



# PITWM VERSE BY VERSE

## 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

### LESSON: PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH — May 29, 2022

#### INTRODUCTION:

Chapter 11:23-33 describe Paul's suffering for the church. The pain and persecution of what Paul endured is almost inconceivable.

1. He was imprisoned often 11:23a
2. He was whipped times without number 11:23b
  - a. He received 39 lashes from the Jews on five occasions 11:24
  - b. He was beaten with rods on three occasions 11:25a
3. He faced death time and again 11:23c
  - a. He faced danger from flooded rivers 11:26b
  - b. He faaced danger from robbers 11:26c
  - c. He faced danger from both Jewish and Gentile mobs 11:26d
4. He was stoned once 11:25b
5. He was shipwrecked three times 11:25c
6. He spent a terror filled night and day on the open sea 11:25d
7. He traveled many weary miles 11:26a
8. He spent sleepless nights 11:27a
9. He knew constant hunger and thirst 11:27b
10. He was often cold and naked 11:27c
11. He experienced harrowing escapes being lowered out of a window into a basket down the wall 11:32-33
12. He bore daily the burden for the many churches he had started 11:28-31

#### LESSON: I. PAUL'S VISION OF HEAVEN 2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-4

**(2<sup>nd</sup>)12:1 It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.** Paul had just spoken about his suffering and persecutions, what might earlier seem like boasting, but it's not. It's not necessary, practical, or self-serving; it's really unprofitable for him no doubt to glory.

It just looks like Paul is a little fed-up of all the naysayers of his calling. The false teachers and the critics of Paul were saying that he lacked in spiritual experiences, that his salvation and ministry were suspect because he had not had the kind of experiences they were privileged to have. They thought to themselves and questioned others: *'How could Paul be called of God if he has not had spiritual visions and revelations from the Lord? We have had them.'* *'If he has really been called of God, why has he not had them?'*

So, Paul had to defend himself against his critics. We're gonna always have critics that are placed in our lives that will cause us to fight or be in flight. This circumstance was not just about Paul, It's about the church he started, it's about how the church saw him as a leader, and for the church to be delivered from false teachers. Pray for the head pastor, the head of every department, the head of every auxiliary etc. This is the reason he shares this spiritual experience of visions and revelations of the Lord. This is his way of fighting back; his proof.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>)12:2 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 is really talking about an experience he had. He is referring to himself as the man. So, he spoke "I knew a man**



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*in Christ...*" He himself is the man, nobody special, but he's in Christ when the vision experience came to him.

1. This vision experience happened 14yrs ago.
2. This vision experience was so real that he could not tell (knew not) whether he was in the body or whether out of the body. He just couldn't tell. But God knows of such.
3. This vision experience is where he was caught up into the third heaven. We know of Paul's experience and change on the Damascus Road. His salvation and call from God was real. But Paul describes something entirely different—being caught up into the third heaven, the dwelling place of God, where the presence and the glory of the Lord are fully manifested and experienced. He called it paradise (v.4). The clouds; the sky is the first heaven. The sun, moon, stars, and planets; outer space is the second heaven. Jesus told the man on the cross, "*Today shall thou be with me in paradise*" (Lk.23:43)—the third heaven where God lives.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) 12:3 And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth);**— Paul says it again that he could not tell (knew not) whether such a man (himself) was in the body or whether out of the body. He just couldn't tell. But God knows.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) 12:4 How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.** God knows how he was caught up into paradise (the third heaven), and how he heard unspeakable words which were unlawful for him to utter. This meant that it was for Paul's hearing and Paul alone. God did forbid him to reveal or share what was said. That means people are not ready to receive these things.

## II. PAUL'S THORN IN THE FLESH 2 CORINTHIANS 12:5-7

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) 12:5 Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.** A man with such spiritual experiences has a right to boast, but Paul just didn't want the people to get all caught up in the visions and revelations. He couldn't even talk about what happened in the visions or revelations. He didn't want to be put on a pedestal, so the only thing that he will boast in will be his infirmities; his weaknesses. God does not place infirmities upon us, but He is able to use them for good. "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love the God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*" Romans 8:28. Also, "*...that Christ's power may rest upon us*" 1 Cor.12:9d. Paul realizes that it is God's power that he can rest in. He realizes how God's power gets him through situations he cannot get through on his own.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) 12:6 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.** Paul could have proclaimed the truth of his experiences, but he would not, lest people begin to think too highly of him. Exalting the person who has had some unusual experience is always dangerous because you might begin to see him as more than who he is. Therefore, Paul kept those intimate experiences to himself. He only wanted people to know the testimony that he was called of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and that he is a witness for the Lord.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>) 12:7 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 lets us know that because of the abundance of revelations he had



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received from God, he was given a thorn in the flesh (something that irritates, frustrates, and nags him)—the messenger of Satan who came to buffet (cause pain; strike) him, lest he should be exalted (in the eyes of the people) above measure. When we look at it, we know that people have been coming against Paul, we know that they were not led by God, but the enemy of God, the messenger of Satan to cause pain, to strike at Paul's last nerve. Paul was forever defending himself to the people: People thought he was not sent by God; people opposed him; people were always divisive in the church. This *"type of thorn in the flesh"* comes through people Satan uses, but God will use it to humble you.

