



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 12:1-6

“The Rapture of Paul”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] This weather about us made me think of this letter that I got from a young man, which I received just yesterday from Beaverton, Oregon, and his name is Thor Holme. And you remember Thor is the Norse God who throws thunderbolts and things like that. But he has this to say, and since we have in our bulletin today some quotes from letters, “Five weeks before your radio program went off the air on KPDQ in Portland, Oregon, I tuned into your program for the first time and heard you speaking on election. I’m a firm believer in the doctrine of divine election and am disturbed by the synergistic and Arminian preaching that permeates the vast majority of the churches today. As Donald Grey Barnhouse said, ‘For me the matter is forever settled when there was nothing but death for me, Jesus Christ took that death in order that I may have life.’ It is that new life I live only through (he’s got that underlined) the power and faithfulness of Jesus Christ. I wonder many times how any Christian can believe in anything but pure Monergism when studying Soteriology. When I was unwilling, through the preaching of the gospel by Donald Grey Barnhouse and through the quickening power of the Holy Spirit, I became willing. Salvation is one hundred percent God plus nothing!! (two exclamation points)

I enjoy your tapes and almost daily listen to one and use them when witnessing to family and friends. The members of Believer’s Chapel are to be commended for their work in and support of the tape ministry. Look forward to your forthcoming visit to Trinity Bible Church in Portland, Oregon, and plan on attending all the meetings there.” It’s nice to get a letter from someone who listens constantly and who understands and whose name is Thor. [Laughter]

I have another nice letter in my pocket I just received from Mrs. Hazel Nicholls from Weatherford, and she has written before and expresses through her letters quite an understanding of spiritual things. And I am grateful to Mrs. Nicholls because she found a rather rare book by William G.T. Shedd and offered it to me as a gift which I now have in my library. So we do have people out there who are listening constantly to the radio ministry, and we are grateful for them and glad that some of the things that are said are helpful to them.

We are turning to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and reading a short portion for our Scripture reading today, verse 1 through verse 6. This is just part of the paragraph that closes at verse 10, but we’re making this into two messages. And so today we’ll look at the first part, verses 1 through 6 and the subject, as you will note from the bulletin, is “The Rapture of Paul.” The apostle writes, “Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.”

Just a word of explanation, you remember the apostle began the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter, “I wish that you would bear with me in a little foolishness.” Now, the reason he said that is simply because his opponents in Corinth, who had come in and were disturbing the church, had evidently made themselves boast about their standing before the Lord and about the apostle’s apostleship in a negative sense. And so he’s defending his apostleship against the claims of individuals who are boasters and who wish to make much, and perhaps in the light of Paul’s words here, of their experience of visions and revelations.

Now, Paul feels that he’s forced to do some boasting himself, but he calls it foolish. But nevertheless, it’s necessary in this case. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse he says,

“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. And I know how such a man--whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows-- was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. On behalf of such a man I will boast; but on my own behalf I will not boast, except in regard to my weaknesses. 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.”

May God bless this reading of his word, and let’s bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for the word of God and for the benefit that has come to us as a result of the ministry of the Lord Jesus recorded in that word. We thank Thee for the forgiveness of our sins, for the imputation of a righteousness that is acceptable to Thee, for time and for eternity through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s Cross. We give Thee thanks. We worship Thee and praise Thee as the only true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon us as we look into the Scriptures today. Give us understanding and wisdom. And throughout the days of this week, may we in our daily life be pleasing to Thee. We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ today. May the rich blessings of the divine trinity be upon every local body of believers who acknowledge that Jesus Christ is lord and savior.

