher. We also find a list in II Cor. 11 of all that Paul had endured- he was stoned, shipwrecked 3 times, beaten with whips, cast in prison – facing danger, hunger and thirst at every turn. So Paul can speak with authority here- he has endured his share of physical trials and bodily ailments. Paul knew pain- but there is also a specific focus on his eyes in v. 15. The Galatians had at one time loved Paul so much that they would have given him their own eyes. Remember that Paul was at first blinded by the light of Jesus on the road to Damascus- so it is possible that he suffered with long term vision problems. But the exact aliment remains unlisted- it is a thorn in his flesh. But even with this thorn- even with this ailment- this weakness of the flesh- Paul does not shrink back or give up his calling! No, the hardship he endured did not hinder him from being useful! He endured- and faithfully served wherever he was and with whatever trial he had he pressed on! Some of you will see this in your own life as well. Some of you have endured great trials- some of you have endure bodily ailment. Others still have the thorn left in your side- whatever that trail may be. What we can see here is that the trial does not disqualify from service! Don’t let the bodily frailty stop you from serving the Lord! Rather make the best use of your time- even while enduring the struggle! How you suffer shows what lives in your heart! The fact is, we all face various forms of tribulation! Anxiety, uncertainty about the future, physical pain, burdens that no one else can see! You can serve God faithfully even now- and in some ways this trial forces you to see your need anew! Remember what we read in II Cor. 12, that Paul prayed repeatedly that this thorn be removed! As we all would- we pray that God would take away whatever physical ailment you are experiencing today! Perhaps God will take this away- perhaps this thorn will be removed so that you can praise God for His mercy! But remember how the Lord answered Paul in II Cor. 12- the answer he received is this- my grace is sufficient for you in your time of need. My power is made perfect in your weakness! Perhaps the answer to your prayer is an increase in grace- an added measure of the Spirit! As such, this trial is used to drive us to Christ- to make us like Christ as we will see in our next point! We do not know how God might use this trial to bless you! Thorns are used to keep us humble as Paul said- to keep us near the cross. For even Jesus prayed- if it is your will, take this cup away from me. But not my will- your will be done! So we can learn from how God used Paul- in the time of his weakness. Paul was able to have calmness in the calamity- peace while enduring the thorn. Trials and weakness do not disqualify you for service- they often enable you to better serve! Don’t be discouraged- God is using you even now! God uses the weak to humble the strong! So take up your cross and follow Jesus- faithfully serve even if your body is enduring pain! You may not have chosen this trail- but you can still serve God with it- in the time of trial, you can still be useful in the kingdom! Don’t miss out on this time to serve God- obey Him even in the time of shadow!

**II. The Burden of Pastoral Ministry**

But there is another burden that we find in our passage today. Not only does Paul faithfully serve with the burden of physical ailment and bodily trial, he also has the burden of pastoral ministry as is evident here. This is not a physical trial- but a unique burden that those called to ministry carry. We see this in v. 19- where Paul compares himself to one in labor. We started to see this already last week in v. 11. Paul is a mother who is enduring birth pain- seeking the good of this congregation. What is this labor like? Well, I could ask every mother here to describe the birthing process. They call it labor for good reason- it is hard work. With sweat and pain- with great difficulty is a child produced. But what was this child that Paul was in labor for? Well, Paul’s labor was for the birth of spiritual children! He wanted to see new spiritual offspring produced and brought forth within the church. Added to that, Paul desired to see these children grow in grace and knowledge. Not only that children would be born, but that they would have Christ formed within them as v. 19 concludes. Paul’s work- his labor in the Lord- is for the Spirit to sanctify these people! That they would be born again and grow in the image of Jesus Christ! The end and goal of gospel preaching is the making of disciples. Every faithful minister prays for and ministers unto the holiness of the members of the church. As a good shepherd, Paul desires that the little lambs grow and develop! Something happens to those who read and hear the Word of Christ. Christ is formed in them by the Spirit! I do not want you to look like me- I want you to look like Christ! Don’t follow me- follow Him! It is His Word that you must hear! And this is his desire! That the flock would be safe, well fed and mature! Paul’s burden here is that of a mother. What do mothers want for their children? Well, they labor as mothers so that their children would be born and grow! You want what is best for your children- and as any parent can testify- it breaks your heart to see your children stray! It wounds you see your children make bad decisions! So Paul is being wounded by the Galatian church! Paul is boldly speaking the truth- but the church here is turning away! As he states in v. 16- have I now become your enemy because I speak the truth? Paul is perplexed with them as v. 20 says. Once this church had loved him and was willing to give their eyes to him. Their hearts were opened and they received the good news with joy! They had enjoyed the blessing of the word- receiving the word with gladness! Now that Paul is gone, they have turned their back on him. They no longer delight in the word- their hearts have grown lukewarm. It was not only that they were rejecting him; they were really rejecting the truth of the gospel! It was a sad thing to Paul- a church that had grown tired- not only tired of their pastor- but tired of the gospel itself! This was so confusing to him- and it broke his heart! Paul is still laboring for them- but what of this child? They had grown tired of Paul and had gone back to their former ways. They had forgotten and forsaken the good news- and gone back to worthless elementary principles! Am I your enemy for speaking the truth? What happened here? Now to be clear, it is a sad day when a formerly loved pastor is no longer welcomed in the church he once served. The old saying is that the same people who unpack your bags will be the same ones to help you pack them again! But there is something worse going on here. It is not only the messenger but the message that is being rejected! The good news of the gospel is being turned away from! That is why his tone is so pointed- even on the harsh side here! These are not light or small matters- eternity is at stake! The burden of pastoral ministry that Paul has is incredibly heavy! He is disappointed- having faithfully planted the seed and watered that seed- now to see the plants wither and die off. Or like a mother whose child has forsaken the family and gone their own way. So Paul’s heart is breaking- how can you go back to slavery? How can you go back to the shadows and other religions! I have loved you as mother- cared for you as a shepherd- and now I fear I have loved and shepherded in vain! So the situation in Galatia is critical. Their former hospitality has turned to hostility towards Paul. Where once the gospel message was received with gladness, now it was all but ignored. As Jesus would warn the churches in Rev. 2- I know that you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead! Wake up! Return to your former works! You have abandoned your first love! Repent- or you will lose your light!

To conclude, Paul had his share of burdens- but these trials only pushed Him on to faithful service! Again we find that this church in Galatia is like rocky soil- the gospel that was first received with joy is now dying out- there is no dept to the root! So Paul is perplexed- his heart is broken! But even now- Paul does not give up! The burden of physical pain- and the burden of being a pastor to a church that has forgotten him- will not dissuade him! He reminds the church who they are and what they are called to be! Children of God in the faith- called to a life of holiness! As our theme states: Jesus Christ enables His servants to endure their burdens since His grace is sufficient. So whatever burden you have- physical or spiritual- follow the example of Paul who followed the example of Christ! Faithful under pressure- obedient even when the thorn pricks. Because God’s grace is sufficient for us in our time of need!