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No Pain No Gain

April 21, 2024  
Series: Where Glory Dwells  
2 Corinthians 2

**BIG IDEA – TO BE A LEADER IS TO GROW AS A LEADER MEANS  
TO INCREASE YOUR PAIN THRESHOLD**

I like to read. I don't know if you guys like to read. I like to read a lot, and I like to read a lot of different kinds of books. I like books on leadership, although most books on leadership could have been just a little business article. Every once in a while, I find a great book on leadership. I think one of my jobs up here, maybe, is to share great resources with you, so I want to tell you about a book: *Leadership Pain* by Sam Chand.

Here's the big idea in this book. He basically says that wherever you are... Think about wherever you are right now, emotionally, financially, physically, spiritually. He says the difference between where you are (he's a Christian, by the way) and where you could be or should be (and those are usually the same things) is the pain you've not been willing to endure. That's a word for some of you, for sure.

You're in the same place physically because you just can't say no to pepperoni pizza. It's too painful. It's too painful for you not to be full all the time. It's too painful for you to work the hardest machine at the gym, the front door. Some of you need a little financial pain in your life. You need a little bit of "I can't spend everything I make." Some of you need a little bit of emotional pain in your life or some relational pain in your life. We're going to have some hard conversations.

He says in this book... By the way, I think everybody is a leader. Maybe it's a "little L" leader. Everybody who has influence is a leader. Every parent is a leader. He says if you're not hurting, you're not leading, because leadership is disappointing people at a pace they can handle.

I want to talk to us today about pain. In this book he says there are three types of pain. There's *external pain*. That's conflict and complexity outside of you. Anyone who's growing a business knows that pain. He says there's *internal pain*. Internal pain is the confusion you have ("What should I do?") and the comparison trap we fall into and the insecurities and anxieties of our hearts.

Then he spends the most time on *growing pains*. We know this. Anytime you've ever grown, it has been painful. You're like, "It's so embarrassing. It feels so horrible to be wrong." Well, today, the apostle Paul is going to talk about pain. That's all he's going to talk about. He's going to use the word *pain* five times in the first four verses. He's going to talk about a painful visit. He's going to talk about multiple things.

Paul felt so much pain because he cared so much for the church. If Jeremiah is the weeping prophet of the Old Testament, Paul is the weeping apostle of the New Testament. So, turn with me to 2 Corinthians 2. I'm going to try to get through all this. We'll see how we do. There's a lot to talk about this morning.

## **01 THE PAIN OF CAUSING OTHERS PAIN**

The first type of pain is the pain of causing other people pain. Have you ever been there? Every parent has been there. Every parent has disciplined their kid, and before they spank them they say, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." And every kid goes, "I don't think so, but okay." Let me show you this.

*"For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained?"* Do you see why we're talking about pain today? *"And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice..."* Paul is like, "I wish life could work so I could just make *you* joyful, and then you make *me* joyful, but sorry, it doesn't work that way. Sometimes I have to cause you pain."

*"...for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all."* Remember? Paul said last week he wants to be a worker for joy, but sometimes that's painful. *"For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you."*

Really quickly... I don't need to go back to the first week. You can go back and listen to that sermon if you want to. I explained the whole situation with Paul and the Corinthians. Here's what you need to know. Yes, he planted a church, he left, and when he came back there were a bunch of problems. This happens all the time.

There was a leader in place, and there was order, and there was structure. He leaves, and we don't even know all that he finds, but he basically says, "Guys, I came back to put things in order." That's one of Paul's favorite phrases. Sometimes putting things back in order is really painful.

We don't know if it was false teaching. (It probably was.) We don't know if it was sinful living. (It probably was.) We don't know if it was false teaching that came into the church. We don't know what it was, but Paul said, "I had to make a painful visit." Then Paul said, "I had to write a severe letter." We'll get there later. Paul mentions a severe letter.