And we pray for the Chapel, its elders and deacons and the members and the friends and the visitors who are here with us today. And upon its ministries, may, O God,

there continue to go forth a faithful proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray for those who’ve requested our prayers. Wilt Thou, Lord, minister to them out of the riches of Thy divine being and power. We pray that the sick may experience healing in accordance with Thy will, that the perplexed may find guidance that will be of help to them, and that the needs, particularly of those who’ve requested our prayers, may be met to the glory of Thy name. Be with us now as we sing and as we reflect upon the word of God.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today is “The Rapture of Paul.” A remarkable paragraph indeed is 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 1 through verse 10 in which our study is found. Facts of the unseen world are delivered to us to be received and to be believed. Notice the things that are found, if not explicitly, implicitly in this paragraph. The unseen world is a real world. And second, there is a third heaven. And, third, there is a paradise, as we shall see they are really the same thing, but what we call paradise and third heaven exists. The human spirit can be there consciously and can there hear and understand. And, further, there are personal agents of evil capable, with God’s permission, of assailing even human flesh, even an apostle’s flesh. Prayer is very real, and Christ hears it, and, finally, the sufficiency of Jesus Christ’s grace for every need of the tempted. All of those magnificent truths are found if not explicitly, implicitly in this paragraph. And in it we have an apostolic word on claims for visions and revelations. And if ever a day needed it, today is the day.

We have large religious organizations that canonize individual professing Christians calling them saints as a result of visionary, revelatory experiences that they claim that cannot be proven by any of the ways by which we might prove truths such as that. The evidence is, so far as we are concerned, beyond our grasping.

We have large religious organizations that are not even Christian who also make claims for visions and revelations. We have, for example, the Mormons and Joseph Smith grounded in a so-called revelation. And incidentally, in Isaiah chapter 29:4, which is found as the support for many of the Mormon’s claims in that passage, if you will look at that passage chapter 29 in verse 4 you will find that the evidence that is claimed for the authority of the Books of Mormon is really evidence that has in its contexts to do with false prophets, not true. We have in the Christian professing world, individuals who claim to be able to visualize Jesus in such a way that the Jesus whom they visualize becomes real to us.

These are startling claims, but there are a number of individuals who claim that if we visualize our Lord that through visualization he actually may become real to us. These are startling claims for professing Christians to make and surely contrary to the word of God. In fact, individuals are exhorted to visualize our Lord so that he may become real to us. What’s startling about this is that these so-called appearances of the Lord which are made real by our visualization of them are things that we accomplish; whereas, in the New Testament every appearance of the Lord Jesus was an appearance that was initiated by him and not by us. In fact, the whole fabric of that kind of claim is contrary to the New Testament.

We have it in the common statements that are made by so many believers today, professing believers, and I’m sure some of them are believers, the Lord spoke to me today, and he said such and such. And often we’re not, perhaps, clued in enough to what is being claimed to ask how did he speak? Did he speak audibly? Did he speak by a vision or by revelation? Is it through some charismatic experience such as speaking in tongues that he has spoken to you?

We had an interesting occurrence of what I would call the ridiculous this week. Some of you may know that Jimmy Swaggart has said that God has spoken to him to establish a theological seminary. As I understand, I didn’t hear him say this, but it has

been reported to me that he has made this claim -- made this plan, and it is to be called the Jimmy Swaggart Theological Seminary. Well, this week on one of the programs James Robinson, a friend of his, said that the Lord had spoken to him and told him that Jimmy shouldn’t do that, [Laughter] that Jimmy was an evangelist and he should stick to evangelism, that he was mad to have a theological seminary anyway. And so here we have one Jimmy saying that the Lord has spoken to him and told him to do such and such, and the other Jimmy or James saying the Lord has told him that he shouldn’t do it.

Now, I think this is ridiculous. I think this is the kind of thing that brings disfavor upon Christianity as a whole. Visions and revelations, if you’ll go into the Christian bookstores today, you’ll probably find, and particularly in certain Christian book stores, many books on the shelves in which individuals claim to have had certain visionary, revelatory experiences and their details of them.

Now, when one turns to Paul, what a different spirit one finds. For Paul, the proper basis of ministerial status is faithfulness to the message of the Lord Jesus Christ in word and in deed. Let me say it again, for Paul the proper basis of ministerial status is faithfulness to the message concerning Jesus Christ in word and in deed. That was the thing by which the apostle determined what is of God and what is not.

