



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Great Lion of God, 2 Corinthians 12:1-10

“Paul: Man of Vision, Man of Action”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] We thank Thee, Lord, for the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul. We rejoice in the way in which Thou hast sovereignly laid hold of him, transformed him, and made him an instrument in the proclamation in the word of God. We thank Thee for the influence that he has had upon us and the western world especially. We thank Thee for those parts of our life and culture that are traceable to the apostle and his faithfulness to the word of God as given to him. We especially thank Thee that Thou didst make him an apostle to the Gentiles, and we rejoice in the spreading of the Good News to us who were not of the chosen people ethnically. And we thank Thee for the way in which Thy grace has reached to us and included us in the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ. We give Thee thanks and praise and will Thou, Lord, be with us as we study the word together tonight. In Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] “Paul, a Man of Vision and a Man of Action.” We have noticed that the Apostle Paul was a much traveled man. For example, we’ve followed Paul from Damascus to Arabia, back to Damascus, to Jerusalem, to Caesarea, to Tarsus, and then back to Antioch, and shortly after he will go on to Jerusalem and then ultimately, will

begin his travels that will take him over the west for in a considerable way in the future. It is now about 45 AD, and Paul is in Antioch for one year. He is teaching the church at Antioch with Barnabas, the two of them instructing the church in the doctrines of the word of God. He is back now, after a delay of about ten years, in the main stream, not of Christian action, as we shall see, but of recorded Christian action. It seems very plain from 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and the description that is given there of the sufferings of Paul and the experiences of Paul that he was engaged in a lot of Christian activity which Luke does not record in the Book of Acts and also which does not appear except incidentally in the epistle of the apostle. He is back in Antioch because Barnabas had need of some help there, and has brought him to Antioch, and they are teaching the word there.

Antioch was founded in 300 BC by Seleucus Nicator, who was the first Seleucid ruler. And of course he prospered, if one may call it that in the time, immediately following the death of Alexander the Great. This city Antioch was named after his father, whose name was Antiochus. It was at this time when Paul was ministering there with Barnabas, the third largest city in the Roman Empire, Rome being the largest, and then Alexandria, and then Antioch.

There were many proselytes to Judaism in the city of Antioch. Now, one became a proselyte to Judaism that is a Gentile by, first of all if he was a male, being circumcised, and then secondly, he baptized himself or he gave himself over to a ritual bathing, which is probably the antecedent of the baptism of John the Baptist. Then he also brought a sacrifice and pledged that he would keep the law. So these four things transpired for the males. They were circumcised. They were baptized. They brought an offering. And then they pledged that they would keep the Mosaic law. There were many Gentiles in the city of Antioch who had come to Judaism in that way. It's easy to see why people in the world then who were thinking about spiritual things would have been attracted to Judaism because they were largely identified with paganism and with the many gods of

paganism, and to find a religion in which there was one God worshipped and one God who was set out as a holy God was quite a bit different from anything to which they were accustomed. The gods of the heathen were not holy gods. They were wicked. They were sinful. They were sensuous. And, of course, having many gods, it was filled with idolatry, and so those who were seeking truth would naturally have been attracted by the relative purity of Judaism as over against the paganism of the world around.

Now, of course, there were some true believers in Judaism, but we're thinking, primarily, of Judaism as a whole. Also, remember that in the persecution of Stephen in the city of Jerusalem, a number of Hellenistic refugees had come from Jerusalem to Antioch. That is described for us in the Book of Acts. For example, in Acts chapter 8 and verse 1, after the stoning of Stephen to death, we read, “And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” In other words, the apostles stayed in Jerusalem, but many refugees went out, no doubt because of the persecutions there as that text indicates. Then we also read in verse 9,

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

So, many refugees had left the city of Jerusalem, had gone to places like Antioch, and, specifically, it is mentioned in Acts chapter 11 that some of those who had congregated in the city of Antioch were individuals from Cyprus. He mentions, specifically, Phenice and Cyprus, and then in verse 20 of Acts chapter 11, “And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake

unto the Grecians, preaching the LORD Jesus.” So, Antioch then was the place where many refugees from Jerusalem lived. There were many proselytes who were Gentiles, but proselytes to Judaism, there. And so when these refugees came to the city of Antioch, who were true believers, they began to preach the word and Acts tell us that a great movement of the spirit was taking place in Antioch. As you read through the Book of Acts, you notice, of course, that Antioch becomes the headquarters of the Christian church, replacing Jerusalem as the active head. So when the apostles go out on their journeys, they come back and report to the church at Antioch. Not that Jerusalem is unimportant, but the movement of the church is away from Jerusalem toward the west.

