

## COME TO VISIONS AND REVELATIONS OF THE LORD

### 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1 – 16



~ Our Spiritual Safari is not popular, friends; in fact, it is an outright offensive endeavor to some people, apparently — judging from the private correspondence I receive. Well, the strength of the Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for me, friends — how about you? Is He sufficient for you? With His strength, our safari is going to conclude with one additional report from second Corinthians — and then travel back in time to the historical period of Esther. To be called up into the throne room of God will be a remarkable experience we will all enjoy as believers someday; and we'll learn about that day in Esther but, in this leg of our expedition, Paul will provide a glimpse of insight to that day by revealing his experience of being called up to the third Heaven - and having lived to tell about it, too.

Space exploration was a remarkable subject of interest when I was young. Today, it hasn't panned out for mankind. First of all, there hasn't been a whole lot of space travel recently for mankind, per se; and when you look at the distance to, say, Andromeda, our sister star, we can safely say man hasn't been very far from this earth yet. The moon isn't very far, and the only need to go back to the moon would be to establish military oversight. When the Russian Sputnik went to the moon, they made the statement, *"... we have been to the other side of the moon, and we didn't see God."* Well, friends, they didn't go far enough. God is much farther away than the moon. In fact, you have to go *all the way* with God — to the third Heaven — if you want to see Him.

There are at least several hundred books on *"near-death"* and *"back from death"* experiences. I tend to doubt those who take a whole book to reveal what Paul and John tell us with very few words. The Word of God explicitly says, *"... no man has ascended up into Heaven."* That means if you are a man, you haven't been there. Physical death for man is a one-way door. Once you walk through it, you aren't coming back here. I know many disagree; and they have a right to be wrong.

We also have John going up to Heaven from the isle of Patmos. John was called up into Heaven in Revelation. We know John was called into the third Heaven where the throne of God is, and that God called John “*like a trumpet*” to “*come up hither.*” Then, God showed John the “*things which must be hereafter.*” That’s very important to understand; because we are still in the here and now — not the hereafter.

The Lord Jesus is the only One Who could have told the apostles anything about Heaven; but Jesus said very little about it. Overall, John doesn’t have much to say about Heaven, either — not in any of his epistles, Gospel or his prophecy. Lazarus came back from the dead, and he didn’t have *ANYTHING* to say over at Mary and Martha’s house when they all had supper with Jesus — not a word — about anything! And Lazarus had seen Jesus speak across that great gulf condemning the rich man. Even in his direct dealings with the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul doesn’t have much to say about any of those instances. Here, Paul doesn’t have *anything* to say about this trip to the third Heaven....

***<sup>1</sup> It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.***

***<sup>2</sup> I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth) such an one caught up to the third heaven.***

~ Paul suffered a repulsive existence for his ministry – we saw that in our last report. No man can say he has suffered more than Paul suffered for the Gospel of Christ. If you haven’t read our last report, I suggest you go back and do so now; and Paul was permitted by God to write just this little bit down. Some of us like to think we’re doing something special for the Lord — but none of us have endured much for Him. Frankly, we should be very careful about singing certain songs such as, “*.... Jesus, I my cross have taken, all to leave and follow Thee. Naked, poor, despised and forsaken – Thou, from hence, my all shall be.*” Well, I have heard that sung by very wealthy self-professing believers who haven’t given up anything – I can tell you that.

What place does the Lord Jesus occupy in your life, friends? Does Christ really mean anything to you? Is Jesus real in your life? There is so much so-called “*testimony*” that has so little to say about the Lord Jesus — but a whole lot to boast of concerning the person giving the testimony. I sometimes wonder if certain people really even need Jesus or not. See, the Lord Jesus must be glorified – not us. Paul suffered like no man has ever suffered for the sake of glorifying Christ.

**Acts 14:**<sup>19</sup> *And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead ~*

Those who did this to Paul wouldn’t have left him unless they were pretty sure he was dead, friends. So, that can only mean God raised Paul from the dead. Paul wasn’t even sure if he was in reality when he describes this experience. Was Paul just unconscious and seeing visions? Well, even Paul wasn’t dogmatic about it because it didn’t matter. What did matter is that, either way, the result was the same; Paul had been called up to the third Heaven....