Well, let’s look at the paragraph because it has a lot to say on that very point. The apostle begins by the continuation of his foolish boasting. Now, “foolish boasting” is his term. He said in chapter 11, verse 1, “I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness.” And verse 30, “If I have to boast, I will boast to what pertains to my weakness.” Now, boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable and finally in verse 11 of this chapter he says, “I have become foolish, you yourselves compelled me.” In other words, the foolishness that the apostle speaks about here is the foolishness that he is compelled to exhibit in speaking of the visions and revelations that have been given to him and also in detailing his experiences as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ as evidence of his apostolic authority, for the opponents of the apostle had come into the

church at Corinth after he had been the instrumentality for the evangelization of the saints there and had sought to attack the apostle’s authority.

And evidently their type of attack had to do with the fact that he was not an apostle like the Twelve, that the message that he preached did not have sufficient of the Law of Moses within it to be a valid message, and, further, they claimed evidently certain experiences and also no doubt discounted and disparaged the claim that the apostle made concerning the Damascus Road experience. So the apostle is faced with some enemies who are not unintelligent. They are intelligent enemies, and he is forced now to boast even though he considers boasting unprofitable in the light of the situation in Corinth. He states that in verse 1, boasting is necessary though it is not profitable. But because it is necessary I will go onto visions and revelations of the Lord.

Now, since they boasted in experiences evidently, the apostle reluctantly reveals his unusual one. If we were looking at the things that the apostle had experienced in his ministry, his greatest vision would have been the vision of our Lord on the Damascus Road when the Lord appeared to him, then spoke to him, and called him to the ministry of the gospel to the Gentiles. One interesting thing about that is the apostle mentions it, remember, in Acts chapter 9 and Acts chapter 22 and Acts chapter 26 in great detail, but it’s clear that others to had evidence that something unusual had occurred and the description that is given in the Book of Acts indicates that. In other words, it wasn’t something that the apostle alone claimed to have happened, but others also had observed what had transpired although so far as we can tell from the Book of Acts they did not fully understand.

Now, there were other things that the apostle experienced in his ministry when he was in Philippi. He had a vision and words were spoken to him. When he was in Corinth, there also was an appearance of the Lord to him. In chapter 23 in verse 11 another appearance of the Lord. In chapter 17, verse 23 and 24 in Galatians chapter 2 in

verse 2 he makes reference to going up to Jerusalem by divine revelation, perhaps a reference to Acts chapter 11 and the last few verses of the chapter.

Now, he speaks of some of them, and he speaks of his conversion, of course, in his letters fairly frequently. But he’s forced to speak of this experience; this unusual experience in which he is raptured to the third heaven or as he also defines it to paradise. So the apostle then has had many experiences. He doesn’t like to talk about them. He doesn’t like to emphasize them. He doesn’t like for people to lay stress upon them, but because of the situation at Corinth he feels it necessary to do it. So in verse 2 through verse 4 he speaks of what he calls the man in Christ.

Now, we don’t have any doubt about who this is, the apostle speaks in the third person through verse 2, verse 3, verse 4 even at the beginning of verse 5, “On behalf of such a man will I boast.” But when we come to the 7<sup>th</sup> verse and the apostle writes, “And because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations for this reason to keep me from exalting myself there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me to keep me from exalting myself.” We can say at this point, if we had any doubt about the person to whom he was referring, ah Paul we found you out here. You are really talking about yourself.

Now, we don’t know when this happened Paul says fourteen years ago. If we knew precisely when the 2 Corinthians epistle was written we would be better able to tell. But even if we knew precisely the week, month, and year, we would still have difficulty in saying exactly when this took place. If 2 Corinthians was written in the years 55 to 56 in that particular period of time, then it is possible that the apostle refers to the time that he spent after his conversion in Syria and Seleucia. It’s possible -- and that incidentally is referred to Galatians chapter 1 and verse 21. It is possible that it was an event that occurred when he spent the year in Antioch in ministry there because that would have been about fourteen years previously. And some have suggested even that it might have been when the apostle on his first missionary journey -- for the time frame could be fitted

to include that was in Lystra, and in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead. In fact, he was dragged into the city as if he were dead. But then stood up alive and many have found that a very attractive hypothesis, that the apostle was regarded as dead, ascended to the third heaven to paradise, there saw the things that he describes here, and then by God was given life again by resurrection.

