

Becoming Beauty (2 Corinthians 4:13-18).

(Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-12)

So death is at work in us, but life in you. For the past few weeks we have been making our way through 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and 4 and we ended our time last week by talking about how we can display the beauty of Christ to those around us through our afflictions... And this is important because it is only when people SEE the beauty of Christ in the gospel - it is only then that people can genuinely make the decision to follow Christ. You have to see it! You cannot CHOOSE to follow that which you find to be boring. The Holy Spirit has to remove the veil over our hearts by giving us new hearts. And so... therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. God is merciful in saving sinners. On our own, it would be FUTILE to try to share the gospel with others, but because God has invited us to participate in His salvific work, we do not lose heart! Even in the midst of much opposition and hardness of heart and even persecution. We do not lose heart because we know that as we suffer WITH JESUS we will also be manifesting something of the life and power and beauty of the risen Christ to those around us.

So death is at work in us, but life in you... When we line up our priorities with that of God's and begin living for His kingdom, we WILL face suffering and opposition. We will be afflicted, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed. God in His all surpassing power will uphold us and provide us with all that we need in Christ Jesus to live for His glory.

And so we pick up now, in v. 13. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak...

I'm going to pause here for a moment to address something that is destroying churches from the inside out. Notice how it says... I believed, and so I spoke. I spoke - meaning, I opened my mouth and talked about it. However, we live in the era of "actions speak louder than words." where words simply are not that important. And this mentality has crept into the church... and it is killing us! And it is killing the world!

Even well-meaning Christians have been taught a form of evangelism that does not save, namely, an evangelism that focuses on good works over and above the proclamation of the gospel. One of the reasons I so much appreciate Pastor Tak for training us in a form of evangelism that emphasizes the power and priority of WORDS! We all ought to be VERY thankful for him. Because in many, many churches, there are pastors crying out, “preach the gospel at all times, only use words when necessary!” This saying is attributed to Francis of Assisi who was a monk that ministered to the poorest of the poor during the 12th century. However, here’s the funny thing. Francis never said such a thing! Here was a man who scorned his vast inheritance to turn to a life of living amongst the poorest of the poor and he always talked about Jesus!

Live the gospel! Do the gospel! Be the gospel! This is heresy! The Good News is not a message about us and our works. It is a message about Christ and His works. To put it bluntly, any form of doing, living, or being the gospel stems from a profound confusion of categories. The Law tells us what to do, how to live, and who to be; the Good News tells us what God has done for us in Christ - of how He lived a perfect life and died in our place, bearing the full weight of God’s wrath against sin on our behalf, defeating the powers of sin, death, and Satan through His resurrection such that all who believe in Him are now clothed with His righteousness. Jesus lived the gospel. Jesus did the gospel. And Jesus is the gospel.

Furthermore, the gospel is not our changed lives - it is not a story of how my life changed and became better after I met Christ. Your changed life might be a testimony to the power of the gospel in transforming lives but it is not itself the gospel. That is to say, the gospel is not what Jesus can do for you; rather, the gospel is what Jesus has already done for you in history. What people need to hear is not the story of my successful moral life. They need to hear about the life and death and resurrection of Christ. Truly, we do not preach ourselves but Christ crucified.

But going back now.. v. 13. I believed and so I spoke... so we believe and so we also speak.... what Paul is doing here is borrowing language from Psalm 116 where it says “I believed, even when I spoke: “I am greatly afflicted...” So just as at one point, the Psalmist continued to sing praises to God and proclaim of His goodness and faithfulness to those around him IN the midst of His affliction... So we also continue to speak of all that God has done for us in the person and work of His Son Jesus Christ while we are afflicted...

WHY? Because we BELIEVE. WE BELIEVE that God will deliver us from this body of death... knowing that He who's raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also

with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence... Notice how Paul is not just focused on saving his own butt. If the goal of our salvation was to escape suffering, we would run straight to home base... BUT, as it is, the goal of our salvation is to glorify God - and so... notice how Paul does not just say I know that the Lord will raise me with Christ! But rather, God will raise US with Jesus and bring US with you all into His presence! The reason why we as Christians go out of our way to proclaim the gospel even in the midst of hardship is because we believe that God is at work in displaying the beauty of Christ to those around us THROUGH the way that we suffer for His Name!

And this is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God!

