

Light-Weights

Text

Second Corinthians 4:7-18

Topic

The apostle Paul describes all of our present sufferings as a *light* affliction that results in a future *weight* of glory

Title

“The Light-Weight Champions of the World”

A bride and groom planning their wedding chose as their Bible verse First John 4:18, “There is no fear in love; for perfect love casts out fear.”

They decided to have it written in its entirety on their wedding cake.

Everything went well... Until the reception, when they walked in to find the cake decorated not with **First John 4:18**, but with **John 4:18**, “For you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband.”

I have doubts that story is true, but it serves as a good illustration. When you share God's Word, you want to get it right.

You should be looking for a text that in its context really speaks to the situation; hopefully one that has been brought to your attention by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

This is nowhere more essential than when you are sharing with someone who is suffering. It would be better to share nothing rather than to share the wrong 'something.'

For us, as a body of believers, 2018 was undeniably a year of intense suffering for many of our members. I'm not going to reference anyone in particular; but if you are on the prayer network, all you need do is read down the list to see the discouragements, and the diagnoses, and the deaths.

At times, and I'm not exaggerating, the suffering seemed almost Job-like, in that one tragedy followed another and another and another in rapid succession.

We all are members of one body. That means “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with *it*” (First Corinthians 12:26). Is there an appropriate text in its context that can comfort **all** of us?

There is such a text; it’s found in Second Corinthians 4:7-18. Here is a sampling to show you its appropriateness for us:

2Corinthians 4:8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair

2Corinthians 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -

2Corinthians 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

Then the author, the apostle Paul, brings it home:

2 Corinthians 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.

In 2018 we were “hard-pressed,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “struck down.” We want to experience the promise of not losing heart.

I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1 If You Realize You Are Dying, You Will Not Lose Heart, and #2 If You Remember Your Destiny, You Will Not Lose Heart.

#1 If You Realize You Are Dying,
You will Not Lose Heart

(v7-15)

There is a big push towards human immortality. What was once strictly the stuff of SyFy is within our reach.

One recent article, in a serious publication, suggested three ways you might achieve immortality in the near future:

1. By putting your consciousness into an android body.
2. By replacing your organs with replicas created by 3D printers.
3. Or, by living (for real) in a cloud-matrix.

One researcher boldly predicted that, with advances in technology, anyone currently under 40 years of age *will not die of natural causes*.

As per usual, the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world. While nonbelievers try to extend human life on earth indefinitely, **God urges us to realize, and thus embrace, that we are *dying*.**

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Your “treasure” is your knowledge of, and your relationship with, God through Jesus Christ.

It is the Gospel, and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit.

It is everything that is yours if you are in Christ; everything you once lacked in your natural birth that has come to you in your spiritual birth.

What on earth could be more precious? More valuable? More necessary? More sustaining?

Paul's point is that, this side of eternity, you are as fragile as an "earthen vessel," which translates as "jars of clay." You might say we are a bunch of **cracked-pots**. Such containers are easily broken through daily wear and tear.

As remarkable as the human body is, it is easily broken. And by "body" I'm including your mind and emotions; they, too, are frail.

A neuropsychologist wrote, "Bodies get ill, age, and die. Milk spills, glasses break, people mistreat you, good feelings fade. One's sense of calm or worth is easily disturbed. A life is like a house of cards, and a single gust - a layoff at work, an injury, a misjudgment - can knock it over."

For us, 2018 wasn't hypothetical; the suffering has been real, and it has been intense. It's helpful to realize, from the outset, we are frail in our current condition. Suffering is not unusual; it is, in fact, the norm for humans.

What sets us apart from nonbelievers is that we reveal "the excellence of the power" of God working in us. One poet put it like this:

*Earthen vessels, marred, unsightly,
Bearing Wealth no thought can know;
Heav'nly Treasure, gleaming brightly -
Christ revealed in saints below!
Vessels, broken, frail, yet bearing
Through the hungry ages on,
Riches giv'n with hand unsparing,
God's great Gift, His precious Son!*

2 Corinthians 4:8 *We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;*

2 Corinthians 4:9 *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -*

There are four things you can count on:

1. Being “hard-pressed on every side.” This phrasing could describe grapes being pressed. So you can count on being pressed, *but are simultaneously promised you will not be “crushed” by it.*
2. You can count on being “perplexed.” It means confused with no clear understanding of your path. *But you are simultaneously promised you need not “despair.”*

3. You can count on being “persecuted.” We probably experience this the least, but any action against you for simply being in Christ is persecution. *But you are simultaneously promised you will not be “forsaken.”*
4. You can count on being “struck down,” which can have a number of applications, including losing the battle. *But you are simultaneously promised you will not be “destroyed.”*

Again I’d stress that prior knowledge is key. You **will** be hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. These are unavoidable given the current condition of creation.