## III. PAUL'S CRY FOR RELIEF 2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-10

**(2<sup>nd</sup>)12:8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.** Paul called it *"this thing"*, meaning this problem. He wanted deliverance and relief from this situation. He wanted God to remove the thorn. Why? - Because it pricked and bothered him. It distracted him from his labor. It made him appear personally weak and sickly. Paul prayed and sought the Lord 3 times about it, that this thing would depart from him. Do we realize that God will not remove everything we ask Him to do, for He has purpose for it.

**(2<sup>nd</sup>)12:9 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.** The thorn was working for good, for it kept Paul from being puffed up, and secondly, God revealed His power in Paul. God says *"My grace is sufficient for you*. That means God's divine unmerited favor was sufficient for Paul. Even God's strength was made perfect in (Paul's) weakness." God allowed it to keep Paul humble. In Paul's weakness, God was protecting him, for then Paul could be covered in God's strength and not his own. God's power was strongest when Paul was weak. Therefore, *"Paul could gladly acknowledge that he would rather glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him."*

**(2<sup>nd</sup>)12:10 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.** Since Paul knows that the thorn wasn't removed and that God's grace was sufficient, he was glad to glory in his infirmities, now he says he takes pleasure...

- in infirmities, a general term meaning all kinds of sufferings and weaknesses whether moral or physical. The power of Christ can overcome any weakness or temptation for the believer.
- in reproaches, whether ridicule insult, slander, rumor, or whatever.
- in necessities, hardships, needs, deprivations, hunger, thirst, lack of shelter, or clothing, or any other necessity.
- in persecutions, verbal or physical attack, abuse, or injury.
- in distress tight situations, perplexities, disturbances, anxious moments, inescapable problems and difficulties.

He no longer kick against the prick. It's all for Christ's sake. God shows him that when he is weak, then he is strongest because of Christ. God is showing up in his weakness. He shifts his focus while he waits on the change. When we acknowledge our weakness before the Lord, then the Lord pours His strength into our mind and heart. He empowers believers to overcome and conquer all infirmities and weaknesses. This keeps us close; keeps us humble before God, for we will constantly need the fellowship of God.

## SUMMARY:



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**1Paul says that it is not expedient, meaning necessary, self-serving or profitable for him to boast. Some thought to themselves and questioned others about Paul's authority; him not having spiritual visions and revelations from the Lord. So now he shares that he did have a spiritual experience of visions and revelations from the Lord. 2Paul is referring to himself as the man. He himself is just a man, nobody special, but he's in Christ when the vision experience came to him.**

- 1. This vision experience happened 14yrs ago.**
- 2. This vision experience was so real that he could not tell (knew not) whether he was in the body or whether out of the body. He just couldn't tell.**
- 3. This vision experience is where he was caught up into the third heaven, the dwelling place of God where the presence and the glory of the Lord are fully manifested and experienced. He called it paradise (v.4).**

**3Paul says it again that he could not tell (knew not) whether he was in the body or whether out of the body. He just couldn't tell. But God knows. 4God knows how he was caught up into paradise (the third heaven) and how he heard unspeakable words which were unlawful for him to utter. This meant that it was for Paul's hearing and Paul alone (12:1-4).**

**5A man with such spiritual experiences has a right to boast, but Paul says that he will boast only in his infirmities; his weaknesses. 6Paul could have proclaimed the truth of his experiences, but he would not, lest people begin to think too highly of him. Therefore, Paul kept those intimate experiences to himself. He only wanted people to know the testimony that he was called of God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, and that he is a witness for the Lord. 7Paul lets us know that lest he should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, he was given a thorn in the flesh (something that irritates, frustrates, and nags him) —the messenger of Satan who came to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure (12:5-7).**

**8Paul wanted deliverance and relief. He wanted God to remove the thorn. Why? - Because it pricked and bothered him. It distracted him from his labor. It made him appear personally weak and sickly. Paul prayed and sought the Lord about it 3times, that this thing would depart from him. 9The thorn was working for good, for God says, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in Paul's weakness.*" God allowed it to keep Paul humble. In Paul's weakness, God was protecting him, for then Paul could be covered in God's strength and not his own. God's power was strongest when Paul was weak. Therefore, "*Paul could gladly acknowledge that he would rather glory in his infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon him.*" 10Paul now says "*Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distress for Christ's sake.*" It's all for Christ's sake. He no longer kick against the prick. God shows Paul that when he is weak, then he is strongest because of Christ. God is showing up in his weakness. When we acknowledge our weakness before the Lord, then the Lord pours His strength into our mind and heart. He empowers believers to overcome and conquer all infirmities and weaknesses. This keeps us close; keeps us humble before God, for we will constantly need the fellowship of God (12:8-10).**