Here's what I want you to know. I have to be so careful when I talk about this, so give me the benefit of the doubt as I talk about this. I'm going to use these terms. They're a little elastic, but I think they're going to be helpful. We need to understand, if we're going to be people who can cause other people pain in a good way...

Let me show you this before I get into this, because I have to be nuanced here. Verse 4: ***"For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain..."*** "I didn't want my painful letter to cause you pain." ***"...but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you."*** So, sometimes you cause people pain because you love them.

Here's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about the difference between *hurt* and *harm*. Let me be so clear. We are to never harm anyone, ever. Harm is when I do evil to you to hurt you. But sometimes we have to hurt the people we love, and we hurt them to correct them or redirect them.

How many people have you not had the hard conversation with because you didn't want to hurt their feelings? Please hurt their feelings. The husband is like, "Please, would some woman come in and hurt my wife's feelings, because I need to have a hard conversation with her about what she's doing." Everyone is so afraid to hurt someone's feelings.

Listen, guys. We've all been in situations where people hurt us to help us. Why do we hate going to the dentist? Does anyone here like to go to the dentist? No! They push on your teeth with sharp things. "Does that hurt?"

"Yes."

"Well, that might be a cavity."

"Okay. You're hurting me to help me."

All of you physical therapists and chiropractors, all you do is hurt us to help us. If you get out of any type of surgery, afterward you're going to hurt. We have to be able to have hard conversations, courageous conversations. We believe here that hard words make soft people and soft words make hard people. Many of you are in the same place you've always been in because nobody has been willing to hurt you.

In fact, some of you men set up your whole lives so no one can get in, so no one could know, so no one could ask, so no one could hold accountable. You also have a bunch of information on all of your friends, so if they said anything to you, you'd get back at them, and then they won't say anything. Yikes!

What does Paul do? Paul writes a letter. I want to talk about this for a while. Think about this. This is so basic, but (I thought about this this morning) this is a word for at least 10 percent of you in the room. Listen here. Paul wrote a letter to prepare for him to have a face-to-face meeting. I don't know why I've never talked about this before, because, obviously, that's all Paul did. I mean, half of our New Testament is letters from Paul and other people, preparing for them to come.

Here's what Paul does in his letter. You can read it. You should be reading 2 Corinthians on your own. Paul writes this letter, and he explains his heart and his love for them. Paul writes a letter and tells the Corinthians how he experiences them. Have you ever thought about that? "How do other people experience me?" What's it like to be on the other side of you? That's what Paul writes about.

Paul writes, in large part, to defend himself, like, "Here's my life, and here are my motives, and here's why I'm doing what I'm doing." Here's the whole point. This is a word for some of you today. You need to write a letter to someone. You do. I'll tell you three types of letters that happen.

There's the "salvation story" letter. You need to write that to somebody. This happens every once in a while. You came to Christ, and your dad doesn't understand. You're like, "I don't know how to explain it to him. He's asking why I'm going to church now. He's asking why my friends are changing. He asks why I broke up with my boyfriend or my girlfriend, and every time I try to bring up Christ..."

Have you ever done that? You try to bring up Christ with someone, and you're like, "It's just awkward. It's emotional. It gets weird. He turns it into religion, and she turns it into politics, and I can't make any progress." I'm just telling you, some of you need to write a salvation story.

I came to Christ in March 2001. My parents were worried about me. I grew up as a nominal Catholic. All of a sudden, I'm going to Bible studies, and I have a new friend

group. My parents (they didn't tell me this until years later) thought I'd joined a cult. They were worried about me.

Now that I'm older I can see it. I'm like, "Okay. Your 16-year-old son starts wanting to go to youth group, wanting to go to a different church." Like, "What's going on?" I remember on Mother's Day 2001, I wrote on the Mother's Day card my salvation story. Some of you need to write a salvation story.