But when you are, you can know you aren’t being crushed or driven to despair or forsaken or destroyed. They are promises that you will be sustained.

In each case the suffering is very real, but it cannot affect your treasure, and though it feels like you can’t take it, you are promised that you can.

Here is what I’m saying: You will be “struck down” at some point in your journey to Heaven.

But no matter its severity, you are not, and cannot, be “destroyed,” because (as we will see in a moment) the ‘real’ you is spiritual.

How do we appropriate these promises?

2 Corinthians 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

2 Corinthians 4:11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2 Corinthians 4:12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

Paul referred *three times* to his **dying**. He also reminded us that even Jesus died, as far as His physical body.

Paul never knew if he would make it through one more day. One author wrote,

Paul knew that he was dying - and that everybody is dying. He experienced tremendous suffering, and in it he saw the decay and the wasting away of his earthly life. There

were weaknesses and sicknesses and injuries and hardships and pressures and frustrations and disappointments. And every one of them cost him a piece of his life.

We need to realize that death permeates creation on account of sin.

Dying is a way of life. Not just physical death. No, we must deal with the death of dreams and hopes and plans as suffering dramatically alters them as well.

While suffering understandably troubles us, it should be expected. It's why Jesus came and died - to overcome sin and death, reversing the curse upon this planet and this universe.

Paul also mention "**life**" *three times*. He said the life of Jesus is shown to others through us in our suffering.

Our frailties are the backdrop for people to see the power of life in Jesus Christ. The "treasure" must be revealed; and apparently its excellence is *in and through* our enduring suffering in the strength of Jesus' resurrection.

2 Corinthians 4:13 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,

“I believed and therefore I spoke” is Psalm 116:10. The entire verse reads, “I believed, therefore I spoke, “I am greatly afflicted.” ”

I think God gave it to Paul in his suffering - just like we are discussing having verses to encourage and strengthen us in our suffering.

The psalmist prayed for deliverance, believing it could come in this life, but knowing it will come in the afterlife.

What I am about to say I do not want to be misunderstood, or to undermine anyone who is suffering. God absolutely *can* and *does* deliver and heal. Pray for healing; pray for deliverance.

We must nonetheless admit that God doesn't heal or deliver as often as we ask. People we pray fervently for remain sick; they die.

It is NOT from a lack of faith on anyone's part. It is the nature of the dispensation in which we live.

Paul has already said we carry, "about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (v10). In his letter to the Colossians he wrote something similar, saying that we "fill up in [our] flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church" (Colossians 1:24).

Here is what those verses tell us about the church age in which we live: Believers are Jesus' "body" on the earth. He is in Heaven, but we remain on earth and, as His body, it's as if He never left. Men still afflict Him *through us*, and in that way we carry about His dying, and "fill up," or complete, His afflictions.

It's an era, a dispensation, where God can and does heal; where He can and does deliver. But most often He does not. He is glorified as we carry His dying and fill up His afflictions.

It takes incredible faith to say, "Not my will, but Your will be done."

2 Corinthians 4:14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you.

Now we're getting to it. We have something to look forward to; something that will cancel-out every tear we've shed prior to it. The resurrection of Jesus in His glorified human body guarantees that everyone of us in Christ will likewise be raised.

All the believers of the church age in which we so suffer will one day be personally presented to our Father in Heaven.

Does it sound like Paul had given up hope in being raptured and knew he would be martyred and was instead looking forward to being resurrected? Not at all. Our attitude ought to be to expect the Lord's coming as imminent, but unpredictable.

2 Corinthians 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.

These words encourage you - encourage us - to endure suffering on account of four things:

First - We endure for the good of others. In Paul's case, we see the immediate effect of his suffering as he continued to preach the Gospel and win converts to Jesus.

In our case, we need to take God's word for it that in our suffering we have a positive effect on others - both believers and nonbelievers. The effect we have will mostly be intangible. By that I mean we may not see immediately results, e.g., people getting saved.

