



THE THIRD HEAVEN

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-6

2 Cor. 12:1 Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows — such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows — 4 was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. 5 On behalf of such a man will I boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. 6 For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.

VERSE 1...

- Paul's aim is to tell about two things...
 - Visions/revelations
 - Weaknesses/suffering
- He is careful never to steal attention away from the Word of God or the glory of God

VERSE 2...

- Paul describes himself as, "A man in Christ."
- He places his experience at a definite time — 14 years ago.
- He describes himself as a latecomer to apostleship.
- He places his experience at a definite place called... 1) The Third Heaven, and 2) Paradise.

VERSES 2-4...

- Paul says that his experience was by way of rapture. He was "caught up" into God's presence.
- He was overwhelmed.
- He did not have words to fully express what happened to him.

WHAT DID PAUL MEAN BY "INEXPRESSIBLE WORDS?"

- Words that were not translatable into human or earthly terms.
- Words that were for him alone.

What we do know is that God spoke to Paul in such a personal way that he had an indomitable spirit from then on!

VERSES 5-6...

- Paul is clear that he thought his experience gave him no right to boast.
- Great spiritual experiences must not be turned into personal gain! They are for the growth of the kingdom of God!

APPLICATION #1...

The Word of God is our source for all truth. At times, God will give us:

- A revelation: special insight into, application of, or action to take, as a result of understanding God's Word.
- A vision: a visual of a preferred future when the will of God is obeyed.

APPLICATION #2...

Special times in God's presence will leave an indelible mark on our lives. The special word God gives us or the vision that he reveals to us will come with a date and time stamp. And, in Paul's experience, the vision will include a fuller revelation of Jesus Christ. By the way, it is right to pray for such a vision.

APPLICATION #3...

We learn from Paul that when the vision is complete, our goal will not be to tell of the vision but to preach the gospel in a more powerful way. God did not give Paul a vision so that he could boast of it. The vision came to empower him to win more people to the faith that was in Jesus Christ. He did not want people to say, "Wow, isn't that the person who had the vision?" But rather, "Look at the way that person lives and serves God!"