

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: July 3rd: 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10

[Second attempt: failed to save first version!] Paul's critics were doing what determined critics do: attacking him on all fronts. He was a man who didn't have the gift of seeing visions (and reporting on them frequently and at length). He wasn't sufficiently Jewish. He wasn't a film star male. Paul responds that he too has been gifted with a glimpse through the veil: that deeply affected him; but he is not going to dwell on it. He says that in parentage, tradition and practice, and grasp of Hebrew, he is as Jewish as any of them. He says that yes he isn't Mr Universe, and he has a visible and on-going health problems that causes him real pain and difficulties. He had fervently prayed for cure; but been told by God just to get on with it. GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT! Put in another way, God clothes us when we are naked, and strengthens us when we are weak. The nakedness and weakness (goodbye to self-reliance) is God's starting point.

Visions (glimpses through the veil) are frequent in the Bible: Sometimes extended and extensive as in Revelation, Daniel, Ezekiel. Sometimes brief but transformative as with Isaiah or Jacob. An experience that can't be described or explained and is not to be reported might sound a bit useless, but down the ages the "glimpse/revelation" has been powerful. You might put Paul's initial encounter on the Damascus Road as a vision. You might call the three disciples' experience on the Mount of the Transfiguration as a vision. For folk who don't have a visionary experience, there are still God moments – something more special than the special ordinary.

"Paradise" was a Persian word for a walled garden. The Persian King granted a favoured few the privilege of walking with him in his walled garden. God does the same to some very ordinary people. Walking with the Lord.

Paul's Jewishness was in question because he was a Jew of the Exile and not a Jerusalem (Temple) Jew. It seems a bit odd to us; but we have our own "not really one of us" ways of thinking.

The thorn in Paul's flesh/ stake in his nerve can not be reliably identified, It was clearly periodic, painful, and public. Epilepsy has been one thought. Migraine another. We know Paul had eye troubles: he had to write big letters. (Hangover from the Damascus Road blindness?) One guess is the sort of malaria that produces severe headaches. We need to keep our thinking about healing prayer (Paul himself was associated with healing miracles) in the context of Paul's experience of asking for healing and getting grace to go on without healing. We probably all know people who stay positive despite.....

John Wesley was not St Paul, but Wesley's activity level gives us a more recent picture of pastoral/missionary hyperactivity: 42,000 sermons, and sometimes three sermons and 60-70 miles travel on one day. God's grace much needed.