Now Paul, I say, had not been inactive in the ten to eleven years that he spent in Cilicia in Tarsus; he had a number of visionary experiences, but one remarkable one stands out. It's to be placed in the time period spent in Tarsus between the years of about 35 AD to 46 AD, and that's what we are turning to now. And I want to read 2 Corinthians 12 verse 1 through verse 10, for this experience is dated by Paul, and it does seem to fall in the period of time after he was sent away to Caesarea and then to Tarsus before he came back to Antioch to teach for a year with Barnabas. Now, in 2 Corinthians he writes to the church in Corinth,

“It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. (Now, I'd like for you to notice the plural, “visions and revelations of the Lord.”) I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (so, he tells us approximately when this took place.) (Whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a

fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”

This was Paul's pretribulational rapture, incidentally. You'll notice the term twice is used. He said he was “Caught up to the third heaven.” That's the word that is used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4 for the rapture. The incident itself is a rather strange kind of incident. And, of course, we would like to ask a lot of questions about it; if Paul were here, I'm sure that that would be one of the things that would be brought up. And it must have been a question that the apostle had to face frequently. He says that he was “Caught up into the third heaven.” He speaks as if this was an ecstatic experience, and no doubt, that's what it was. What is an ecstatic experience? Well, very few of us have had an ecstatic experience. Some of us had it when the Cowboys first won the Super Bowl, but that's really a little different, isn't it? We call it an ecstatic experience when something unusually good happens to us. If you're trying to speak about it psychologically, perhaps you could say something like this: that it is the temporary detachment of the mind from the body in which the person is able to look at himself objectively, but not feel that he is really attached to himself. You notice Paul speaks in this passage in the third person. He talks about a man, “And this man,” in the Greek text. “I knew a man in Christ,” he's obviously speaking of himself. But he calls him “A man in Christ.” And then in verse 2 he says, “Such and one caught up to the third heaven. I

knew such a man (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;)”
So, he writes of himself as if he were looking at himself as a distinct person different from himself.

It is a rather remarkable thing. One of the things that is interesting about it, however, is that it is not unparalleled in Paul’s world. There are others who had made similar claims to an experience like this. For example, in apocalyptic literature there are four Rabbis who are said to have and who claim to have seen Paradise. Rabbi Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha Ben Abuyah and Akiba, the famous Rabbi, all of whom flourished in the earlier part of the 2nd Century AD, and so were two generations younger than the Apostle Paul. They are ones who claim to have entered Paradise. Ben Azzai looked into Paradise and died. Ben Zoma looked and went mad. Elisha Ben Abuyah became an apostate. Only Akiba survived the experience unscathed. What is meant by their entrance into Paradise, of course, is debated, but evidently was some mystical experience that they were claiming to have had. And what is indicated by the tradition that they all suffered, except Akiba, is that it’s a perilous thing as a mortal individual to have a view of Paradise.

I haven’t had a chance to do any real study of the connection between Paul’s experience and these statements about such an experience, but of course, when you read in the Bible when, for example, Joshua is in the presence of the Lord, or when Moses is in the presence of the Lord, or particularly, when Jacob wrestled with the angel, and he left limping and limped for the rest of his life, what lies back of it is the fact that the God of Paradise is a holy God, and no ordinary human may enter into his presence without suffering for it. And so there is something of that, no doubt, in these traditions about these rabbis, but in the case of Paul, we have a similar thing because it is clear that the stake in his flesh, the thorn in his flesh that was given him was given him because he had been caught up to the third heaven and had heard things that were unutterable. So, in order that he might not be lifted up beyond that which was proper, God gave him this

stake in the flesh, this thorn in the flesh, in order that he might be not proud and arrogant with reference to his experience.

