

2 Tickets to Paradise!

I. Announce:

- A. Slide#1 Taking Off The Gloves: Men's Conf 1/26
- B. Slide#2 Justice Matters: JM2

II. Intro:

- A. The Apostle Paul gives one last credential to the Corinthian church & the false apostles who had wormed there way in causing dissension...visions & revelations!
 - 1. So, Paul adds a postscript to his resume w/a credential he has never shared before.
- B. Slide#3 Outline: 2 Tickets to Paradise! & A Thorn and a Rose!
- C. Remember the Eddie Money song, "I've got, 2 Tickets to Paradise."? (His girlfriend's mother wanted her to marry a doctor or a lawyer, not a musician. Money wrote the song as plea to take her away)
 - 1. Paul obviously received *2 tickets to Paradise*. Most of us get 1. He cashed in 1 here.

III. 2 TICKETS TO PARADISE! (1-6)

- A. Slide#4 EXALTATION! (1-4)
- B. (1) **Boasting** - Necessary for man; not necessary for God.
 - 1. Man – Often a professor needs to let his students know right up front he knows what he's talking about. Or during a job interview.
 - 2. God – vertical boasting is never necessary. It accomplishes nothing. God knows everything you've ever done & everything you're capable of.
- C. (2) Most believe this is speaking of **Paul** even though he writes it in the 3rd person. (see vs.7)
 - 1. This was 14 years ago, which would place him down in Arabia, where he dwelt for 3 years right after he had received salvation(Gal.1).
- D. Slide#5 (3) **Third heaven?**
 - 1. 1st Heaven = Earth's atmosphere. 2nd Heaven = Outer Space.
3rd Heaven = Gods Throne.
 - 2. 1 Kings 8:27 Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You.
- E. Slide#6,7,8 (4) **Paradise** – of Persian origin, it meant a walled enclosure (a royal enclosed park).
 - 1. "When a Persian king wished to confer a very special honor on someone specially dear to him, he made him a companion of the garden & gave him the right to walk in the royal gardens w/him in intimate companionship."¹
 - 2. Both the Hebrew & Greek borrowed this word.

¹ William Barclay, pg.257.

- a) Hebrew – Eccl.2:5 I made myself gardens and **orchards**, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. (*paradesim*)
- b) Greek – LXX of Gen.2:8 The LORD God planted a **garden** eastward in Eden.

F. Slide#9 **HUMILIATION!** (5,6)

G. Amazing what he **doesn't** do w/this experience!

1. He surely could have capitalized on this one! – “Speaking engagements, contracts for books & magazine articles. His own TV Reality show.”
2. If you had an all expense paid trip to Heaven...What part would it play in your ministry? - How would it change things for you?
 - a) Instead of exploiting his experience, he kept it quiet up to this point.

H. **Weakness** – Paul is speaking of anything that makes him appear weak in the eyes of those to whom he ministers.

1. When he appears weak in others eyes he is actually strongest.
- I. God will not go forth w/that man who *marches in his own strength*.
 1. Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, Says the LORD of hosts.
 2. God will have *no strength* used in His battles but the strength which He Himself imparts! (Spurg)

IV. Slide#10 **THE THORN & THE ROSE!** (7-10)

A. God wanted to keep Paul **humble** after his exciting visit to heaven.

1. To keep Paul from succumbing to pride, God gave him this *constant reminder* of his inadequacy.
2. Slide#11 In the Jewish **Haggada** (“telling”, i.e. “tell your sons”(from Passover). Traditional Jewish literature which told them **Who** they were; **Where** they came from; **What** they stand for) the Jews said there were **four Rabbis** in the 2nd century that had the rare experience of entering Paradise.
 - a) **Ben Azai** had seen the glory & had died.
 - b) **Ben Soma** beheld it & went mad.
 - c) **Acher** saw it & became a heretic.
 - d) **Akiba** who alone ascended in peace & in peace came back unscathed.
 - (1) Paul did not return unscathed.
 - (2) How is it we have so many stories of people **seeing heaven** (out of body experiences) & they all come back unscathed?

