



*“I am content with weaknesses, insults,
hardships, persecutions, and constraints,
for the sake of Christ;
for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)*

I find that I usually have one of two reactions to this line from Paul. Either I look at Paul’s sufferings and think: “Yikes, that’s a lot to go through!” or I look at what he gained and think: “Okay, that’s worth it.” Paul writes this to show us the importance of relying on God, and not on our own strength.

There are three things to consider: the message Paul preached, the persecution he endured, and the strength that God gave him to persevere. The message he preached was the gospel of Christ. While many of us today are very familiar with this message, the people Paul wrote to had only heard about the message rather recently, and still needed instruction. And so, Paul writes letters like the one we hear from this week as a way of giving instruction in the faith and spreading the message of the gospel while he is traveling to other cities that have not yet heard the good news. He has recognized the call he received from God to preach to all nations, because the message of the gospel is meant for everyone.

But not everyone is willing to hear and follow the gospel of Christ. Christ invites all of us to come closer to Him, but oftentimes we need to change something about our lives in order to move closer. It may be a habit of anger and lashing out at people, or we may be too concerned with wealth and power, or maybe we hold a grudge against somebody that we just can’t forgive. Whatever it is, the gospel challenges us to become better people. When we preach this message, we often come face to face with the anger of a world which does not want to change. This is the same anger which led to Paul’s many sufferings and trials. Paul called the message of Christ “a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23) because it seemed so strange and incomprehensible to them that they simply could not accept it. And so, they pushed him away, tried to silence him, and persecuted him.

But the persecutions which Paul faced were not the end of the story. God gave him the strength he needed to persevere. This strength is more than simply “pushing through” to get the job done, but rather it is the strength needed to preach the gospel joyfully, even when faced with harsh trials. This strength is offered to us too if we are willing to rely on Christ to give it to us. While we may not face quite the same persecutions as Paul did, we are still called to preach the gospel, and to spread the good news so that it can change others just as it changes us.