

2 Corinthians 4:13-18 – “It’s Just A Light Affliction”

This chapter has been a wonderful chapter at gaining a right perspective of the Christian life and this wonderful ministry we have of sharing the gospel. Paul has been pointing out how even though he may go through times where he gets knocked around it’s so that the life of Jesus may all the more be seen in him. Notice what he said in vs. 12 (where we concluded last week): ***So then death is working in us, but life in you.***

Paul was willing to lay his life down; to give it all up if it would cause Jesus to shine all the more and have people turning to Christ! Paul was ok with death because it ultimately brought life! There’s no glory without suffering. There’s no resurrection without crucifixion.

That’s why the earthen vessels picture is so important. We’re not to promote ourselves or puff ourselves up. Polishing and protecting these vessels is missing the point! These vessels are meant to be bumped around so that the contents will spill out. But those bumps and bangs aren’t to worry us, or make us doubt in God’s faithfulness and love, they’re to allow the power of God to kick in and do His work outside of us and beyond us.

1. The Purpose of Affliction – 4:13-15

4:13-14 - And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak,¹⁴ knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

Paul looks back at what has been said previously. We’re thankful for the Word of God and those that have gone before us. We glean from many of the godly people that either wrote of their own experience of suffering or were written about by others. We’ve got many great examples of people that persevered by faith and were sustained by God’s faithfulness.

Paul quotes from Psalm 116:10, but let’s look at this in more of its context: ***Psalm 116:8–12, “For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.⁹ I will walk before the Lord In the land of the living.¹⁰ I believed, therefore I spoke, “I am greatly afflicted.”¹¹ I said in my haste, “All men are liars.”¹² What shall I render to the Lord For all His benefits toward me?”***

- The passage can sound a little clunky, but the idea here is that the Psalmist had been rescued from imminent death. He’s now saying in faith that he will

walk in the land of the living before the Lord. He has believed and now he's confidently speaking it out.

And it's this same spirit of faith that caused this Psalmist to boldly move forward in the face of affliction, that is at work in Paul's life (and every believers life). It's the same spirit of faith that the writer of Hebrews, when running out of time to tell of all those that have overcome obstacles by faith in God in the great 'hall of faith' chapter, said:

- **Hebrews 11:32–35**, *"And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: ³³ who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. ³⁵ Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection."*

The same spirit that led so many of these heroes of the faith to do great exploits for God, is the same spirit at work in you. Do you believe this?

Do you think that there's a variant of God's spirit that for some it's just like a spirit in training? Or a spirit that gets relegated to the misfits of the family of God. No! It's One Spirit and it's the same spirit at work in us as He has in others through history. So, this leads Paul to not only believe it internally, but to speak it out externally. This is a faith in action!

In fact, we read in **Romans 8:11**, *"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."*

This same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead is the same Spirit at work in us. WOW!!

So, Paul has great faith and belief in the message and ministry he was entrusted with. He spoke out the truth. And if it meant suffering, Paul knew it was just the precursor to God's resurrection power: ***knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus...***

- Paul isn't sweating out the trials and afflictions that he's had to face. He knows that even if they lead to death, it's not the end. He has this spirit of faith by which he knows that he too will be raised up to eternal life.

Now I understand some of us may not be completely fearing death so much; we know it's our great graduation into eternal life. I think what we can tend to fear more is suffering and being persecuted. Right??

Well, Paul has some things to say about that...

4:15 - *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

Everything that Paul has gone through, and any trial that he still has to face, is serving a purpose. It's allowing others to hear the good news and receive the grace of Jesus to salvation.

God was working through the suffering to have thanksgiving abound in others. Paul knew that all that he went through was for the benefit of others (***all things are for your sakes***). That's pretty amazing! Do we consider others in our pain and suffering? Or does it cause us to become even more self-focussed? What a way this is to handle our pain and problems. To know that God may be allowing this in your life to minister to others. And this is causing God to receive the glory. Again, how we need to daily remind ourselves that our lives are meant to be lived to the glory of God.

- **1 Corinthians 10:31**, *"Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

Do you live in a manner where you seek God's glory above your comfort? And where your aim is to see others come to experience this glory of God? That's the exciting life. That's the life that doesn't get bummed out when things aren't going as expected. This is what Paul says next...

2. The Promise Through Affliction – 4:16-17

4:16 - *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

Notice, Paul comes back to the thought he began this chapter with – ***we do not lose heart***... Paul knew that there were reasons and circumstances where you ***could*** lose heart. But it's not what ***needs*** to happen for the believer. Why? Because God is working out something better for us through affliction!

Paul saw that the physical body may be getting beat up, but the spiritual man is growing up! It's getting stronger through these trials.

- **Ephesians 3:16**, *"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,"*

Now there's not a lot of hope for the **outward man**. We're all in a state of decay. That's just the reality. These bodies aren't meant to last forever. We live in a world where a lot of emphasis and work is put on the outer person. But it's a losing battle!

In fact, you know your body is breaking down when you go to straighten out the wrinkles in your socks and then realize you're not wearing any. Or when you do bend down to fix yours socks you wonder what else you should do while you're down there. You know your body is breaking down when you walk past a bathroom and think I better try to go while I have one here.