One thing is likely, and I think this is about as far as we can go, it probably was identified with the fact that he was commissioned as apostle of the Gentiles. Now, he was appointed that right at his conversion as is evident from the things that were spoken to him. But when he left Antioch and went out on his first missionary journey, you’ll remember hands were laid upon them and the mission to the Gentiles really began at that time. So it’s possible around that particular time the apostle’s experience that he describes here occurred.

Fortunately for us we don’t have to identify exactly when it occurred and, in fact, we don’t even have to know exactly that it was associated with his apostleship to the Gentiles, but that makes good sense. In the light of these magnificent sufferings described in the just preceding section, it might well have been a vision that the apostle received and revelations that were received at that time that were designed to strengthen him for the unusual sufferings that he, as an apostle of the Gentiles, would be forced to suffer.

At any rate, he describes the rapture in verses 2 through 4 he says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, such a man was caught up to the third heaven.” In verse 4 he says, “he was caught up into paradise.” One might ask the question, why does the apostle use the third person? Why does he say I know a man in Christ? Why does he go that way -- even the Authorized Version suggests by its rendering I knew a man in Christ that it is someone else he is speaking about.

Now, the Greek does not justify “I knew.” It really says “I know.” So any suggestion that it was someone else by the verb itself should be disregarded. But why

does he say I know a man in Christ? Why doesn’t he simply say I was caught up to the third heaven? Well, if you read through this section and if you pay attention to the apostle in all of the letters that he writes, I’m sure you’ll come to the conviction that the reason that he does this is he wants to go out of the way to keep anyone from saying he’s boasting. He’s flaunting himself. He even describes this experience as if it’s of someone else in the third person.

Now, he says he was caught up to the third heavens or, as he will say in a moment, the paradise and while some have sought to make those two different things that seems unlikely hermeneutically and we’ll take them as if they were the same. He was caught up to the third heaven.

Now, we know that intertestamental sources, that is sources writing in between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament ministry with the birth of our Lord and the ministry of John the Baptist, that sources in different religious books spoke of different numbers of heavens. Some spoke of three, some spoke of five, some spoke seven, some even spoke of ten heavens. But it was not uncommon to speak of three heavens, and it seems clear that the apostle is speaking about three heavens because this is regarded as a great revelation. If there are ten heavens, and you only were raptured to the third heaven, well, then that wouldn’t be so much to speak about or any reason to not want to mention it because of boasting.

So it’s likely that Paul thinks of the heavens as being conformable to the number three. That is, the atmospheric heavens that are about us in which we have clouds and rain and possible thunder and lightning on the way, a tornado or so. And then above the atmospheric heavens, the stellar heavens, and then the third heaven would be what might be called, for lack of proper definition since we know nothing about it, the limitless spiritual heavens where the Lord God himself dwells.

Paradise is a Persian word. It was a word that referred to a royal garden. In the Old Testament, it’s the term that is used in the Greek translation of the Book of Genesis to

describe the Garden of Eden. It was paradise. We know in the New Testament in Revelation chapter 2 in verse 7 when the Lord Jesus speaks and writes to the church at Ephesus, he says as he concludes the letter to them, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches, to him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.” So there was a paradise in the beginning, the Garden of Eden, there is evidently a paradise in the future. In fact, the Scriptures seem to present the whole plan of redemption as being the restoration, to some extent, of that which was God original creation. So we have a first paradise, we have a last paradise, and in between we have the hidden paradise of which we don’t know anything, but shall, I think, find out something about when we enter the Lord’s presence.

When the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross and the people on the cross said, Jesus remember when you come in your kingdom, the Lord Jesus said to him, “Today thou shalt be with me in paradise.” So paradise, the third heaven, is the place of God’s presence, most likely, and it’s the goal of all who are redeemed through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, isn’t it interesting that the apostle is uncertain about this experience? He says, “Twice whether in the body, I do not know or out of the body, I do not know. God knows.” It’s remarkable that the apostle doesn’t know when so many people are willing to tell us what he did not know.

