

2 Corinthians 12 pt. 1 v. 1-10

V.1

[2Co 12:1 NASB] 1 Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

V.2-5

These verses seem to be quite cryptic at first reading because Paul leaves out a few details that would complete the picture for us.

When this occurs people love to hypothesize in order to fill in the gaps of understanding because we are uncomfortable with partial or limited knowledge.

BUT, we must make sure that we are not building doctrine or theological truths off of incomplete information, that is very dangerous. - which some like to do, especially with verses like this that deal with the supernatural or unknown.

Keep in mind Paul makes clear that even he is unsure of exactly what transpired.

Now, while Paul speaks of this man who was greatly honored - he does so in the third person. While this is the case most understand the subject of these verses to be Paul himself.

People like to guess what the point is, and what the “inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak...” are - well they are **INEXPRESSIBLE!**

Paul came away with the understanding that whatever was heard was no for public knowledge.

There is precedent for this in God's Word.

REF. Daniel & Revelation

[Dan 12:4, 13 NKJV] 4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." ... 13 "But you, go [your way] till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

[Rev 10:4 NKJV] 4 Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

Paul's point is that whoever the subject of this account is, perhaps himself, that they experienced something incredible, miraculous, heavenly.

But Paul goes on to say - I will only boast in my weaknesses, not his strengths. So, in this he demonstrates a powerful truth.

One of contrasts. In these first verses the subject experienced a tremendous, supernatural, unusual, not completely understood, God-directed experience.

And yet Paul, boast in his infirmities - resisting the temptation to write a treatise on the glorious blessing he writes about his weaknesses.

A. R. FAUSSET - "...he dwells not on the glory done to himself, but on the *infirmity* which followed it, as displaying Christ's power...Such glory belonged not to *him*, but the *weakness did*...His glorying in his other

self...was not in order to give glory to his fleshly self, but to bring out in contrast the "infirmities" of the latter, that Christ might have all the glory."

When we walk with Jesus we will see glorious things!

[Jhn 14:12 NKJV] 12 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater [works] than these he will do, because I go to My Father.

Have we not in our own lives seen miraculous healings, spiritual re-births, lives changed that we perhaps believed outside the possibility of change? Yes, and we will see more.

Peter, James and John saw a glorious heavenly scene as they walked with the Lord.

[Mat 17:1-6 NKJV] ... Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. 4 Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." 5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard [it], they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid.

But Peter, James and John, also suffered. Their experience with the transfigured Christ was part of their walk, but so was their weakness. So was their future failure. So was there inadequacy.

We may have similar experiences as we walk with Jesus but we must too come to the place where we not only acknowledge our weakness but embrace our weaknesses.

[Psa 144:3-4 NKJV] 3 LORD, what [is] man, that You take knowledge of him? [Or] the son of man, that You are mindful of him? 4 Man is like a breath; His days [are] like a passing shadow.

Speaking to God in regard to the sin of Sodom[Gen 18:27 NKJV] 27 Then Abraham answered and said, "Indeed now, I who [am but] dust and ashes have taken it upon myself to speak to the Lord:

How is it that we, comprised of dust, are also comprised of God's Holy Spirit?

Tremendous weakness, and unmatched glory. AND, Jesus Christ shares in every single bit of that. He felt it, knows our condition intimately.

This was Paul's condition.

V.6-7

We get the sense that Paul is speaking about himself.

He offers words of restraint so that others wouldn't think more highly of him than they ought to.

We learn something here about telling a tree by the fruit that it bears, or "what you see is what you get." In the most authentic and transparent form.

Paul writes that the church ought not think of him more highly than what was observable - what they saw and heard.

There is of course an application here for us as well.

Paul's words are refreshing too. He is keeping faith with his own exhortation on the subject to the Roman church.

[Rom 12:3 NKJV] 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think [of himself] more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

All we can truly tell about somebody is by their fruit - what we see, and ALSO what we hear.

This is born out in living life together - not in the Social Media world where we get everybody's highlight reel and fabricated holiness, and content generation rules the land.

It is in this influencer culture we live in that we expressly desire for others to think of us more highly than we deserve.

[Influencers in the wild slide?]

Real, authentic, meaningful knowledge of one another is lacking.