B. In the loving will of God, **suffering** has a purpose that can be fulfilled in no other way.

1. **Accept it**, & it will become a **heavenly blessing**;
Fight it, & it will become a **heavy burden**. Warren Wiersbe

C. **Slide#12 THE THORN!** (7,8)

D. **Skolops** – A stake used for impaling or torturing someone, a sharpened wooden **staff**, **thorn**, or **splinter**.²

E. We don't really know exactly what this thorn was:

1. **Calvin** thought **spiritual temptations**.
2. **Luther** temptations & persecutions.
3. **Roman Catholics** say **sexual temptations**.
4. **Some** say **disfigurement** (like hunchback, epilepsy, malarial fevers, or severe headaches).
5. **Others** speculate a **speech impediment**.
6. **And others** **Ophthalmia** (inflammation of the eye) from Gal.6:11 **See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!**
 - a) **It was not what the thorn was that mattered, but what it did!**
 - b) **Slide#13** I believe there is time when Paul experienced the Pain of **all 3** of these!
 - (1) **Splinter** – “Lord, get me though this week!”
 - (2) **Thorn** – “Lord, get me though this day!”
 - (3) **Stake** - “Lord, get me though this hour!”

(a) **Which are you experiencing right now?**

F. **Slide#14** **Thorn in the flesh**(phys realm); **messenger of Satan**(sp/demonic realm); **I pleaded w/the Lord**(sp/God realm).

1. I believe in every **thorn** (or list in vs.10) **God & the devil** are both *equally concerned*.
 - a) If **God** gives it, **Satan** seeks to **distort** it; if **Satan** gives it, then **the Lord** seeks to **sanctify** it.
2. It seems **the very weapon** which was used by **the messenger of Satan** to overthrow the Apostle, **was seized** out of his hands & turned into a weapon to overthrow him.

G. **Sounds like he gave up asking after #3**. God forbid you keep pushing for **your will** to be done...because He might give it to you! :()

1. Ps.106:15 **He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul.**

H. (8) **Unanswered prayers!** – The Lord did not answer Paul's prayer as he wanted Him to.

² Linguistic Key to the Greek NT, pg.495.

1. Do you have one “**If only**” statement? “God, **if only** you heal me of this”; “God, **if only** you remove this 1 difficult person from my office”; “God, **if only** my husband was really sold out for You”; “God, **if only** my wife would be sensitive to my needs”.
 2. A **cynic** to an **elderly believer** who had endured great pain for 20 years said, “What do you think of your God now?” To which she replied, “I think of him more than ever!”
 3. See, God didn’t answer Paul’s prayer as he asked, **but** he did in fact meet the need & gave his servant the **Grace** he required.
- I. Some say God will answer any prayer if we only believe hard enough! (Did Paul lack faith? Did Paul have sin in his life?)
1. **No**, vs.7 already explained why it came!
- J. Remember 2 things when you suffer:
1. God **does** have a **good purpose** in view.
 2. When you are weak, expect God to show His **power** in & through you.
- K. **Slide#15 THE ROSE!** (9,10)
- L. (9) God’s **Grace** is **illustrated** & **magnified** in the poverty & trials of believers.
- M. **Slide#16a** Hold to these **3 truths** saints:
1. All things will work together for your good.
 2. **Slide#16b** Out of apparent evils a real blessing shall ultimately spring forth.
 3. **Slide#16c** God will either work a speedy deliverance, or support you in your trouble!
- N. **Slide#17blank** Do you think God only accepts **flawless gifts** or **flawless service** from you?
1. I remember when Mical was young she came in from the backyard with a handful of dandelions telling me to put them in water. As I went in the kitchen I realized she had pulled just the head of the flower with no stems. - Though it was an “imperfect gift” it was a wonderful gift! We don’t have to be perfect to be a blessing. God’s strength will be made perfect in our weaknesses...guaranteed!
 2. Wow, spiritual effectiveness doesn’t depend on our abilities.
 3. You don’t know how a tree is going to do when you plant it, **until** it goes through a **winter**. [silver dollar eucalyptus]
 - a) So the **storms of life** blow against us to **strengthen** our roots so we’ll be able to **stand**.
- O. **Slide#18 Remember:** “The will of God will never **lead** you, where the grace of God cannot **keep** you.”
1. We pray for **lighter burdens** when we ought to pray for **stronger backs**.