So it was an ecstatic experience, and the apostle speaks about it. Evidently, he finds it necessary to speak about it in Corinth because the false teachers with whom he was dealing must have made similar kinds of claims. We know, for example, in the letter that he wrote to the Colossians that some had claimed to have certain revelations to have entered into places which were unnatural for men to enter into. Well, anyway, Paul goes on to say in verse 7, “And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.” This is a very distressing ailment, and, no doubt caused Paul a great deal of difficulty for the rest of his life. It was what one of the commentators said, “A knockout blow to his pride.” But, it proved, ultimately, a help to the apostle and not a hindrance because he responded to it in the way in which God was pleased for him to respond because it became the means of one seeing the power of God in the apostle’s weakness.

We, of course, want to say, “Well what was it? What was it that he had?” It’s interesting to read what the scholars have suggested. It’s all speculation largely. Some surmises include he had pain in the ear or the head. That was Tertullian’s many hundreds of years ago. Some have suggested it was Hymenaeus and Alexander because he was disturbed by those two men and the way in which they were departing from the faith. Others have said it was epilepsy. Many men in the ancient world were afflicted by epilepsy; Julius Caesar, for example, was one of them. Still others have said he had malaria, and that was a constant problem. Others have said he had depression. Well, that would have been no stake in the flesh in the 20th Century. We have so many pills that you can take for depression. Others have said it was the suffering caused by the persecutions that the apostle underwent. Still others have said it was the agony of Jewish unbelief because, remember, he speaks about having unceasing pain because of the fact

the Israel has not responded. And still others have said it was the memory of Paul's persecution of the church.

The most plausible of the speculations, and it is a speculation, is the speculation that the apostle had some difficulty with his eyes. It's usually been called ophthalmia, some form of eye difficulty. Well that makes sense, at least partially in the light of the things that are stated in the Epistle to the Galatians. Writing to the Galatians in the 4th chapter and the 13th and 14th verses the apostle says, “You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.” So, he had some testing in the flesh, some problem. It might have been just illness, some form of illness. But nevertheless, it could have been some eye trouble because he goes on to say, “Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” So, it may have been that he had some form of eye difficulty, and it must have been a very distressing kind of difficulty. It may have made him very embarrassed because of the way in which it affected his appearance. We know in the 6th chapter, in the 11th verse, he says, “Ye see with what large letters I have written unto you with mine own hand.”

Now ordinarily Paul dictated his letters. He didn't dictate Galatians because he was so disturbed by what was happening there. And the Authorized Version is wrong when it says, “Ye see how large a letter I have written.” He's not talking about the length of the letter. It was only 6 chapters. But he is saying the literal rendering of the Greek text is “with what large letters.” So evidently because of his eye trouble he was not able to write very well, and he was writing in a large scrawling, sprawling hand, and that was a reflection of, perhaps, the eye trouble. What it was, of course, we do not know. That may well have been it, but I think, often when we think about the speculations, we lose the important thing that we should remember about it.

One thing you notice about Luke in the Book of the Acts and Paul in his epistles is that they write from different viewpoints. Luke doesn't tell us anything about Paul's difficulty, specifically, because Luke is writing a history of the early church, and so he looks at things from the outside. Using the figure of the tabernacle as someone has, he looks at the covering of the tabernacle which was made with the badgers skins. He looks at the man. But the Apostle Paul, when he describes his experiences, he looks at the inside of the tabernacle. He looks at the hangings of blue suggestive of heaven, and he looks at the man in Christ Jesus. So, in Luke's writing we have the outward view of things, the historical view of things, but when Paul writes, we have the inside view of things from the man in Christ.

How little we know of other people's lives. And I dare say that that's true of us in this auditorium. Now there are some people who are always trying to urge you to get to know everything about everybody else's life. Well there's probably some benefit in that, but there is also something about it that would probably not be beneficial. There are many of us that have certain ambitions and certain desires and certain things with which we are concerned that are very private, and they should remain private. How little we know of one another's lives. Isn't it interesting to read Paul as he expresses himself in this case? He never would have said anything about this were it not for the difficulty in Corinthians. You see, he says at the beginning, “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory.” He was forced to do this because others were making claims that were not true and so he had to speak the truth. He will tell us in 2 Corinthians he doesn't like to boast. He hates to boast. But it's necessary for him to boast because of the historical situation.

