

May24: 2nd Corinthians 11-13

Chapter 11

Here Paul begins reprimanding the Corinthians and laying into the “super apostles” who seem to have led them astray. It seems that these “super apostles” really were like the prosperity gospel preachers today: very smooth talkers, charismatic speakers, burdening the people by guilting them into paying them “millions of dollars”, and worst of all preaching a false gospel! Paul is horrified that his infant church, his chaste bride of Christ, has been so led astray by these snake oil salesmen. Paul received financial support from the wealthier Philippian church while he was in Corinth. Beginning in vs. 16, Paul begins laying out his credentials for the Corinthians, boasting of his human credentials as a way to fight back against the criticisms the “super apostles” were sowing into the church. Paul feels terrible boasting like this, he says himself that he is acting like a fool, for he has been driven mad with a “divine jealousy” for the church. He boasts not only in his credentials, but also in all of the pain and suffering he’s endured for the sake of spreading the gospel. On top of all of the physical hardships, Paul feels constant anxiety for the wellbeing of the churches that he’s started (which comes up again and again in his writings as he waits to hear from this friend and that about how the churches are doing). Vs. 30 is an oath that what follows will be true, even though it seems unbelievable. Acts of the Apostles chronicles many of these episodes.

Chapter 12

Paul begins this chapter by putting boasting in perspective. Paul feels it is necessary, yet not appropriate to boast about himself, for no human being’s boast about themselves can compare to the incredible spiritual works God is accomplishing in our world. Paul shares a short aside about a person whom he knew around the time of his conversion to Christianity who received a vision from God of paradise –THAT person has room to boast about what God has done, but none of us have room to boast, except about our weaknesses, for God works through our weakness. No one knows exactly what Paul means by “thorn in the flesh.” Some believe Paul suffered from stigmata, others believe the “thorn in the flesh” was a person who tormented flesh or another physical ailment. The paradox of our cross-bearing faith is that Christ is most present in suffering, and that God uses our weaknesses as strengths in the gospel.

Vs. 14-21, Paul expresses fatherly love for the church, and a desire to spend on and be spent by the community, rather than for the community to

support him. He questions the church about the accusations that have been swirling around about him, with the understanding that of course they aren't true. Paul is honest with them about his fears, and this vulnerability about fears and weaknesses is a cornerstone of what makes for healthy community, and especially for a healthy leader of the gospel.

Chapter 13

Paul concludes this letter by urging the community to undergo necessary self-reflection. Paul's tone is now pastoral, noting that his letter has been severe so that he won't have to be so harsh when he comes to them in person (which ironically was one of the first charges raised against him by the super apostles in chapter 10).