Certainly it is rare to encounter humble souls desiring to glory in their weakness while magnifying Christ's strength and grace.

May our Lord help us with this.

We find in verse 7 that Paul decided not to continue going on with this remembrance of glorious visions and revelation, but rather he is going to double down on magnifying his weaknesses and hardship.

This is where we surmise that Paul is in fact referring to himself in the above verses - when he speaks of the “abundance of revelations.”

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, in close fellowship with the Lord, realizes that his unique experience presented him with the unique opportunity to be exalted above measure.

AND he also realizes that the Lord kept him from that, how? Suffering.

In particular, severe physical suffering in the form of a persistent condition.

That is what Paul refers to when he describes his thorn in the flesh. Some physical affliction.

The point is one we have made already...even in the midst of glorious revelation, Paul suffers. The life of the Apostle, the life of the Christian, isn't “either, or” as the prosperity gospel presents.

The life of the saints is marked by glory AND suffering. It is marked by seeing people made whole while our bodies do deteriorate. It is sharing in the complete regeneration of our souls while still dealing with physical infirmity.

Why? In Paul's case the temptation of exaltation. Who is to be exalted in this kingdom? Not us! The Lord of all creation - Jesus Christ is to be exalted.

But, we have seen, and will see, that there are men and women in the kingdom who will seek to be exalted above measure. They seek to take a little of Jesus' shine for themselves. That is a dangerous game.

And one that Paul was not immune to. So God allowed him to be afflicted by who....Satan. Don't let that be lost.

Now Satan doesn't afflict everybody all the time, he's not God, he's not all powerful, all knowing, all present. He is a created being - subject to his creator.

And on occasion God allows Satan to afflict the saints - why, Paul says it..."lest I be exalted above measure...."

Paul came face to face with his own weakness, and he came face to face with his own ugliness.

He saw that he was prone to exaltation. And in his bodily affliction he was humbled. He saw his own frailty and need for divine intervention. This drove Paul to his knees in prayer.

V.8-9 Paul prays for relief

God doesn't always grant relief or healing...why? That we might dwell in Christ's grace.

Paul prayed three times! That's not too terribly many.

BUT, he also listened. Jesus spoke to him. He speaks to us.

He reminds Paul of grace and sufficiency and strength.

As a matter of fact Jesus says, "MY strength is made PERFECT IN WEAKNESS."

How different than being made perfect in our own strengths.

WE may at times think that Jesus demonstrates his complete power when we are at our best. While the Bible tells us that Jesus' power is on full display when we are weak.

Not only when we are weak in the tacit, unmentioned sense, wherein we alone know our weaknesses - but, as we see in Paul's case, when we glory in our weaknesses - when we vaunt our weakness, when we declare and when we rejoice in them and are glad of them.

How much different than our view of weakness where we know we have secret weaknesses, and we keep those between us and Jesus, and the facade we show to others is simply that - one layer deep.

Paul came to the understanding through the abundance of suffering that he was weak, he embraced that, he publicly displayed that, and, as Jesus spoke to him about His own power and sufficient grace - Paul came to know that if Jesus was lifted up in that weakness then he would much rather allow Jesus to be lifted up than himself.

And he desired to have communion and fellowship with the Spirit of Christ, which rested upon him in his weakness.

V.10 THEREFORE - having said all of that Paul drives the point home quite simply - Jesus Christ had brought Paul to a place where he saw his weakness and the sum of all of his vast suffering as a net gain.

He understood that sickness, being insulted and wounded by believers and unbelievers alike, living with unmet needs, being driven away and pursued violently, living in extreme anguish was all for Christ's sake.

What does that mean...for Christ's sake? Some have turned that into a phrase to express their disgust - almost as a curse.

But for Christ's sake, in the context of Paul's teaching here, means for his glory, that Christ would be lifted up, magnified, exalted -- and all as seen through the lense of suffering and weakness.

Paul closes with a paradox of sorts that makes perfect sense to the believer - for when I am weak, then I am strong.

We can never be stronger than Christ, than the Spirit of the Living God.

The best way to adopt his strength is by summarily dismissing any notion of or reliance upon our own power, acknowledging our own weakness and insufficiency as our basic self. In doing so we draw near to Christ and he shows himself strong. Even through weak, anxious, fearful, needy people like us.