The Gift that Kept Paul Humble
2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (NKJV)

- today we start chapter 12… we will look at vs.1-10….
- It’s here that Paul will talk about two gifts that he was given… a vision of heaven.. and thorn that kept him humble… notice…

Vs. 1 – “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord…”

- Paul’s ministry was filled with visions and revelations…
- In acts 9 Paul would encounter the glorified Christ on the day he was converted..
- Also in acts 9 he would see a vision of Ananias coming to minister to him…
- In acts 16 he was given a vision of a Macedonian man asking him to come and help them..
- In acts 18. When his ministry in Corinth god difficult God would encourage Paul through a vision..
- In acts 22 he was given a vision of his ministry to the gentiles..
- Paul’s journey with the lord was full of visions and revelations…
- But the vision that had to top it all was this one he describes here in chapter 12… where Paul was given a vision of heaven.

Vs. 2-4 – “…I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

- Notice a few things here.

1. He describes his experience in the third person
• it’s not until vs.7 does he get back to speaking in the first person…and then notice he speaks about the thorn he was given because of his revelations and visions…
• so the question rises… was this his experience or was it as he said … I know a man in Christ…someone else’s experience…
• my own personal opinion…and most commentaries…I am not alone in my opinion…
• this was Paul’s experience… he took a quick trip to heaven and back…
• remember he is still defending himself to the church of Corinth…
• they have been following some false apostles… who are big at boasting… full of pride…
• so Paul describes this experience in the third person to stay in the humble posture…

2. It was 14 years ago…

• that’s pretty amazing… Paul had this experience 14 years back and had kept it to himself…
• when.. he doesn’t tell us??? but it’s possible this is what Paul described last week in ch.11:25.. once he was stoned to death.
• In lystra Paul was dragged out of the city… stoned and left for dead…
• Now it doesn’t say for sure that he died…
• But history shows us that when someone was brought out to be stoned.. it was take them out… this happened to Steven in acts 7…
• And if you put this experience here in chapter 12 with what took place in acts 14… it would be highly possible that Paul was stoned to death…
• That this was not just a dream that took place at night because he had too much Nyquil…
• Now… you might be asking….when he died… where did he go?

3. He was taken to heaven.

• Vs.2 Paul says he was taken to the third heaven…
• what is the third heaven??
• It’s not suggesting there are three different heavens…
• It’s a language that was common to the readers of that day…
• The first heaven would be the atmosphere… or the blue sky… that’s what we see each day.....while the sun is out..
• The second heaven has to do with the stars… what we see at night when the sun goes down… the starry sky.....
• The third would be where God lived and reigned… What we cannot see…. beyond what we can see…
• Paul calls this third heaven or paradise in vs.4….. where the lord rules and reigns.

It reminds us… not to worry… God has the ability to get us to heaven…. He brought Paul to heaven… to paradise… and so he can get us there also…. no line to wait in.. no soul sleeping… he went immediately…

• Notice the word paradise… because that’s all we get on this vision…. vs.4 also tells us that Paul heard inexpressible words that were unlawful for him to utter…

4. He was not to describe what he heard.

• Now…. When you hear about someone dying and going to heaven you can’t help but be interested in what they encountered… what was it like… what did you see.. how did you feel.. what did you hear….
You want to know…
• It’s the curious heart that we have… we want to know and Paul could be trusted to give us the truth…
• But notice.. Paul says… I heard inexpressible words, which is not lawful for a man to utter…
• Whatever he heard God did not want him to speak about it…. and whatever he heard could not be fully described… they were inexpressible…
• Bummer…..
• There are other places in scripture where we get glimpses into heaven… street’s of gold.. pearly gates.. river of life… no more pain, sorrow, death… but even in that you know your not getting the full picture… can you imagine a place without sin?? Skip the gold streets that’s a place where I want to be….
• But here … Paul was to keep quiet….to keep us in suspense…even when he explains that he went to heaven he is super careful not to come off prideful…..
• Probably unlike the super apostles… who if they had an experience like this would not hesitate to boast about it…to use it to make them superior…
• Did you notice what Paul would say…

Vs. 5-6 – “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, except in my infirmities. For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.”

• To boast in this way would be foolish…
• In other words…To write a book… to go on tour… to make a video Paul knew was not the lord’s heart….it would have the potential to create something in him that was not healthy….pride…
• Think about it… the lord had allowed him to hear some things that were out of this world… literally… from heaven.. but while he was on the earth he was not to share them…
• He knew something about heaven that nobody knew… and he couldn’t tell anyone….
• That would be tough…

Have you ever had a picture with someone famous? Did you frame it.. did you put it on instagram? It’s what you do… how many of us get a new car and we can’t help but want to show it to our family… to our neighbors? A new boat… some of you get new shoes and your showing them off… Could you imagine heaven?? You would want to tell the whole world…it might even make your head swell.. your pride to grow….

• That’s what leads us to the next verse…notice…

Vs. 7 – “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.”
• Paul was given the gift of hearing things in heaven that nobody else had ever heard… but with that also came a gift from heaven that kept him humble..
• to keep him humble…. So that pride would get the best of him..
• he calls that gift a thorn in his flesh…
• What is a thorn in the flesh?

Thorn : Greek translation: something withered at the front, having a point that produces an annoyance or disability.

• What this was?? every commentator goes round and round…was it his eyes…. Was it a weakness in his body… could be… more and likely ….but Paul doesn’t tell us..
• He does tell us this…
   Vs.7.. that a messenger of Satan to buffet me..
• The word buffet is a boxing term…

Buffett: Greek translation: to wrap with a fist…

• Satan was giving Paul some body blow’s….  
• Dude… that’s what he just listed….. in chapter 11..