There were many things in Paul's life and many things in his mind which he never unveiled to us and there are many things in the minds of all of us sitting in this room that we have not unveiled to others. The apostle illustrates some very important things for us here. He indicates, of course, that by this that he was what I would call a real man. Now so far as I know he did not eat quiche either and so that would qualify him. [Laughter]

But he was a man of resolution. Just think of the experiences of the apostle. Through the nice lovely days of the sun shine and then through the storms of life the apostle kept unmovedly toward his goal in life to minister the word of God as the apostle of the Gentiles through the good and through the evil. He was resolved to do the will of God. He had fortitude. He took sorrow, and he took anguish and a great deal of that, but that did not deter him from the path that God had directed for him. He had many of the same kinds of problems that you and I have. Oh, true he had some experiences we have not had. I know there are lots of people who think if I could have just had one of those unusual experiences that the apostle had, then I'm sure I would be more faithful. I'm not sure at all. It's evident in the Old Testament as we read the lives of the prophets. They had unusual experiences of the Lord, ecstatic experiences, ecstatic like experiences, but human nature is human nature and human nature is rebellious toward the things of God. It is by the grace of God that the apostle is as faithful he is. He was a man of courage, a John Knox kind of man who never feared the face of clay, unflinching in his obedience to the will of God as it was expressed to him.

There's another thing that I think we ought not to lose when we sense that the apostle here is telling us something of his inner experiences, and we tend to get carried away with curiosity, we shouldn't forget the discipline of pain. And in the apostle's life you find the perfect illustration of it, it seems to me.

“Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn (this stake) in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, (for he looks at Satan as the one who executed the judgments of God, under God,) lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice.”

Can you imagine the Apostle Paul praying three times for the same thing and getting a “no” each time? Have you ever gotten some “no's?” Well, you can understand

the apostle if you've ever gotten two “no's,” three “no's.” And probably, many of you in this auditorium can think of some things for which you've prayed for a very long time. And maybe you're still hoping to get a “yes” answer, and perhaps you will get a “yes” answer. But there are experiences in which you pray and you get “no” and “no” and “no” and then there comes an end and you know so far as you're prayers are concerned your prayer is not going to be answered as you had hoped that it might. The apostle had hoped that “thorn in his flesh” would be taken away, but no it came back with the answer, “My grace is sufficient for Thee.” What a magnificent word sufficient is. My grace is enough for you.

Now you might have thought that Paul might have entered a testimony meeting and would have praised God if the thorn had been taken away and that would be the ideal kind of spiritual life, to be able to stand up and say, “God answered my prayer. And my thorn is gone.” Well, I'd like to suggest to you there is something better because the apostle learned through this experience that the grace of God was sufficient for him with the thorn. “My grace is sufficient,” sufficient. Let me emphasize it again, sufficient for us in the experiences of life. One of the things I've liked about the elders in Believers Chapel is that from the beginning they had the idea that the word of God was sufficient for us. We are buffeted by all kinds of fads and all kinds of movements and spirits that are moving though evangelicalism, year after year, decade after decade, age after age, but through it all, it's good to be reminded over and over that the word of God is sufficient for us as Christians. And the apostle learned, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Our disabilities are meant to unite with his abilities. And the result be praise for the sufficiency of this gracious God. Notice the 10th verse, “Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities.” Now, here is the person who is praying that the infirmity would go, but now, “I take pleasure in infirmities.” I take pleasure in reproaches. In the Greek text, that's a word that means something like insults, “In

persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong,” for he has learned to lean on the Lord in the experiences of life.

I guess you could illustrate this with many of the great men of the Bible but Jacob comes to my mind. Jacob learned this experience too, when he wrestled with the angel to which I referred previously. He limped through the rest of his life of his life, but I think that he got quite a bit of joy out of that limp. It always reminded him of the fact that he had wrestled with God and he had prevailed. And that the angel had changed his name from Jacob, Supplanter, to Prince with God.

