

## “Why We Go Through Trials,” Part 1 - 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 – April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017

- Today’s teaching will be part one of a new series I’ve titled, “Why We Go Through Trials.”
- In the previous chapter, we looked at some of the ways to get through a trial, and in this chapter, we’ll look at the “why” of trials.
- More specifically, why it is that we have to go through trials and what it is that God does in and through us because of the trials.

### 1. Trials enable us to see what God is showing us (Verses 1-4)

1 I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—4 was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

- v1 Paul says if he must keep on boasting, though there’s nothing gained, he will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord.
- v2 He describes in the third person that fourteen years prior he was caught up to the third heaven either in or out of the body.
- v3-4 He says while only God knows if it was in or out of the body, he heard inexpressible things that no one is permitted to tell.

- What Paul says in the first four verses of the chapter brings up a couple of questions that I think we would do well to answer.
- The first question is actually twofold and has to do with why Paul speaks in the third person, and how do we know it was him.
- I believe it’s that Paul is growing weary of talking about himself and not talking about Jesus, and it’s him because of verse 7.

- The second question has to do with what happened and perhaps more importantly, when and where this happened to Paul.
- Bible commentators suggest that there are three possibilities, one of which was during Paul’s ten years in Syria and Cilicia.
- A second possibility is when he was stoned in Lystra, and the third possibility is that this happened during his time in Antioch.

- The bottom line is that we really don’t know, which would indicate that God deem it necessary to have Paul include this detail.
- However, this hasn’t stopped many a Bible expositor from speculating as to where and when it happened to the Apostle Paul.
- In so doing, they also speculate concerning whether or not Paul was actually taken to heaven in his body, or out of his body.

Adam Clarke settles this dilemma succinctly, writing, “As he could not decide himself, it would be ridiculous in us to attempt it.”

- To me, the real question that needs to be answered is not what happened, where it happened, or when it happened, but how.
- By that I mean, how did Paul receive this vision of heaven when he was caught up to heaven? Answer, it was by way of a trial.
- The truth of the matter is; Paul would have had to be in the midst of unspeakable difficulty, especially if it happened in Lystra.

- Here’s where I’m going with this, throughout the scriptures there seems to be a common denominator when it comes to visions.
- Namely, that of a difficult trial preceding the vision, as a catalyst for the vision and it’s not the first time it came this way for Paul.
- Back in the book of Acts chapter twenty-seven, we have the account of Paul receiving a vision as they were to be shipwrecked.

- When Stephen was about to die as a martyr, ironically enough with then Saul of Tarsus being there, he saw a vision of Jesus.
- John, after being banished and left for dead on the Island of Patmos, received the visions recorded in the book of Revelation.
- Replete throughout the Old Testament as well, we have numerous examples of visions received while in life and death trials.

- One such example is Joseph, who was the recipient of a prophetic dream while at the same time his brothers wanted to kill him.
- Jacob was another example of this when he too was on the receiving end of a vision at the same time Esau wanted to kill him.
- I think of Isaiah who in the year King Uzziah died was so distraught God had to show him that He was still seated on the throne.

Isaiah 6:1–4 (NKJV) — 1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!” 4 And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

- Personally, my favorite example is when Elijah is running for his life with a contract out on his life and wants God to take his life.
- Not only is he running from Ahab and Jezebel, he’s running from God, and it’s at that very moment that the Lord comes to him.
- When He does, Elijah is hiding out in a cave, and after He basically tells him to stop feeling sorry for himself, and get moving.

1 Kings 19:15–18 (NKJV) — 15 Then the LORD said to him: “Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria. 16 Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. 17 It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. 18 Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

- Now I’m keenly aware of how we’re all prone to think that men like Elijah, Isaiah, Jacob, Joseph, Paul et al are all the exception.
- The problem with that is nothing could be further from the truth, such that, God still reveals things to us in and through the trials.
- In other words, like with them in their day, we in our day are often times on the receiving end of that which God wants us to see.

- I’ll take it a step further and suggest this may be the very reason that you find yourself in the trial you brought to church today.
- If that’s the case, then the question becomes, what is it that God wants you to see, in and through the difficult trial you are in?
- I’ll close by posing this question in this way, could it be God is directing me to do something I wouldn’t have thought otherwise?