

THE GIFT OF A THORN!

TEXT: 2 Cor. 12:1-10

THESIS: To reveal a glimpse of heaven and the reasons for believers suffering on earth.

INTRO.: A. Of the trillions who have died and the comparatively few who have gone to heaven **only three** have come back to give us *a few details*: **Jesus, John and Paul**. Here we have Paul's fantastic experience. It is a revelation and a mystery. The question is why didn't God allow Paul or *someone* to give us *a detailed description of glory*? In all 66 books of Scripture we have but fleeting glimpses of the place where we are destined to spend all eternity.

B. In our text Paul is given "***a thorn in the flesh***" *to keep him from revealing too much*. Apparently he had a desire to communicate wonderful details about his experience, but was not permitted to do so. In fact, the Lord Himself allowed Satan - *Paul's, and our, archenemy* - to keep Paul from "spilling the beans" or boasting of our future home in too much detail. Let's examine the passage and squeeze whatever details we can from what God did allow to be revealed...

I. A TRIP TO HEAVEN: vv.1-4

A. Sights: "***caught up to the third heaven...***"

1. The Jews and Muslims believe in 7 heavens, but neither are Bible believers.

2. There are only three heavens: the Ariel heavens, the Astral Heavens and God's Heaven!

NOTE: Someone has said that there are only 2 safe places for humans: in the dust or in Heaven. No-one has ever fallen from the grave, whereas Satan & his angels fell from Heaven. (Of course, believers have no danger of falling from Heaven.)

B. Sounds: *"...heard unspeakable words"*

1 Cor 2:9-10 *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. 10 But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.*

NOTE: The Scriptures have given us just enough to keep us excited about Heaven, but not enough so we can brag about our Heavenly Home. It seems as though Paul constantly put his life in jeopardy when he came back to earth, he was so enthralled by what he saw and heard.

It wasn't for a lack of desire for Paul to broadcast what he had seen and heard up there, but rather so he would not become conceited or "puffed up" or **"exalted above measure"** over his unique experience. **v.6**

To help him contain his enthusiasm and to keep him from "spilling the beans" about everything he had experienced in his trip to heaven, the Lord enabled Satan to attack him with...

II. A THORN IN THE FLESH: vv.7

A. A Painful Experience:

1. Thorns are painful!

- a. We can probably liken this to Job's experience where the Lord turned Satan loose on him with boils all over his body, from head to foot!
- b. We don't know specifically what Paul's "*thorn*" was – probably not revealed to us so whatever pain or suffering we must endure we won't think Paul's was easier!
- c. The word "*thorn*" denotes "*to impale*" as on a stake.

2. Thorns are Purposeful:

- a. The "*third heaven*" was an incredible experience to be safely borne by one who had to come back down to earth in a body of sin & death.
- b. It was especially difficult for one with Paul's background of wealth, fame, and position.

B. A Limiting and Limited Experience:

1. Paul could heal others, even with handkerchiefs and aprons, but couldn't heal himself.
2. He carried a Physician with him in all his travels.
3. The good news is that like Paul's suffering ours too is limited, not just limiting.

III. A GRACE THAT WAS SUFFICIENT: vv.8,9,10

A. Paul was Specific and Persistent in Prayer: v.8

1. He prayed specifically for his thorn: *"...for this thing"*
2. He prayed specifically for its removal: *"...that it might depart from me"*
 - a. "Thorns" are not fatal, but painful.
 - b. "Thorns" are not debilitating, but irritating.
 - c. "Thorns" may put us on praying ground and prayer is not sinful nor always spiritual, it can become sinful if insistence on deliverance is apart from God's will.

NOTE: What is YOUR THORN?! Will you let it control you or will you use it as a witness, as Paul did? Of course you can pray to have it removed, but perhaps it is what God wants you to use to bring glory to Him and to speak to others. A young lad in our church used her MS as a witnessing tool. She always had a smile on her face in spite of her head to toe paralysis and even ability to speak. She told me that she did not want to be healed and go back to having full use of her body. Her chosen verses were Ps. 119:67 & 71.

Ps 119:67 Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.

Ps 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

B. Paul Went from Groaning to Glorifying: v.9

1. There was grace available within God's will.
2. Paul went from asking for temporal and temporary healing to receiving eternal blessings.
 - a. Often we ask for deliverance and He grants us patience.
 - b. Often He doesn't answer according to our will, *but according to our welfare & profit.*

C. Paul Went from Feeling to Faith:

1. The thorn still hurt, but it served as a reminder of God's grace & His greater plan.
2. His thorn persisted but it called to remembrance the thorns Christ wore for him.

D. Paul Went from Poverty to Power: **v.9b,10**

1. Paul delighted in suffering for the Savior.
2. Paul went from resignation to rejoicing.
3. Paul went from pain to pleasure. ***"...take pleasure"***
4. Paul lists 5 specific trials which were transformed into triumphs. ***"...infirmities for Christ's sake"***

CONCL.: If God has sent you **"the gift of a thorn"** do not recoil in horror. Roses have thorns, but who considers the thorns when admiring the beauty of the rose? What lady would reject a bouquet of roses from her sweetheart because of the thorns on the stem? So with God's grace. It grows on

the thorny stem of affliction. But that thorny stem of affliction is necessary to display the beauty of the flower of God's grace. Believer, accept it. ***It is God's gift to you now. Over in glory as in the original Eden there will be no more thorns!!!***