***<sup>3</sup> And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth)***

***<sup>4</sup> How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.***

~ When a man writes about these types of things — regarding near death experience and all that stuff — they write ponderous, never-ending series of tomes and magnum opuses. Well, the man who was let over the wall in a basket is the one who was called up to the paradise of the third Heaven according to the Word of God – and he was the one who declined to write it down for whatever reason. It’s not lawful to utter so many unspeakable words. Don’t think so? Read verse four again. Do you believe the Bible is the Word of God? This is like walking into a spider’s web, isn’t it? Man, having said so much, could never have said so little. There’s no sales pitch here, friends. Take it or leave it....

***<sup>5</sup> Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.***

***<sup>6</sup> For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.***

***<sup>7</sup> And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.***

~ Paul would have told you all about what was physically wrong with him; but he wasn't going to talk about the third Heaven because he was told not to. Today, Satan tries to remove the genuine Christian from the earthly scene with sickness, disease – or remove them by infecting their thorn in the flesh. We have no idea what Paul's thorn in the flesh was because we aren't told; just as we don't know what Paul saw up there in the third Heaven. The thorn in the flesh was given to Paul to keep him humble; to keep him from exalting himself above measure — particularly considering the vision that he had just had about Heaven. Of course, we see the Lord Jesus Christ Himself speak directly from Heaven in verse nine....

***<sup>8</sup> For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.***

***<sup>9</sup> And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.***

***<sup>10</sup> Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.***

~ God's strength is made perfect in our weakness. Many people cannot accept that truth. If you aren't weak, then Christ is not strengthened in you; and the Lord isn't using you. God answered Paul's prayer three times to remove the thorn in the flesh. Each time, God said, "no." Most of us keep

asking the Lord for things to which God has already said, “no.” See, there comes a time when we will have to decide if we believe the Bible is really the Word of God or not. Is God’s grace sufficient for you to bear your thorn? Paul gloried in his infirmities – not in the fact that he had received a vision. You might turn this all over in your mind the next time you hear about someone who had some great dream or vision. God only uses the weak man – not the strong man – not ever....

***11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.***

***12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.***

~ There were certain signs given to an apostle in the day in which we are studying; and only the apostles had those sign gifts — and only at that time. Healing the sick, raising the dead, and talking in tongues was amongst those gifts. In the Galatian country alone, there was likely *fifty* dialects and differing languages. Well, Paul could speak all of them. God said the Gospel of Christ must go out to the world by human beings. In the Roman Empire, I think it was important to get it out in a hurry, too. So, the signs for the apostle’s credibility ended with the apostles themselves; and with the canons of Scripture being closed. We know tongues – and all “*sign gifts*” - have ended today because we have a New Testament — and because the apostles are all gone....

***13 For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.***

***14 Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.***

***15 And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.***

***16 But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile.***

~ So, our Spiritual Safari ends this leg of our expedition with a rule that's being broken everywhere today – "*the parents for the children*" – verse fourteen. The more Paul loved these people, the less he was loved in return. Paul wasn't after their stuff – he was after their hearts. They didn't appreciate that. Paul wanted them to understand sound doctrine; so, he dealt with his thorn in his flesh.

God sealed Paul's lips about his visit to Heaven because Heaven is too wonderful to contemplate. Very little is said about Heaven in the Word of God. That's because it cannot be described properly, correctly or completely in a human language. I still want to go there – because I want to meet the Person Who is there – the Lord Jesus Christ; and we're going to fix our eyes on Him as we grow in our Spiritual Safari. Doing so is going to make our pilgrimage expedition down here much easier. The burning sands of the desert we're going to cross as we return to the Book of Esther won't be so bad if we keep our eyes on Jesus. If we cannot find Christ on every page of Esther, we'll be in serious trouble. Remember, we're looking for Jesus on every page of Holy Writ ~

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