Some of you need to write a "repair the relationship" letter. I knew a young lady (this was years ago), and she had a complex relationship with her dad. He was a good guy but a little scary, as some dads can be. This dad didn't have the best relationship with the older siblings. She thought she had a decent relationship but still had a lot of questions.

She said, "I'm going to write a letter to my dad. I'm just going to tell him how I experience him and how I would like to have a better relationship with him than I do." She told me the story. She said, "Well, the relationship got better, but my dad never talked about the letter." Isn't this a classic guy? "Okay. We'll act like this never happened and I'll change." Okay. Fair.

Some of you need to write a letter and share the gospel. I had a lady email me two weeks ago brokenhearted over her mom. She writes me this long email. "What do I do? My mom lives *here*. I only see her once or twice a year. It's emotional when we do. It's at Christmas stuff. Other people are there. I don't know what to do." I said, "I'm no expert, but what about writing a letter?"

See, a letter gives space. It allows people to process. What happens today if you get a letter? If you get a handwritten letter, what do you think today? You open it up and go, "Who was kidnapped?" Right? By the way, do not send a text. The advice here is not to send memes and emojis. This is a thoughtful letter.

## **02 THE PAIN OF FORGIVENESS & RESTORATION**

The first thing is the pain of causing other people pain. The second thing is the pain of forgiving people and restoring them to fellowship again. Let me show you this. Turn with me to verse 5. Here's what he says. "***Now if anyone has caused pain...***" There's that word again. That's why we're talking about this, guys.

***"...he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough..."*** We have to talk

about that. I'll get there. Look at Paul's heart toward this man. **"...so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or..."** This could be bad. This is what happens to people who aren't forgiven and restored. **"...he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow."**

Have you ever known that person? What they did... No one will forgive them. No one will let them forget about it. It's not good. He says, **"So I beg you..."** Paul, the great apostle, does that sometimes. "I'm begging you, guys. I'm not above begging." **"...to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything."**

This is one of the reasons I told you in the first week why Paul wrote. Paul wrote because there was a man they were hard on for his sin, and they probably *should* have been hard on him. We'll talk about that in a second, but they were no longer forgiving him, and they were no longer restoring him.

Just as a little note, some people think this is the man mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5. In 1 Corinthians 5, there was this guy (I know this is gross, but this is what the Bible says; it calls it sinful) sleeping with his stepmom. Paul is like, "What in the world is going on? I know you think you're being all tolerant, but this is..." Paul goes, "Guys, the world doesn't even do this." So Paul says, "Guys, you need to discipline this man."

We're talking about some sensitive things, but we'll do it together. To be a true church, a church has to practice what's called *church discipline*. Don't be scared by that phrase. Here's how church discipline works. If somebody sins against you, go and tell him his fault, just you and him alone.

Here's how 99 or 95 percent of church discipline works in our church. Some guy walks up to another guy in Community Group and says, "Hey, man. I see this area of your life. You seem a little harsh with your wife. Man, I just want to talk to you about it. I'd love to see you grow in that area."

And 99 percent of the time, if you're a normal human, you just go, "Dude, I'm so sorry." You don't get defensive. You don't get weird. You go, "Dude, I'm sorry. Done. Working on it. Thanks. Can you help me?" And there, that's church discipline. Dealing with sin. That's what church discipline does. Every once in a while, the guy brings up his lawyer. He gets defensive. You have to bring someone else in, and sometimes you have to get everybody involved.

Church discipline says, "We're serious about sin." It's what makes a church different than a parachurch college ministry or your Bible study that you go to on Tuesdays. You're like, "What's the difference? Kyle is teaching the Bible. They're teaching the

Bible here on Tuesdays. What's the difference? Is this a church?" No, that's not church, because only the church...

I'm going to use kind of casual, common language. Here's what the church does. We let them in and we kick them out. There are certain churches that let everybody in. We don't do that. To be a member of our church, it's like, "Are you a believer? Are you in a healthy place?"

