

2 Corinthians

“Winning Through Weakness”

III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10

D. 10:1-13:10 Winning Through Weakness

2 Corinth. 12:1-6

“Caught up into Paradise”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 1 I had a dream

III. Vs. 2-4 Paradise

IV. Vs. 5-6 At home while away

I. Intro.

The remarkable thing about Paul’s boasts (*which he willing admits is foolishness*) is that they are not in the things that most folks would brag about. There was:

- No mention of impressive degrees from prestigious schools.
- No mention of the long list of books and papers he has written.
- No mention of the numbers of people who have become followers of Jesus.
- No mention of famous folks he was associated with.
- No mention of the sizes of the churches he has pastured.

It was the contention of the false teachers in Corinth that the reason he didn’t speak of these things is because he didn’t have anything to brag about. But that is simply not the case! Instead what Paul boasts about is the things that caused him to become humble and broken: beatings, fastings, imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, dangers from every side. He then included the one event that caused him to see ministry from a completely

different view; when all that he had dreamed about all of his accomplishments, education and experiences that he had thought made him successful was flushed down the toilet, kicked to the curb. I believe most Americans are suffering from an identity crisis that seems to be getting worse. I further believe that we Christians are not immune from this disease in fact we may be in some ways more susceptible in catching it. We long to find our identity in something other than Jesus; the church we attend, the denomination, the ministry we are involved in etc. It is time that we flush all that down the toilet like Paul had 20 years earlier in Damascus.

You would think that this would have settled the issue with these false teachers but Paul in chapter 12 describes a personal experience that finally sounds like something that others would see worth boasting about the time he was caught into Paradise and heard things that he declares is not lawful for a man on earth to speak about. Why does he mention this? Well the answer will be revealed in verses 7-10 as Paul speaks about a thorn in the flesh to buffet him from pride.

II. Vs. 1 I had a dream

Vs. 1 In Acts chapter 1 after the ascension of Jesus into heaven prior to Pentecost the Church faced its first crisis and it was of leadership, specifically who would fill the position vacated by Judas? As they gathered Peter outlined the necessary qualifications to be an apostle and in verse 22 Peter says that they from the *“beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”* I mention this to explain why Paul now felt it necessary to share this experience of being taken up into the third heaven. You see these false teachers

knew Paul had come to Jesus after all these events so how could he be an apostle? So he starts this by saying in verse 1 *“It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:”* Paul actually saw the risen Jesus therefore he was a witness of the resurrection of Jesus. Perhaps you are thinking well didn’t Paul have that encounter with Jesus at his conversion of the way to Damascus? Nope, as we read that account in Acts 9 Paul only says that He “HEARD” the Lord not that he “SAW” the Lord. So the event Paul mentions here is the time he physically met the Lord and saw and heard from the Lord. We get a further clarification from Paul on this encounter in Galatians 1:12 where Paul says concerning the gospel he preached that; *“I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Then in Galatians 2:6 speaking of a meeting Paul had with the “Who’s Who” in Jerusalem, the leadership of the early Church (James the ½ brother of Jesus, Peter, John and others) Paul says, Galatians 2:6 *“But from those who seemed to be something-- whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.”*

III. Vs. 2-4 Paradise

Vs. 2-4 I call your attention to several things:

- a. First Paul refers in verse 1 to *“visions and revelations”* which is plural and means that Paul had more than one encounter with Jesus.
- b. Second note that Paul in his humility is reluctant to say, *“Hey, I had many encounters with the risen Jesus”* instead he says, *“I know a man who 14 years ago... was caught up into the third heaven.”* So how do we know that Paul is

making reference to himself? First we have statement in verse 6 where he says
“lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.”

Then in verse 7 he says that because of the *“abundance of revelations”* a thorn in the flesh was given to me.