It's not fun getting old, but our hope is not in these bodies. Our hope is in the inward man being renewed and transformed day by day.

4:17 - For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

This is almost humorous. Paul says **our light affliction**?? Look at what he's had to endure:

- **2 Corinthians 6:4–5**, *"But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, ⁵ in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings;"*
- **2 Corinthians 11:23–28**, *"Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."*

Yet as crazy as these things are that Paul has had to endure, he knows they're all temporary! They're just a light thing in comparison to what we're looking forward to in eternity.

- Interestingly, this word for light is used only one other time in the Bible. It's used in **Matthew 11:30**, *"For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* In other words, Jesus says that there's nothing heavy about following Him.

And Paul says these light afflictions are **but for a moment**. Now this can mean different things to different people. The measurement of a *moment* can vary. For instance, I can say to my wife if we're trying to make an appointment, '*Honey it's time to go or we're going to be late*'. She may respond, '*Just one moment, I'm just about ready*'. That's not the kind of moment Paul has in mind here.

You might feel, *but my light affliction feels like it's been going on for so long!* It might feel that way, but when compared to eternity (as Paul is doing here) it will seem like **but for a moment**.

In fact, all these things are working out a far greater work of glory! Now how can that be? Because all that Paul endures in this lifetime for the Lord has reward in eternity. He knows that there is a glory awaiting him that is going to far outweigh any suffering received from this age.

- **Romans 8:18**, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"

Now what is this **eternal weight of glory** exactly? What is it we're all to be longing for? It's the beauty of being in the presence of Jesus when our eternal redemption is complete and we stand perfect in Him. It's witnessing the beauty of resurrected life and the glories of heaven. There's going to be a weight with that. What we will be and what we will receive will far outweigh any heaviness of suffering we've experienced in this lifetime. Paul is basically showing that the greater the suffering, the greater our future glory will be.

- **1 Peter 4:13**, "*but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*"

There will come a time when we will truly say, all that we have endured in this world, was so very worth it for what it produced in the world to come. And suffering brings us to a place where we long all the more for what is to come.

- "According to Paul, our *troubles are achieving for us the glory* of which he writes. It is not that he viewed sufferings as 'good works' or as virtuous in themselves. They do not automatically or mechanically intensify the 'glory'. Rather, it is that *troubles* cause us to *fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen* (verse 18). *Troubles* help us to understand that there is

no future for us here in this tawdry, fading existence. Therefore we focus, increasingly, on the unseen, resurrected and glorified Christ (4:4–6, 14).”¹

Hebrews 11:24–27, *"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin,²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.²⁷ By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible."*

“There is a pyramid in this verse which, as F. E. Marsh has pointed out, does not tire the weary climber but brings unspeakable rest and comfort to his soul.

Glory

Weight of glory

Eternal weight of glory

Exceeding and eternal weight of glory

More exceeding and eternal weight of glory

Far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”^{24 2}

3. The Perspective in Affliction – 4:18

4:18 - *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

If you focus on what is temporary, you'll be sorry. If you focus on what is eternal, you'll have glory! And that's difficult because those are the things that are not seen. When you don't see something, you tend not to worry about it. But what is seen, that's what you can easily worry about.

Paul shows us here that we need the right perspective. We need to have the right focus. Don't dwell on the seen, because that's not the end reality. Focus on that which isn't seen, because that's the end reality.

What are ***the things which are not seen***? They're the things of God. It could be the work He's doing presently (which again isn't always seen in the immediate), it

¹ Barnett, P. (1988). *The message of 2 Corinthians: power in weakness* (p. 94). InterVarsity Press.

²⁴ F. E. Marsh, *Fully Furnished*, p. 103.

² MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 1836). Thomas Nelson.

could be the things of heaven (which Paul mentioned in the previous verse – the weight of glory).

If we could ask the apostle Paul what he saw as life's greatest blessing, I suspect he would answer something like this: "Personal salvation with its provision of the present and the future." For him, nothing else really mattered. He constantly looked beyond his trials and adversities, sensing the presence of Jesus Christ and rejoicing in the prospect of happiness in heaven with Him.

Romanian pastor Richard Wurmbbrand spent 14 years in prison for preaching the gospel. Although his captors smashed four of his vertebrae and either cut or burned 18 holes in his body, they could not defeat him. He testified, "Alone in my cell, cold, hungry, and in rags, I danced for joy every night." During this time he turned to a fellow prisoner, a man he had led to the Lord before they were arrested, and asked, "Have you any resentment against me that I brought you to Christ?" His response: "I have no words to express my thankfulness that you brought me to the wonderful Savior. I would never have it another way." These two men exemplify the supernatural joy that can be experienced by believers who live on the edge of death as the result of being severely persecuted.

Salvation, which brings strength for today and hope for tomorrow, lasts forever. Therefore, we don't have to be defeated by troublesome circumstances. When we know we are saved, we have the assurance that God is at work in our lives, preparing us for the eternal realities of the better world. Yes, salvation is life's greatest blessing. - H.V.L.³

³ Galaxie Software. (2002). *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. Biblical Studies Press.