Well now Paul had some related experiences. This, of course, occurred while he was located in Tarsus, but we know that the apostle says, “It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.” And then he specifically mentions this one. Looking at Paul’s life, he had quite a few of these visions, quite a few of these ecstatic experiences. Of course, we think of the three times that he recounts his conversion and the things that are added as the three accounts are put together. But there are other places where the apostle had experience with the Lord that was in a rather direct way. I just mention these passages if you have a pencil and you want to write them down, you can. If you don’t, that’s fine, you still will be a member in good standing in Believers

Chapel and can get your picture taken and put in the book when it comes.

[Laughter] In addition to these three accounts of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9:1-13, Acts 22:3-16, and Acts 26:4-18, remember there is a fourth reference to the Lord dealing with him in Acts 22, verse 17 through verse 21. There we read in verse 17,

“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed

on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.”

It's interesting that the original commission Paul received in his conversion was that he would minister to Israel and the Gentiles, but now as time goes by it becomes evident that his ministry is going to be directed, primarily, to the Gentiles. He will minister to Israel, as well, but primarily to the Gentiles. Then in Acts chapter 18 verse 9 and verse 10, there is another instance in which the apostle has an ecstatic kind of experience. He's in Corinth, and we read in verse 9 of Acts 18, “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.” So, “I have much people in this city.” There are elect ones there who are going to come to faith in Christ, and until those things come to pass, the apostle is a person who cannot be hurt by the experiences. Then in Acts chapter 23 and verse 11, there is another reference the apostle makes to this kind of thing happening in his life. Verse 11 we read, “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.” So again, the Lord appears to the apostle. And then finally in Acts chapter 27, verse 23 and verse 24, we have a similar thing. In Acts 27 verse 23 we read, “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” So Paul's experiences included a number of times when he had what might be called mystical experiences.

Now, that brings me to talk for the remainder of our time about the related theology. Was Paul a mystic? Well we should probably ask, “What is a mystic?” Well a mystic, in theological language and in historical language, was a person who claimed to

have direct relationship with God. Now you do have people that claim to be in direct touch with God, apart from a mediator. Many religions claim that, actually. And occasionally, you will run across an individual who will claim to have had direct relationship with God, not through a mediator, but direct relationship with God. The Quakers tend to be people like that. They tend to be guided by what they call the inner light. That is, they have an inner light, and they have direct touch with God apart from a mediator. That is, historically and theologically, mysticism.

Now there is a biblical mysticism. That is, when a person has experiences like Paul has, but they are experiences through the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Was Paul a mystic? Was he a person who received direct revelation from God? That is, from God as God and to Paul as a man? No, Paul was not a mystic in that sense. I know what you're thinking. “Well, didn't Paul say that he got direct revelation from the Lord?” Yes, he did. But he let us know in his writings that it was by virtue of the mediator that he was given this direct revelation from the Lord God. When, for example, God spoke to him directly, he was speaking to him directly only because Paul was a man in Christ, because he had a mediator. He said there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. So, was Paul a mystic? No not in the sense of mystics. Paul received revelation directly from God in Christ. In that sense he received revelation from God.

F.F. Bruce, in his very fine book on Paul, says there was very little in Paul that savors of the “flight of the alone to the Alone,” the last one being capitalized. “The flight of the alone to the Alone,” reminds me of James Denney's famous expression that, “I'd rather be saved in Christ than lost in God.” And what he was referring to was the tendency of some to speak about their ecstatic experiences in such a way that they were caught up in God and lost in the experience of God apart from the mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Professor Denney was right. I'd rather be saved in Christ (that is, having the mediator set out in the word of God who dies for my sin) than some ecstatic mystical experience unrelated to the cross of Jesus Christ. So, someone might say, “Well

what about the mysteries? Didn't Paul talk about the mysteries?" Yes, he talked about the mysteries. He said that he was communicating mysteries, the mysteries of the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the church, for example. But that's not mysticism. Those mysteries that Paul is talking about are bits of divine revelation that were not revealed in the Old Testament but are now revealed. The mysteries are references to divine revelation which was one time was hidden but now is open through the apostle. So his mysteries were revelations of the divine purpose.