Now here is something shocking... Paul says that this - us carrying in our bodies the death of Jesus in order that the life of Jesus may also be manifest through our mortal flesh... **THIS IS ALL FOR YOUR SAKE**. There it is again! We saw it earlier in verse 12. So death is at work in us, but life in you! And now we see it again - this unrelenting pursuit for the eternal good of others... **THIS is all for your sake** - so that (or **BECAUSE**) as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

For as long as we live, we will NOT lose heart and continue to bear witness to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ because as grace extends to more and more people, it will increase **THANKSGIVING!** As the people who are saved increase, so will our joy! One of the reasons God invites us to participate in His work of calling lost sinners into His kingdom is because He wants us to **TASTE** the joy of heaven over a repentant sinner. Jesus told us that there is a **PARTY** going up in heaven overtime a sinner repents and turns to Jesus and God wants unto celebrate with Him! And so, in all of God's wisdom, He allows His children to suffer as they proclaim the gospel because that is the way we can most clearly display the beauty of Christ to those around us - when we count it **GAIN**, and not loss - Jesus looks beautiful and precious to those around us... And this is for **OUR MAXIMUM JOY!** Because as more and more people SEE the beauty of Christ and repent from their ugly sins, our **JOY WILL INCREASE**

This is all for your sake - so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Look it. Even our **JOY** is for the glory of God! It is not only when we suffer properly that we can glorify God, but it is when we are joyful in the right things as

well! We glorify God by enjoying the things He enjoys! Namely, His own glory! And this is a entirely separate sermon series in itself, but suffice it to say that God's great joy is Himself! And this is only appropriate because God is PERECT in all that He is. It is NOT egomania...

But instead of getting to caught up on that... look.

God is at work in bringing us maximum joy and giving Himself all the glory.

John Piper puts it best “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him.”

**16** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

There it is again! The chapter began with the statement, So we do not lose heart.. why? Because God is mercifully at work to display the beauty of Christ to those around us even in our sufferings, and now, it ends with that very same statement. WE DO NOT LOSE HEART!

Why? Though our outer self is wasting away... though death is being worked in our bodies... my eyes are wasting away... my knees are wasting away... for some of you it might be your hair... or your teeth... your back... or your health... Even though our outer self is wasting away, WE DO NOT LOSE HEART! Because our inner self is being renewed day by day....

**17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

And so, for those of you who have been paying attention, we have come back now full circle... If you remember, 3 weeks ago... I talked about the law of the soul - how we watch what we love, and we become like what we watch. And so here it is again! The KEY to NOT LOSING HEART - the SECRET TO BEING RENEWED

DAY BY DAY is to have an eternal perspective. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond ALL comparison.

And I know that some of you here are suffering even as I speak... And it does not seem LIGHT or momentary. In fact, it has been going on for a LONG time now... but this is where the eternal perspective kicks in. If you focus on the here and now... a month... and year... 50 years... It seems like a LONG time.. But turn your gaze upward toward the eternal horizon and see your suffering for what it really is... IT is temporary compared to the ETERNAL glory that will one day be ours! and it is LIGHT compared to the WEIGHT of glory that is being worked for us.. And I sincerely believe that your reward in heaven increases to the degree you suffer for Christ. The word “prepared” in this verse comes from the Greek word katergazomai - which can mean producing... or working... carrying with it the connotation of building something up... the light and momentary affliction you experience in this life is PREPARING you for a greater reward! To be able to enjoy Jesus Christ with greater capacity forever!

To be sure, everyone in heaven is perfectly happy and there is no jealousy... and no one is lacking in anything good... but there is a real sense in which the suffering you experience for Christ now prepares your cup or vessel.. if you will... to contain.. or reflect MORE of God’s glory in a way that gives you a greater capacity to enjoy Christ.

This is the view that I take and many of the great Christian men of old such as Augustine, Luther, Spurgeon, George Whitfield, and Jonathan Edwards interpreted this text and other similar texts in this way... but take it with a grain of salt.. No one knows exactly how we will be rewarded in heaven - but suffice it to say... your suffering is PREPARING for you - a particular and unique eternal weight of glory for you!

At the VERY least, as Spurgeon put it - the joy of consolation increases in proportion to sufferings endured in affliction.

In other words.. the book of Revelations.. It says that God will wipe away every tear... which means.. we will cry in heaven. And those who have suffered much in this life will cry more... and the joy of God’s consolation as He wipes away our tears will be greater in proportion to how much we cry... Are you troubles in this life many? Don’t despair! Your consolation in heaven will be that much greater!

Anyhow, verse 18... here is how this eternal weight of glory is being worked in us... as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient... TEMPORARY.. but the things that are unseen are eternal. It is all about what we LOOK at. In talking about the the law of the soul, I said that the fight for holiness was the fight for sight... Because we will ultimately watch what we love and what we watch, we will become like. This is also true of glory. We will be glorified as we fix our eyes upon Him! The Christian life is primary one of SEEING beauty! And as you SEE the beauty of Christ, you reflect that beauty by displaying His life and power to those around you through good works and the gospel message! And as you spend your life fixing your eyes on the beauty of all that Christ is for you in the gospel, an eternal weight of glory is being worked in you until one day... as we see Him face to face, we will become like Him! When we see Him face to face.. the Bible tells us that in a flash...in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed and become like Him in glory...

We will be glorified in an instant...

For those who are in Christ, death is but a doorway... Think of “death” as this piece of paper... It will be over in an instant.. In the words of Jesus, we have already passed over from death to life. And so, all that remains is to pass on from life to life...there is no death.. Therefore, have no fear as you continue to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to all those around you.