So what do we know of this encounter? Well we know that it occurred 14 years earlier but we don't know if he was taken up bodily or not and we don't know what he heard or saw. Now if I was to write out a commentary on what Paul saw and heard 14 years ago it wouldn't be worth the paper it was written on. It is interesting to me that he calls the location *“the third heaven”* and also calls it *“paradise.”* The word *“Paradise”* comes from a Persian word which means a *“walled garden”*. When a Persian King wished to bestow a special honor on someone dear to them, he made them a *“companion of the garden”* and gave them the exclusive right to walk in the royal gardens with him in close companionship. That is what Paul describes as the dwelling place of the Lord! The Jewish terminology of heaven was viewed three ways:

1. First is the atmosphere around the earth, the clouds, etc.
2. Then beyond that we here in Montana can see on a clear night a second heaven made up of the planets, moon, stars, and other galaxies.
3. Finally you have the third heaven the invisible realm where God's throne is, a place he calls Paradise. It's the invisible dimension of life because we can't see it for the most part unless God chooses to reveal it to us as in the case of the apostle John, Stephen at his stoning and Paul here just to name a few.

If you trace back the 14 year date from the date of the writing of this letter it makes this encounter somewhere around the time when he came out to Tarsus, back to Antioch (some ten years after his conversion). The other thing Paul tells us is that whether this was in his body or out of his body he wasn't sure and if it was out of his body he didn't miss it. When we are home with the Lord who cares about the old tent! Home is the place where you can relax, be at ease, kick off your shoes, stretch out and feel comfortable. That apparently is what being with the Lord is like. Perhaps this is the reason he gives this account in the third person, because it was almost like it happened to someone else as he was not aware of his body.

Another thing Paul tells us is that what he heard he could not tell us about. He must have heard things that contributed to his understanding of life and reality. But he could not describe these things in earthly words just like John and the Old Testament prophets who had visions of the Lord, visions of heaven, were never able to quite accurately describe what they saw. They had to put it in symbols using words prefaced with "LIKE". The only commonality between all these visions of heaven is that not a single person could accurately put into human language what they witnessed. What this reveals to us in this realm is that when we are with the Lord our knowledge will be vastly increased. We will know of secrets we never dreamed existed, secrets that are so beyond us now they cannot be put into language.

IV. Vs. 5-6 At home while away

Vs. 5-6 But instead of boasting in this experience and using it to put those false teachers in place instead he says, *"If I bragged about this encounter even though it would be 100%*

true he wouldn't want anyone to use it to get their eyes off of Jesus and on to him."

Calvin wrote that such inexpressible things were given to Paul personally as he was a man who suffered enough to break a thousand hearts and needed to be strengthened thus he was given a greater view of glory in order to keep him afloat through the beatings, imprisonments and shipwrecks of his ministry. The very fact that Paul for 14 years has never once mentioned this experience he had with the Lord tells us that such an experience despite its personal revelation and powerful encounter with the risen Jesus what he experienced had "NO bearing or importance to the gospel" else he clearly would have spoken of it every chance he got. Consider the amount of times Paul had shared his testimony of his conversion and how the Lord transformed on the road to Damascus, yet here in this amazing revelation Paul has never spoken of it until now 14 years later and that only to say that he won't talk about it. Paul had learned that no matter how impressed folks would be of any person, talent or experience none of those things matter when compared with the person and work of Jesus. Paul is saying, *"I don't want you to see me based upon what I experienced mystically but rather upon how I lived among you practically."* What a lesson we can learn from our brother Paul who didn't want to block anyone's view of the most incredible person there has ever been, JESUS. Paul practiced *"invisibility"* so that all could see the *"Invisible God"* who alone is the only One worthy of following! Think of all the books there are out there in the Christian book stores about these experiences that of folks that went to heaven and came back writing about it. Then think of Paul who went to heaven and for 14 years has never mentioned once until he was forced to do so and then only to say he wasn't going to talk about it. Why talk about heaven when you can talk about the one who created heaven?