G. Campbell Morgan has written in one of his books that when he was in the United States, he had individuals who went up to him and asked him what he thought about Paul’s experience. Did he believe that story? And he remembered one person who asks was Paul caught up in bodily form, or was it his spirit that passed on into paradise?

Well, Dr. Morgan said my reply was obvious, he said “My dear friend how do you suppose I know when Paul tells us twice over that he does not know.” And then Mr. Morgan goes on the talk about people who claim to have visions and revelations. He makes some interesting statements. He says, “When people ask me did you ever have an

experience like this? I say never. Do you think other people have had it? Undoubtedly, I am certain that experiences like that have been granted under certain conditions to certain persons and always with a certain definite purpose.” That’s an amazing thing for Dr. Morgan to say.

And then he goes on to say, which shows that even Dr. Morgan wasn’t always consistent, he said, “But I always am suspicious. And, in fact, I want to know what they had for supper the night before.” That would seem to suggest that the only reason he said I think it happens is in order to avoid the criticism of saying, you mean to say, it’s impossible today when so many people claim that it has happened.

So whether Paul was caught up body and all like Enoch or Elijah or whether only in spirit, we know this, Paul was comfortable with either of you. In other words, he says whether this or that, I don’t know. But he does not say it couldn’t have been that because the biblical doctrine would forbid it. So he could have been caught up body and spirit or he could have passed into the presence of the Lord in spirit alone. He is comfortable with both of those things.

Now, I want you to notice what Paul emphasizes. He says in verse 4, “I was caught up into paradise, and I heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak.” Now, I’d like first to point out that when he says he heard these things he first says they were inexpressible because they were simply ineffable. That is, one could not describe them so that we down here upon the earth or anyone down here upon the earth could understand them.

If you’ll remember when the Apostle Peter in the first epistle speaks of the inheritance of the saints, he describes it as incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Now, I ask you, could you describe the inheritance of the saints from that, incorruptible, undefiled, fadeth not away, three negative terms. In other words, all Peter is saying is our inheritance is not like anything down here on the earth. Things down on the earth corrupt. Things down here upon the earth may be defiled and will be defiled,

and things down here on the earth will fade away, even those of you who are counting on gold. It’s corruptible, too. Incorruptible things are heavenly things. Human things are corruptible. But if you were to ask to describe our inheritance positively, there is no way in which we could describe it from Scripture for the simple reason we do not have the capacity to understand that, so the apostle suggests.

Now, I have a friend who was a colleague of mine at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and he has some words concerning the difficulty of Paul. He said, “You know, suppose you learn the language of some isolated tribe in the interior of New Guinea from a tribesman who made the trek out to the civilized world. And let’s say the tribe was a pre-stone-aged tribe in its technology. We have had something like that in the South Seas in recent years. And your assignment is to penetrate that tribe and explain to the people using their language and no visual aids exactly what electricity is and can do.”

And then my colleague says, “You might proceed by saying that electricity, presumably you would have to transliterate the word, is something like a powerful, invisible spirit that runs faster than the wind along hard things like vines. These hard things, unlike vines, are made by men and are often strung up on tree trunks with their branches lopped off. Electricity is made at one end of these vines and the vines carry the electricity into all the houses. When one gets inside, it goes into some other things that man makes. One of these looks a little like a box, but when electricity gets inside of it the top heats up like fire and you can burn your cooking upon it just as well as you can burn it outside. And, furthermore, when the electricity gets inside other things that man makes, small round things, they fill the house with light so that you have vision like little suns, so to speak.” One would be forced to do things like that but when we come to the heavenly things we don’t have the capacity to do even that.

The apostle and the New Testament writers tell us in various ways that we look for a city that has foundations we do not really understand. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord and we look forward to that. In fact, most of us who make

profession of faith in the Lord Jesus look forward to being with the Lord. One of the strange things is that so many people who say that they look forward to being with the Lord and with the believers are those that find it very difficult to spend one hour with other believers on Tuesday or Thursday night in the ministry of the word of God.