It will be to build-up those surrounding us, going through it with us.

Second - We endure by the sustaining grace of God. Paul himself reported elsewhere that he had prayed about what he called a thorn in his flesh, and the messenger of Satan. God refused to heal him from the thorn, or to deliver him from the messenger, but promised Paul that His sustaining grace was sufficient.

If God refuses to deliver... Refuses to heal...
Then His grace is sufficient - nay, abundant - for
you to endure.

Third - We endure because our trust in the Lord
inspires others to “thanksgiving.” When God
brings beauty out of ashes, and triumph in spite
of tragedy, it inspires the giving of thanks.

Fourth - We endure to bring God glory. If our
purpose in life is to glorify God, and since He
can be glorified in and through our suffering,
then so be it.

In one of the situations that we as a church body
endured in 2018, one that ended in death, I kept
being drawn to Jeremiah 17:14, “Heal me,
LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will
be saved, for you are the one I praise.”

- If God chose to “heal,” He would be the One
we praised.
- If God chose to “save,” meaning to bring his
son home to Heaven to complete his salvation,
He would still be the One we praised.

#2 If You Remember Your Destiny, You Will Not Lose Heart

(v16-18)

Nobody here this morning wants to lose heart. Nobody came in here saying, “I sure hope we sing some songs and hear a Bible study that helps me lose heart.”

In the midst of such intense pain and suffering, how can we not lose heart?

2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart...

I think it was Dr. J. Vernon McGee who I first heard say, “Know what the ‘therefore’ *is there for.*”

The “therefore” tells you that what Paul has just said - what we’ve just read - is the reason to not lose heart.

Again the wisdom of God is foolishness to the world:

- The world says the kind of suffering Paul described is precisely why you *do* lose heart.
- The Word says the kind of suffering Paul described - when properly approached - is precisely why you *do not* lose heart.

The truths we are encountering in these verses - they are why you do not lose heart in your suffering. **You are to believe them.**

2 Corinthians 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.

Paul never lost sight that his “outward man,” his earthly body, was wasting away. The more it did, the more it magnified, and amplified, that the “inward man” is constantly being renewed.

The “inward man” - that’s the ‘real’ you. It’s your soul and spirit, that part of you that will be resurrected or raptured in an eternal, glorified body at the coming of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 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,

There are people in our body that might be offended at having their “affliction” called “light.” Except for the fact it was Paul who said it. A little later in this letter he describes a few of his “light” sufferings:

2Corinthians 11:24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one.

2Corinthians 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;

2Corinthians 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;

2Corinthians in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness -

2Corinthians besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

Paul was definitely a 'light-weight,' as we are using the term. He considered *any* and *all* pain and suffering insignificant **when weighed against the glory of eternity**. He gave glory more weight. Someone said, "Compared to the glory coming, afflictions are like feathers on the scale."

2 Corinthians 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.

This is telling us to *not do* something, but to *do* something else:

- Do not "look at the things which are seen."
That is the material world in which, as strangers and pilgrims, we are merely passing through.

- Do “look... At the things which are not seen.” That is the spiritual - everything laid out about us, and for us, in a relationship with Jesus.

Albert Barnes wrote,

Paul here has stated the true secret of bearing trials with patience. It is to look at the things which are unseen. To anticipate the glories of the heavenly world. To fix the eye on the eternal happiness which is beyond the grave; and to reflect how short these trials are, compared with the eternal glories of Heaven; and how short they will seem to be when we are there.

In the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Lord dictated letters to seven churches. Only one church received no criticism from Him. It was the church in Smyrna. It has been called “the suffering church.” Jesus told the pastor of that church to deliver the following message:

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation

ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

I feel a little bit like the pastor at Smyrna, in that I've pretty much told you that suffering is inevitable. It is, whether we say it or not.

But that's not the takeaway. The takeaway is to be a light-weight, like Paul and myriads of saints who have gone before you.

We are naturally heavy-weights. We consider our suffering heavy, and we put greater weight on the material present rather than our spiritual destiny. Get out of the heavy-weight division.

Your affliction is light, but that doesn't mean it won't hurt; that you won't cry rivers of tears.

It means that in spite of it, and in large measure on account of it, you are being renewed day by day.

Be a light-weight. Tell yourself, and tell one another, "Do not lose heart."