2Cr 11:24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.  
2Cr 11:25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

• Remember who gave them these.. the religious..  
• who were they fueled by? Satan… they could have been the messenger here that Paul is talking about.. it could have been nerve damage from the stoning.. maybe he was dragging one of his leg’s around because it had been crushed…  
• he doesn’t tell us exactly what it is …. Because that was not the greater thing in all this… it was the greater work that was being done

Warren wiersbe … it is a good thing that we do not know, because no matter what our sufferings may be, we are able to apply the lessons Paul learned and get encouragement.
Paul knew… there is a greater work that is taking place than just the pain that would come from the thorn… Notice… vs. 7… he says it twice… lest I be exalted above measure…

Paul knew.. with the revelations and visions… with a visit to heaven.. hearing heavenly discussions would come the potential to become high and mighty…. So he was given a thorn to keep him humble…

One of my friends in high school loved to fight… if you looked at him wrong he was ready to throw down… and usually he won.. but there was one day that he didn’t… we were riding a motorcycle … I was on the back and I saw his head turn towards some guys way down the street… and before I had anything to say about it he had turned the bike around and we were chasing these two guys.. why I had no idea… eventually we caught up to them and within a few seconds.. not minutes seconds rob was scrapping with one of them… but he had met his match that day… the tables were turned… rob had let his pride take him to a place that was unhealthy… and a little humble pie had come his way…a thorn if you would…

Paul could say.. I was given a thorn so I would not get arrogant.. so that I would stay humble…so that I would not be exalted above measure…

Now.. notice what Paul does after he is given this thorn in the flesh..

Vs. 8 – “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.”

Paul prayed… when he was suffering.. when he was encountering a beating.. when he was physically handicapped Paul prayed..

it’s what we encouraged to do in the book of James…

James 5:13.. is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray…

instead of taking it out on others… take your petition to heaven…

when your spouse is being a thorn.. when your boss is being an irritant.. when your full of anxiety and pain and it’s starting to handicap you … take it to the lord in prayer…

listen to the promise that is given in Philippians…

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The peace of God... the peace that the world cannot give... that exceeds our understanding will guard our hearts and minds....

I am very grateful to be a part of a community of believers that pray’s like you do... I have never been a part of a fellowship that enjoys worshipping the Lord and seeking the Lord like you do... so many church’s I attended there would be 5 people who showed up at prayer...
You have a potluck and 500 people showed up but prayer.. it was for the few gifted intercessors... But not Wildwood... last week we had over 3 pages of prayer request to pray over... and they were from cities all throughout the inland empire...
Bloomington.. grand terrace... Indio....bng, bmt, highland....
the house of prayer... sometimes we have 200 people show up... over 30 elders given to prayer... we are seeing people healed of some heavy stuff through prayer...

- When Paul was in pain he prayed......
- And notice... Paul didn’t just ask once... but three times he asked the Lord to remove it....
- Just like Jesus did in the garden of Gethsemane...
- Father if I can pass on this cup... then he prayed... not my will but yours be done...
- You see prayer is not us getting our will done... but his will done...
- It’s often us lining up with his will for us... so often we pray... Lord remove this cup.... But in the Lord’s wisdom the cup is exactly what is needed...
- Paul asked three times... and then he heard the Lord speak to his heart...

Vs. 9 – “And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will
rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

- In others words… Paul my grace is all you need…

Jon courson… like Paul we ask for help from the Lord. As far as our father is concerned, however, the purpose of prayer is not that He might give help to us, but that He might give himself to us..

- God in his wisdom… did not remove the pain.. he gave him a promise… my grace is sufficient…
- It’s in times of suffering we don’t can’t trust our feelings.. they are all over the place.. but instead we trust in the promises..
- Let it move you to prayer until you hear his voice.. let it move you to the word until you find his promise…
- That’s what Paul would have to trust in… the promise of grace to hold him.. to ground him.. to keep him from pride..
- Think about it… if pride had gotten into Paul’s ministry then he would found himself out of ministry…
- That’s exactly what took Satan out… it wasn’t enough to be second… it was enough to be the most powerful angel.. the most beautiful angel… it wasn’t enough to lead the worship in heaven…
- He wanted to be worshiped in heaven…
- Pride set in and his ministry was over…..that’s exactly what would have happened to Paul….

[2Sa 22:28 NKJV] You will save the humble people; But Your eyes are on the haughty, that You may bring them down.
[Pro 16:18 NKJV] Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.
[Jam 4:6 NKJV] But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

- It’s when we are humble that we understand the depths of grace… so God in his great love for us will often take us to a place… a difficult place so that we understand grace.
- If he resist the proud.. .then we need to stay in a place of humility..
And our flesh fights humility….pride is a work of .. a deed of our flesh…

so he might often allow something in our lives to keep us in the place of humility …. So that his grace and even his power might rest on us…..

That’s what brings us to the second part of the message from heaven.. Vs.9 for My strength is made perfect in weakness.

When you and I are weak that’s when his strength can take over…

That’s when it’s perfected… when we are self sufficient.. when we are self confident.. then his strength is not what it could be…

Paul was given a thorn.. not because the lord was made at him.. not because there was sin in his life.. but so he could know the depths of his grace.. so that he would not lose his ministry… so that he would know and understand the great power of God…. That’s why he could say….

Vs.9 therefore, I most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Vs. 10 – “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Let’s stand.. would you say that with me…

When I am weak, then I am strong

Wildwood it’s ok to be weak… that’s when he does his greatest work.. in us and through us….