That’s a strange thing, isn’t it? In fact, it leads one to think that there are a lot of people, a lot of professing believers in Christ, if they were transplanted to heaven as they are, they would want to be out of heaven in a very short time. It’s those who have been born again, who have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who have come to appreciate what has done for them who will enjoy heaven. Those others will not at all. It will be the last place on the face of this universe that they would like to be, in heaven itself.

There is a story that one commentator tells of a young man who was a Christian man, and he was on his deathbed. He had been brought up in a Christian home, I should have said. He had spurned the grace of God. Someone was trying to comfort him and leaning over him on his deathbed said, “It won’t be long now, and after all death is only going home.” He looked up startled, “Going home? What do you mean? This is the only home I’ve ever known. Death for me will be going away from home and going I do not know where.” Sad to say that’s really the experience evidently of the majority of our fellow citizens.

Paul says they were inexpressible because they were ineffable. They were things that we could not understand. But secondly, he says they were inexpressible because they were impermissible. He states, which a man is not permitted to speak. One asks, why Paul? Well, perhaps they were solely given for his benefit to endure the mission to the Gentiles. Why they were not permitted to us, Paul does not explain. But he goes on to say some things about it that gives us an insight into how he responded to this great experience.

He says, “On behalf of such a man will I boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast.” You’ll notice he preserves this curious distinction between the man and himself.

Objectively, it’s the man in Christ. Subjectively, well, it’s Paul in his weaknesses. Objectively, the man in Christ has the great experience. Subjectively, Paul in his weaknesses. And he will speak about them in the next section of this particular paragraph.

Now, I’d like for you to notice that he prefers boasting in weaknesses to boasting in his experiences. Look at what he says, “On behalf of such a man will I boast. But on my own behalf, I will not boast except in regard to my weaknesses.” In other words, the two Pauls are different in this respect. The first one, the man in Christ, one may boast of him, the man in Christ. But as far as Paul himself is concerned, he wants to boast about his weaknesses. He dislikes to boast over this experience. Why? After all, what could Paul not have done if he had the right publisher and the right editors to write up something like this? But the apostle does not want to boast except in his weaknesses. Why not? Well, for the simple reason that the one who boasts is to boast in the Lord. As he says in chapter 10 in verse 17, “But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord, and to speak about the experience that he had, it would be very difficult for him to do this without boasting of himself to some extent. So he dislikes to boast over it.

He says as he began the chapter, “it’s unprofitable, boasting is necessary, it’s not profitable.” And but he said, “I’ll have to go on because of the circumstances.” He dislikes to boast over something that might suggest that he himself is worthy of any kind of adulation. The fear of adulation he speaks of in the last part of the 6<sup>th</sup> verse. He says, “But I refrain from this so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears in me. Boasting, I will not boast of the man in Christ except insofar as it serves the purposes in Corinth, but I will boast in my weaknesses.” Why? Well, because in my weaknesses when I am delivered from them, God gets the glory. And so the power of Christ rests upon him. And God is glorified in his weaknesses, and therefore he will boast in his weaknesses, he will not boast in these great experiences.

Now, I’d like to suggest to you that Paul’s attitude is precisely the opposite of the prevailing mood in a great section of evangelicalism today. In other words, what we see in Paul is the folly of self-esteem. Look at it again. He says, “I refrain from this so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.” Now, that attitude is exactly the opposite of many people today. We fear others will not appreciate us. The apostle is not concerned about people appreciating him. He wants to glorify God. The idea of boasting, the idea of building up his own self-esteem is the very thing that he does not like. Self-voiding he says is not only foolish, it’s false because even apostles are sinners.