In some churches, you could do anything and not get kicked out. I mean, you could live in unrepentant, open sin and not get kicked out. By the way, that happens in churches. The wife is like, "Would you please do something about my husband? Please. I don't know what to do. We come to church, and you guys act like everything is normal." Church discipline is just how you say, "We take sin seriously."

Every once in a while, something happens where the sin is open, gross, and unrepentant. Now, in our experience... Some of you are like, "Has this happened in our church?" Yes, this has happened in our church. What happens at this point... It's usually a guy. He usually left his wife for some woman half his age, and he's usually planning on moving. How real do we want to get right now?

Then he doesn't care. He doesn't care. You're like, "Dude, you're no longer a part of our church. You can come." It doesn't mean they can't come. "We're not going to treat you as a believer anymore. We have an evangelistic relationship with you." Anyway, I had to explain that, because churches don't even do that, but here's something they're worse at: they don't know how to let somebody back in once they've repented.

Guys, why are we so horrible at this? Why are we horrible at restoration? Why when pastors fall in our team, tribe, and tradition they have to leave? They have to leave the whole team, tribe, denomination, and network. They have to go to the charismatics to get restored. They do. I promise you. They have to go to the Black church to get restored, because the charismatics and the Black church know how to restore people, but we don't.

Guys, think about this for a second. I had this thought. We don't know what to do with sin when people are honest and real about it. Could you imagine if King David, later in his life, came to our Weekender? The staff goes, "We got some weird Weekender paperwork."

"What happened?"

"Well, you know, he had an affair, and then he killed the guy, and this is his second marriage, but he has repented."

Could King David be a member of our church? So many churches would say, "No." This is not just a problem in the church. We don't know how to restore people. Why don't people want to restore people? Because we want justice...except if it's us. We want to have the ability to continue to play the victim card and remind people of what they did to us and how horrible it was.

Look at what Paul says here. I want you to see this. I love the apostle Paul. Verse 10: ***"Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs."***

Here's what Paul says: "Guys, I forgive this guy." In fact, the reason we think he's probably not the guy in 1 Corinthians 5 is it seems like this guy sinned against Paul. By the way, notice Paul doesn't name names. Paul doesn't gossip. Paul keeps the circle as small as possible for as long as possible. Paul goes, "Look. He sinned against me and you." Maybe he was trying to do reputation destruction.

Then Paul says something we just need to see. He says, "Guys, I forgive him." How many of you need to forgive somebody so the people around you can see you forgive? Guys, we don't know what anything is. Go ahead and try to explain forgiveness to somebody. Here's the problem: they've never seen it.

They have to go watch *Les Misérables* to see it. They didn't see it in your home, so they have to go watch *Les Misérables*. You're like, "Why am I fascinated with this story?" Because it's a story of forgiveness, and you've never seen it. Parents, if you're going to fight with each other... I know that's an in-house debate. "Do we fight in front of the kids or do we go back to the room and fight back there, and then we come back out?"

Whatever you do, however you fight... You fight in the bedroom, and then you come out and act like you didn't fight. Whatever. Whenever you do fight or whenever you sin against each other, how about forgiving one another so the kids can see forgiveness? How about forgiving your kids so they can experience forgiveness? Forgiven people forgive people.

Okay. Why are we not good at restoring? We're not good at restoring for a couple of reasons. First, it's messy. I heard a story (this was not in our city or anything) about a church. A staff person comes in. Look. I feel kind of messy even giving you this



example. I'm like, "What are they going to think?" even as I share this, but I'm going to do it. So, this guy came in, a staff guy in a large church in a different city.

A staff guy comes in to the pastor and says, "Hey, man. Dude, I messed up. I cheated on my wife. It was a one-time thing, and I told her, and I'm repentant, and we're trying to..." The pastor is telling me this story, and he said, "We had to decide. What do you do? So we said, 'We're going to try to restore this guy.' We gave him a six-month sabbatical, and we said, 'We're going to pay you for all your counseling. We're going to get this marriage restored.'"