As far as the phenomena, like glossolalia or speaking in tongues is concerned, the apostle did not devote himself to that. I know that if we are to understand the statement in 1 Corinthians 14 as a reference to the fact that Paul spoke privately in tongues, we should remember that it was with a view to the authentication of the word of God just as he says in that very chapter. He mentions the purposes of tongues. He spoke in tongues for those purposes, and it's very interesting that if we take him to have spoken privately in tongues, it was not the kind of glossolalia that is called tongues today.

I got a letter the other day from a lady who is listening to the Buffalo station in which she excoriated me a little bit. She said, "Last week we heard your message and we really rejoiced in it, but this week you made fun of us." And she said, "You ought not to make fun of us Pentecostals." Well, I didn't make fun of the Pentecostals, and almost every time that I speak of the Pentecostals, I say there are many fine Christian people among the Pentecostals. But I do not think that what they call speaking in tongues is biblical speaking in tongues, and so I must refer to what I think is the teaching of the word of God. And if the lady listened carefully, why then I think she would have realized that I was not really attacking that, but she felt so caught up in it that she thought I was really making fun of them. I was not. Many of them are fine Christians. Many of them are finer Christians than others who don't believe in the tongue-speaking that they believe in. But we must follow what we think the Bible teaches. I do think there have been many amusing experiences of people who have spoken in tongues. But there are many

amusing experiences of people who don't speak in tongues too, and I speak about them also, including my own.

So, the apostle speaks of the sufferings that he endured in other ways too as well the way in which he entered into the experience of Christ. For example, in Colossians in chapter 1 and verse 24 he talks of sharing in Messianic sufferings. Listen to what he says in Colossians 1:24. “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.” The apostle had many experiences of suffering. And those experiences of suffering in which he underwent were not ways in which he added to the sufferings of Christ, but ways in which he experienced the non-atoning sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, the kinds of things our Lord experienced because the world was angry with him and because unbelievers were angry with him, persecutions. Paul entered into those things, and he could speak of sharing in the Messianic sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ, not the atoning sufferings, the non-atoning afflictions. And isn't it interesting that he says in 2 Timothy and verse 10 that he endures all things for the sake of the elect.

Today I looked over the *Presbyterian Journal*. The first page has, “Ballot – Will You Be Saved?” Yes. No. God has voted “X,” yes. Satan has voted “X,” no. A tie, your vote must decide the issue. Now I must say this for the *Presbyterian Journal*, they have two excellent articles in it in which they show that that is unscriptural. But that's the way many people think about the Doctrine of Election. God's voted for you. Satan's voted against you. And now it's up to you. The apostle looked at the elect in an entirely different way. He thought of them as the people that God had already out in the world and he suffered the things that he suffered for the elects' sake. What greater privilege can we possibly have than preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus, individually, or publically, or whatever way personally, for the sake of the completion of the program of God with reference to his elect? What a magnificent privilege, to have a part in that. And every one of us can have such a part.

Well, I wish it were possible for me, the time is up, to talk about what this meant for Paul in his life, but I think you can see from that statement. The apostle did not think of this spiritual life into which he had been brought as simply a theological thing. It was grounded in theology. It led to the outpoured love of God, and it led also to the sufferings of the apostle in order that the gospel may go to the Gentiles. But Paul had such a sense of his commission, convinced as he was that he was a figure of prophetic significance, apostle to the Gentiles, that it meant a passionate devotion to lifelong action. My dear Christian friend, that's why we're here, for lifelong action, if God had saved you simply to have you ultimately enter into fellowship with him, why has he left you here? Why didn't he just take you? He has you here for a purpose. And the purpose is that you serve him for the elects' sake, for the completion of the plan of God with reference to the Gentiles that the Gentiles may reach fruition and he may again turn to national Israel and they too may come into the experience of the Abrahamic blessing in order that the salvation of God may go to the ends of the earth.

Our time is up. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the experiences of the Apostle Paul and for the reality of them, and we know Thou art desirous of each of us having a spiritual experience of the Lord God. Give us, Lord, great desire to know Thee in a deeper way, to experience Thy grace, to have the kind of spiritual life that the apostle had. We know we're not apostles of the Gentiles in the sense that Paul is, but we are links in the chain that the elect may find their salvation. May...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]

“Paul: Man of Vision, Man of Action” by S. Lewis Johnson
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