2. We pray for an **easier path** when we ought to pray for **tougher feet**.
3. We pray for **fewer problems** when we ought to pray for **better solutions**.

P. **Slide#19** Here's a good example of **when we are weak He is strong** - A mother, wishing to encourage her young son's progress at the piano, bought tickets for a Paderewski (Pad-e-REV-ski) performance (He was a famous concert pianist & prime minister of Poland). When the night arrived, they found their seats near the front of the concert hall and eyed the majestic Steinway waiting on stage. Soon the mother found a friend to talk to, and the boy slipped away. When eight o'clock arrived, the spotlights came on, the audience quieted, and only then did they notice the boy up on the bench, innocently picking out "**Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star**." His mother gasped, but before she could retrieve her son, the master appeared on the stage and quickly moved to the keyboard. "**Don't quit--keep playing**," he whispered to the boy. Leaning over, Paderewski reached down with his left hand and began filling in a bass part. Soon his right arm reached around the other side, encircling the child, to add a running obbligato. Together, the old master and the young novice held the crowd mesmerized.

1. In our lives, unpolished though we may be, it is the Master who surrounds us and whispers in our ear, time and again, "**Don't quit--keep playing**." And as we do, he **augments and supplements** until a work of amazing beauty is created."

Q. "When I am weak then am I strong, Grace is my shield & Christ my song." (Spurg)

1. **Slide#20,21** Don't view suffering as an **enemy**, **but** learn to greet it as a **friend!**
2. **Instead of staring at the thorn we need to be able to see the rose, & smell its fragrance!**
 - a) The **thorn** will give you **humility** **but** the **fragrance** will give you **hope!**

R. (10) **For Christ's sake** (not mine!) - "Make sure it is God's trumpet you are blowing--if it is only yours, it won't wake the dead; it will simply disturb the neighbors."

S. God, **the Great Teacher**, never runs out of ways to **instruct us** in this classroom of life.

1. With each lesson He **perfects** in us the **image of Christ**.
2. One day we will **graduate** to eternity & His task will be finally finished.
 - a) Rom.8:28,29 **And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.**
 - b) Or, as Phillips paraphrased it, "**God chose us to bear the family likeness of his Son.**"
"Hey, you look like your father!"
3. **How does he?** "By continually **teaching, changing, & developing** us. **No day** is ever wasted. No disappointment is outside His appointment. **No test** is ever superfluous. **No surprise** to us is ever a surprise to Him. **He never** gets off course,

never forgets the game plan, never contradicts his overall purpose for us.”³

T. **End:** An unknown Confederate soldier wrote:

1. I asked God for **strength** that I might achieve.
I was made **weak** that I might learn humbly to obey.
I asked God for **health** that I might do greater things.
I was given **infirmity** that I might do better things.
I asked God for **riches** that I might be happy.
I was given **poverty** that I might be wise.
I asked for **power** that I might have the praise of men.
I was given **weakness** that I might feel the need of God.
I asked for **all things** that I might enjoy life.
I was given **life** that I might enjoy all things.
I got **nothing** that I asked for.
But **everything** I had hoped for...
*Almost despite myself my unspoken prayers were answered.
I am among all men most richly blessed.*

³ Charles Swindoll, pg.68.