Well, that wasn't the answer his wife wanted. She thought they were being too soft on him. They were trying to let him keep his job so he could provide for the family, but... Again, I don't know who's right in this situation. That's why it's messy. The wife goes on Facebook and starts to call out the church. Now do you know why people don't do this stuff? It's so easy to just go, "You're dead to me! No severance. Goodbye."

It's messy. Here's why it's messy. We're going to restore people here, and when we restore people here, there are going to be some of you, the loud minority on *this* side... "You're being too hard on him." Then there will be the loud minority on *this* side. "You're not being hard enough on him." So it's messy.

Secondly, we've never seen it. I don't know what it looks like. What does it look like for a Community Group leader to have some sin exposed in their life and take a season off, but maybe two or three years later...? I was talking to a pastor this last week. He said he had a guy in an elder process in his church. This is another true story. This is in real time.

A guy in the elder process gets a DUI. It's revealed he had a huge drinking problem he never told anyone about. He was telling me this story this week because I'm talking about restoring. He said, "I've got a story that might encourage you." He said, "Five years ago, this elder had this DUI, and it came out. He totally repented. He went to A.A., and he has been four years free. He's back in our elder process."

Now, some of you can't say, "Amen," but hopefully you could one day. And we don't do it because it's a lot of work. It's not just messy; it's a lot of work. The reason I'm talking about this is because Jesus loved to restore people. I mean, the final story we have in the Gospels is restoration.

You'd better love that story. You may need that story one day. You know, 40 days... That's not that long of a time. "We need years and years and years." For Jesus it was 40 days. And don't think it was a small sin. He denied Christ three times when he needed him the most after he warned him not to do it.

There are three options when somebody sins in a grievous way. There's the *quick fix*. We don't believe in that. Let me be clear. We don't believe in enabling people, not dealing with the heart issues, not seeing repentance. We don't believe in that. That does happen in churches. It's like, "Well, this person is too important to our organization, so we just enable him or her to do their thing." We're not into that.

We also are against the *one and done*. You are not the worst thing you've ever done. Thank God. By the way, when someone sins... Say they were at 75 out of 100 on a leadership capacity. They're a small group leader or something like that. They sin grievously. They disqualify themselves for a season. Guess what? They don't go to negative 10,000; they go to zero.

The problem in churches is we think if someone sins they go to negative 10,000. They go back to zero, and they can come back to 75 in most cases. We believe in *supervised restoration*. That's the third biblical option. It means we have people, we have a process, and we're very careful with it. We want to see true repentance, but we want to reaffirm our love. We want to forgive and comfort that that person might not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.

### **03 THE PAIN OF MAKING CHOICES & NOT BEING ABLE TO DO EVERYTHING**

The first type of pain is the pain of causing others pain. The second type of pain is the pain of going through all of the hard things to restore people and forgive them. The third type of pain is the pain of not being able to do everything and having to make choices. I'll show you this. This will be quick.

Verse 12: *"When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me..."* That sounds amazing, Paul. *"...my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia."*

Paul asked people to pray for open doors. That was his thing. That's actually one of his favorite prayer requests. He didn't pray for a lot of miracles; he prayed for open doors. He didn't pray just "Convert this person." He said, "Lord, open a door for me to tell them about Jesus." Okay. That's a good lesson to learn.

So, Paul prayed for open doors. In a couple of his letters Paul says, "Will you please pray that an open door will open for me?" In one place he celebrates. I think this is at the end of 1 Corinthians. He says, "A wide door for effective ministry has opened." But sometimes a door opens and you don't walk through it.

I ask this question all the time in my life. "Is this a door or is this a distraction?" Paul says, "I had this major opportunity. It was an open door for ministry in Troas." He says, "But when I got there, I also realized, 'Wait a second. I don't know where one of my best friends and ministry partners... Where's Titus, and how is he doing?'"