Now, you’ll notice if you’ll just think about this for a moment that three convictions at least underlie what he’s saying. First of all, our reputation must not rest upon inaccessible claims. If the apostle were to boast about this experience how could we test it? How could anyone test it? No one could test it. That’s the reason we cannot test James Robinson when he says the Lord spoke to him this past week and told him to tell Jimmy not to do it. And vice versa, the Lord spoke to Jimmy and told him to establish the theological seminary, but we have no way of testing that. It’s Jimmy’s word and that’s all. And it’s James’ word on the other hand. And so it’s impossible for us to test them, and therefore the apostle doesn’t think like that. He says his reputation must not rest upon inaccessible claims.

And, secondly, observable behavior is the better basis of assessment. If you want to test a man’s Christianity, you don’t listen to what he says alone. You pay strict attention to what he does, how he lives, how his Christianity manifests itself in his behavior. That’s a valid test. That’s the second thing. The apostle says, “I refrain from this so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me.”

And, thirdly, Christ and the gospel message are the proper focus. Messengers, other than our Lord, are sinners even apostles. Listen this is the man who said I know that in me, that is, in my flesh dwelleth no good things.

No other Christian minister ever had so rich an experience of visions and revelations as the Apostle Paul, but so far as Paul was concerned, he wished them private, embarrassed to disclose his intimate religious experiences. Today again go into our Christian stores and everyone is writing books parading their so-called Christian experiences that others may extol them or perhaps follow them in their misguided experiences. How different the apostle is. “I do not want to boast. I want to boast only in my weaknesses which glorify God because they show how God has delivered me in all my weaknesses. I refrain from boasting about experiences so that you won’t credit me with more than you see in me or hear from me.”

The basis of Paul’s rapture is not according to his psychic propensities, not according to his capacity for mystical experience, not according to his religious nature, and certainly not in accordance by reason of his good works, but fundamentally, my Christian friend, because he was a man in Christ. He lays stress upon that. He was a man in Christ. That’s the foundation even of his apostleship, his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And only, incidentally when I talk about the apostle for a moment, but only those in Christ may anticipate an experience similar to Paul’s when they, too, are exalted to the glory of God in the presence of God at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ by a rapture that the Lord Jesus will accomplish.

I cannot help but feel that the apostle has a most significant word for us in our day. If you are here today, and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are not a man in Christ. And, therefore, you do not have any hope of such an experience. If you were to go to heaven as you are, you’d be very unhappy. Why, if you think it would be bad to sit for an hour in a prayer meeting, think of one that is interminable. Or think of a meeting in which the saints gathered. And if you think the saints are strange people and peculiar people (and they are) [laughter] then how are you going to enjoy spending eternity with them?

If you are not a man in Christ, you will not have that experience. The man in Christ is in Christ by virtue of the new birth, by virtue of the work of the Holy Spirit who regenerates and gives faith. And who creates within the saints the sense that they are sinners and causes them in the sense of their peril to flee to the Lord Jesus who has offered the atoning sacrifice for sinners as he told the Corinthians, “I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified”? That is, as a crucified Savior who dies for sinners. That’s the heart of the ministry of the Lord and those who rest in him receive the forgiveness of sins, they receive free generation in faith. They come to be men or women in Christ, and they have the hope of ultimately reaching the third heaven or paradise and enjoying the presence of the Triune God and the apostles and the rest of us ordinary saints who, by the grace of God, have the hope of being there as well.

If you are here today and you have never believed in Christ, we call upon you as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus to realize your lost condition in Christ. And if you have come to sense of that, to flee to him in your heart giving thanks to God for Christ who died for you and receiving on the authority of God’s word of forgiveness of sins. Come to him. Believe in him. Trust in him. There is no better time than now. .

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the apostle’s revelation of his experiences, but most of all of the revelation of the attitude of a man in Christ who is reluctant to boast about the great experiences that he had that the glory of God may somehow or other be blunted. He wished to glory in his weaknesses which reveal so plainly that the power of Christ rested upon him. Give us, Lord, something of the same spirit. And if, by their grace, should be some in this audience who do not know Christ and who feel that they are sinners, Lord, move them at this very moment to receive by

Thy grace the forgiveness of sins through Christ’s saving atoning work for sinners on  
Calvary’s Cross.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.