I'm going to explain this. In your life and ministry (I'm talking to every Christian, because every Christian has a life, and every Christian should have a ministry), you need to live in the tension between going to Troas and finding Titus. Here's what I mean. Paul says his spirit is not at rest.

Pay attention, by the way, to what bothers you. I mean, things that bother you don't bother other people. "Why does this bother me?" Because it's your problem. Literally, it's your problem. It doesn't bother anyone else. Pay attention to what bothers you. Paul says, "My spirit is not at rest."

Think about this. He says, "I have this opportunity to preach the gospel to people who have never heard of it." No Bible, no believer, no building. This is an unreached people group. "And I said, 'Nah, I'm not doing that right now, because I have to go take care of one person.'"

We can't forget the one in the midst of the many. This is the temptation in big churches and big ministries especially. We get excited. Look at this room...the many. We're about the one. We did a whole initiative called *ONE*. The gospel goes forward one conversation at a time, one relationship at a time, one individual Bible study with a person at a time, and one invitation at a time to one person.

I'll just spend a few minutes on this. Paul is talking about the tension (I'll give you the categories we use here) between mission and ministry. *Mission* means there are always new people to reach for Jesus. By the way, this is a tension to manage, not a problem to solve. Every church, every Christian, if they're being faithful, is going to have to live in the tension of going to Troas and finding Titus, of doing mission and doing ministry.

*Mission* is "Let's reach as many new people as possible." The problem is when those new people are reached, they need to be discipled, their marriage needs help, their kids are struggling, they're addicted to something, they need to forgive someone, and they need to get connected to community.

I just want to explain this. Here, we're always thinking about how to reach one more. How do we reach the people far from God and close to us, but then how do we take care of the people God has already given us? Why do we talk about the Weekender so much? It's our way to say, "We're trying to find Titus."

That's what we're trying to do with the Weekender: find Titus. Where is he? Who here needs help? Who here needs to be disciplined? Who wants to be cared for? Who wants to be enfolded and engrafted into the life of our church? But the reason we plant churches, send missionaries, and challenge you guys to be on mission where you live, learn, work, and play is we have to go to Troas.

Here's how this works with a family. Let me just say this and bring it down even more practically, I hope, for all of us here. You have to take care of your family as the primary responsibility. Your family is the first church and the first mission field. Of course, this is amplified in full-time ministry, but there are a lot of pastors who have grown a big church and lost their family. They went to Troas; they lost Titus.

Let me even say this. Hear me say this. Hopefully you know what I mean when I say this. Give me the benefit of the doubt again. Your Community Group, at one level, is more important than you reaching new people for Jesus. Here's why I say that. If you're in a great Community Group, they're going to challenge you to reach new people for Jesus.

If you're in a good Community Group, you're going to be healthy. If you're in a good Community Group, you'll be needed and needy and you'll help them be healthy. This is why we say here the people who minister to people are more important than the people they minister to.

Everybody is equally important...I get it...because Christ died for them and they're made in the image of God, but we say the people who minister to people are more important than the people they minister to. Why would we say that? Because if you take care of the people who minister to people, all of the people under them get ministered to.

There's the pain of causing others pain. There's the pain of forgiving. There's the pain of not being able to do everything. Paul is like, "I wish I could teleport. I wish I could be omnipresent, but I have to constantly choose between what I'm going to do." That leads to the final thing Paul gives us.

#### **04 PAUL ENDS WITH PERSPECTIVE IN THE PAIN**

Paul gives us perspective in the pain. Verse 14: *"But thanks be to God..."* It's like, "What? You just lost Titus. You're writing painful letters. The church isn't restoring people." *"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal*

*procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere."* Paul gives them perspective in their pain.

We've talked about this a lot here, I think. When you're growing as a human, maturing as an adult, or growing as a leader... One of the ways you can help people grow is you can help them with their perspective. "All right. You're going to college, and here's what's going to happen in college. Here's what your dorm is going to be like, and here's what these four years..." You give them perspective and expectation.

Paul is giving them perspective, and he says, "Guys, I'm really thankful, and I'm really hopeful." Isn't that awesome? He says, "I'm thankful because God leads us in triumphal procession." That would be a great way to think about life. What should I do? When I look back, I should be thankful. When I look forward, I should be hopeful.

This triumphal procession... What does this mean? Paul is taking this Roman triumphal procession, which I'm not going to get into all of the details about. You can Google it and read about it. It was for a general who had won a battle, and it had to be a certain size of battle that he won.

If he won this battle, and if he captured the king, and if he got all of the people who were fighting against him as captives... If he could do all that, then they would throw a massive parade for the general. This is going to make a lot more sense in a minute when I read more and explain more.

You have to remember, guys... You have Netflix and TV. We see amazing things all the time. The average person in the first century never saw anything amazing their whole life. It was like the same horse, the same backyard. Nothing changed. But every once in a while there would be a Roman triumphal procession. It was the grandest thing they would see, and they would all come to see this.

They would come to see the general. The captives who had been taken captive would be walking in the front. The priest (this will make sense in a moment) had all this incense and this aroma, and it would smell a certain... All of the triumphal processions had this beautiful smell to them, which to the people was the smell of victory. Then in the very back was the general.

Basically, here's what Paul is saying. He's like, "Guys, I want to give you a picture of what's happening," and it's a picture of Jesus as a triumphant general who has won the war against Satan and is leading us in a victory parade home. That's a beautiful picture. Now, here's the problem with us. When we read that verse, that's not how the church often feels.

This is why theologians talk about the *church triumphant* and the *church militant*. The *church militant* is our perspective of the church while we're here. The church militant is like, "Dude, we just lost another one. Died too young." The church militant is like, "I shared the gospel, and nothing happened." The church militant is like, "Dude, everywhere I go in the world, they're persecuting Christians."

The church militant is like, "Paul is in prison again." The church militant is like, "What's happening? It feels like all we're doing is fighting and suffering and experiencing spiritual warfare." That's the church militant. The *church triumphant* is God's picture of the church and what's happening all over the world, and it's the picture of the church in heaven.

Now, we get glimpses. This is a beautiful thing. If you're part of a local church that's functioning biblically, flourishing, and being fruitful, you're going to see glimpses of the church triumphant. Every once in a while, I'll go talk to a couple of our staff. We'll just talk about the weekend.

It's like, "What happened this weekend?" It's like, "Did you see we baptized 35 people? Did you see we have three mission trips going on? Do you know we have so many people signed up to commission their kids? Did you hear what happened at the student ministry last night and all of the new people?" It's the church triumphant.

Here's what Paul says. Let me show you this. This is the image he gives us. What are we in this parade? He's the general. The captives are Satan and all of his enemies. It says this. Verse 15: ***"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life."***

He's going to say in a minute, "Who could handle this?" He basically says a Christian is the aroma of Christ in the world. Listen. This is why it makes sense if you have the image. He says the priest would have this incense, and when everybody who was part of the victory smelled the incense, they thought, "That is the smell of victory," but every captive who was heading to be executed smelled the same smell, the exact same smell, and said, "That is the smell of death."

Here's what I want us to understand. The beauty of the gospel is also the offense of the gospel. The offense of the gospel is the beauty of the gospel. I'm not going to call out churches by name, but there was this really big church, one of the most influential churches in our whole nation.

At Easter they said, "We're not going to use the words *cross* or *Calvary* or *resurrection*, because we're going to have a lot of new guests at Easter, and we don't

want to offend them." I'm thinking, "This is exactly what Easter is about." We have to talk about a bloody cross and an empty tomb.

See, here's what you do when you... This is kind of deep. Sometimes when you share the gospel with somebody, all you're doing is confirming them in their spiritual deadness. I hate to say it. It doesn't mean they're always going to be like that. It has always been amazing to me...

I've been doing college ministry, and before that youth ministry my whole life. You know, I preach for a living. I go into rooms and preach the exact same message, and I watch a bunch of different people respond. When I was on the college campus, you'd see guys get up and get angry and leave, and you'd see someone else come forward and cry and give their life to Christ at the end.

You tell some people they're a sinner, and they bristle. You tell other people they're a sinner, and they say, "I knew it. I knew it. I'm glad God is honest about me. I'm glad I can get some help." You tell some people Jesus died for their sins, and they're offended, because that means they're sinful and need someone to die for them. You tell other people Jesus died for their sins, and they say, "That's the most amazing thing ever. He wants to have a relationship with me?"

Paul says we are the aroma of Christ to people. Then look at what he says. Verse 16: **"Who is sufficient for these things?"** That's where we're going to end...to ask that question together. I want you to know this. The great apostle Paul... This doesn't happen that often, but every once in a while, he gets so overwhelmed by what he's writing he just ends it with a question.

In Romans, chapter 11... I mean, it's a deep chapter. Chapters 9, 10, and 11 are about the sovereignty of God and salvation and the plan for the Jews. It's deep. You can go read it. At the very end of Romans 11, Paul goes, **"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things."**

Literally, this is what I want you to have when you leave here this morning. I want you to have a sense of wonder. That's what Paul is saying was sufficient. "I can't believe I get to do this. I cannot believe it. In my workplace, the aroma of Christ? Are you kidding me? I get to bring life to people?" You also get to bring death to people. "Who's sufficient for these things?"

What if you lived from a place of wonder? "I can't believe this is true." This is what Paul says. He ends with this. **"For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word..."** Do you know what a *peddler* was? It was someone who sold wine, but they wanted to

make more money, so they watered the wine down. That was a peddler. He says, "We don't do that. Here's what we do."

***"...but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ."*** Basically, at the end of the day, Paul goes, "Who's sufficient for these things?" and he certainly doesn't answer, "I am." Here's what makes us sufficient: we're sent by God, we give people God's Word, and we speak Christ.

We say here, "We don't write the mail; we just deliver it." We are God's messengers; we are not God's editors. God has given us this incredible ministry, and here's what we do. This is where I want us to end. He says, "We speak Christ." Wow! What is Christ? Christ is the one who suffered pain for us. Christ is the one who in his first triumphal procession...

We just read about the second one that's happening now, but in his first triumphal procession, he comes riding humbly on a donkey, and he's going to come back one day from the sky, splitting it in half. We speak Christ. Why? Because Jesus Christ experienced physical, emotional, and spiritual pain to do exactly what pain does. It bridges the gap between where you are and where you could be.

Because of what Jesus did in his life, death, and resurrection, we can be forgiven. Some of you need to be forgiven. We can be restored. We can be sons and daughters of God. So, let's go to God in prayer together and in an idea of wonder say, "Who is sufficient for these things?"

Lord, who's sufficient for this? None of us. You will make us sufficient by the grace of God. None of us ourselves are sufficient, so we're going to do this together. Lord, I just want to pray for people in here. I want to pray for people who need to write a letter. They need to write a letter to their dad. They need to write a letter to their husband or wife. They need to write a letter to their kid who's older now and lives somewhere else.

Lord, I pray for people to be restored in this church. Someone might need to be restored. We're going to be the place to do it by the grace of God. Lord, would you make us the kinds of people that when people's lives fall apart, we're going to take sin seriously, but we're going to reaffirm our love. "Get over here. We're going to forgive you, and we're going to comfort you."

Lord, would you help us to have the tension in our ministries between going to Troas and finding Titus. Would every husband and wife view their family as the first church and the first mission field. Lord, would you give us perspective, as we often feel like we're the minority in the culture and nothing is happening and the gospel is not going



forward. Would you give us that perspective of the triumphal procession that makes us ask in a place of wonder, "Who is sufficient for these things?" In Jesus' name we pray, amen.