

11,20,25 2 Cor. 4:13-18, Seeing The Invisible

We'll be looking at the last part of 2 Cor. 4 tonight – so, let's start with vs's 13-16;

(2 Cor. 4:13-16) 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, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

We are living in what might be called a "sensual" reality – meaning that our experience in this life is predominantly our response to what our five senses reveal to us. If all we see and feel is limited to the "outward man" and "our light affliction" (which rarely seems "light"), then what more could we expect than discouragement and disappointment? As one example that Paul gives- our "outer man" is perishing; and the older we get the more obvious that becomes.

This entire world is crying and disintegrating. Lies and deception dominate the souls of the global community; physical pain, disease and loss increasingly impact our bodies; and confusion, anger and lawlessness have become the nature of every culture in the world. All of these things were prophesied and they will all increase a thousand-fold in the Tribulation when people will beg God to die, but won't be able to.

Media and politicians may try to present a different picture; one filled with happy, successful families and the hope of a golden age of prosperity, peace and safety; but the Lord (and anyone with true discernment) sees through the façade to the deep hurt inside every person and animal on this planet.

(2 Tim. 3:1-7) In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its

power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And this is just within the Church itself. We aren't commanded to (quote) "turn away" from such people if they are unbelievers – it's the opposite; they are our mission field.

Paul sums it up in two simple sentences in Rom. 8:22-23;

The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. We know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

And 1 Jn. 2:15-16;

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him . . . (because) *All* that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Anyone who loves this world can't see this world. Even nature itself is in extreme pain, groaning and longing for release from the effects of the Fall into the perfection and freedom of a creation under the care of the sons of God. All of this has a spiritual as well as material expression. You can almost feel and sense the groaning of the souls of man and of the animal kingdom.

Christians are the only ones anywhere that have the potential of seeing earthly reality on the one hand, but also seeing spiritual reality on the other. In spite of all that has been described as that which characterizes the last days of this age for the Church and the world, we can not only survive, but rejoice. How is that possible? By seeing the invisible. By seeing the spiritual reality that we have in Christ – because, as we saw in 1 Cor. 15:19; "If in *this* life *only* we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

The pain in our hearts, or what some have called the “vacuum in our soul”, can never be resolved by anything the world has to offer, in spite of the lies we are told trying to convince us to pursue the complete fantasy of earth-based fulfillment.

Our gaze has to reach beyond this life. Our minds have to be occupied with something that transcends the empty promises that flow to us from the “god of this world”.

So, let’s take some time and see if we can anchor our souls in something more real and more solid than what the enemy is offering.

We’ve spent a great deal of time over the last few years looking at a repeated principle throughout scripture of rewards connected to faithfulness; in its simplicity, we can see this in Matt. 25:22-23;

He also who had received two talents came and said, ‘Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.’ His lord said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.’

And if you’ve been tracking with Jerusha’s studies in Revelation, you’ve seen some of the specifics of what is offered in the seven letters in Rev. chapters 2 & 3.

But what I want to do now is show you what *all* believers can look forward to, even if they don’t receive as many rewards as Christians like the apostle Paul, or John or Hudson Taylor.

Heaven is going to be heaven for all who belong to the Lord; and the riches of our inheritance purchased for us by the blood of Christ are, as Paul put it in Eph. 3:20, “. . . above and beyond anything we could ask or think.”

Philip Yancey once said, “

. . . our time on earth amounts to a mere dot in eternity. This dot is quickly passing away. It will soon be over. Whether we realize it or not, we are all literally hurtling into eternity at a dizzying pace. Which is one reason Paul

said that the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed.

Hebrews 11 tells us that eventually even Old Testament saints like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and David reached a place spiritually where they longed to live with God in eternity. They were each “looking forward to the country they truly belonged to.”

(Eph. 2:6-7) God has raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

H.L. Wilmington wrote;

God delights to show great grace to great sinners. God will display the trophies of His grace throughout the endless ages of eternity. Saints will be concrete demonstrations of the overflowing wealth of His grace. A Roman matron was once asked, “Where are your jewels?” She responded by calling her two sons and, pointing to them, said, “These are my jewels.” So, it is with Christ and his Church. He is going to show the all-surpassing riches of his grace to his children in what F F Bruce referred to as the “limitless future, as age succeeds age.”

And F.B. Meyer added;

The Father has linked us in the bonds of indestructible union with his Son; that He had made it possible for us to share his Resurrection, his Triumph; that we, the poor children of earth and sin, should be admitted into the inner circle of Deity--this will be, to all eternity, the mightiest proof of the exceeding riches of his grace.

The word "exceeding" means "beyond throwing distance." If you throw your thoughts forward as far as you can, there will always be an immense beyond; throw them as high as you may, till they out soar the stars, and there will always be an above; let them sink forever, and there will always be a beneath--in the exceeding riches of God's grace.

“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork”; but the glory of the position and character of the saints, contrasted with the degradation from which they were raised, will be accounted in coming ages a more extraordinary exemplification of the riches of Divine grace than the splendor of the heavens is of the wealth of his skill.

Here’s a definition of the word “kindness” (*chrestotes* in the original);

This is the expression of a beautiful grace... one pervading and penetrating the whole nature, mellowing there all which would have been harsh and austere; a goodness which has no edge, no sharpness in it...

And R.C. Trench wrote;

Paul explains that one purpose of our being exalted to the supernatural sphere is that we may forever be blessed but not just for our benefit, for God’s greater purpose in salvation is for His own sake. God will display for all eternity the surpassing riches of His grace. The amazing truth is that through God's endless kindness toward us in Christ Jesus, the Father glorifies Himself even as He blesses us. From the moment of salvation throughout the ages to come we never stop receiving the grace and kindness of God.

Finally, from H. Hurleys “Sourcebook of New Illustrations;

In January 1983, a three-nation infrared astronomy satellite soared into a 560-mile orbit above the earth and pointed its tracking antennae toward deep space. Almost at once, an avalanche of information poured into the computers at a British ground station. More than two hundred thousand new objects were soon spotted in the heavens, including twenty thousand galaxies in interstellar space. Astronomers couldn’t believe their good fortune. Having convinced themselves of the universe’s emptiness, the new treasures stunned them. Christians are delighted, but not surprised. The God of Scripture created more than can ever be investigated, studied, or understood. As a dim reflection of God’s incomparably resplendent grandeur we expect what the satellite revealed. Yet, all we have experienced here, or

ever shall, reads like an empty page compared to the fullness of life to come in his presence.

Now you know why Paul wrote this in (Col. 3:2) “Set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God’s right hand.” We are seated there with Him now, and when we leave this life, all that that implies will be openly manifested in us.

Like I said in the beginning, we have to anchor our souls above, not below- and in the assurance of our future, not the affliction of our present.

For all of us, heaven will be a heaven beyond our imagination filled with exceeding joy – and it will not only be unending, but forever *increasing*; because it’s the nature of God to eternally and creatively express His infinite love for us.

The next time this life discourages you, remember that even though it may be a very painful “dot”; it’s still just a “dot” and it helps to consistently remind ourselves about what’s coming; and *all* of this *is* coming- even for the least of us.

Most Christians grab for straws on earth. But if anyone thinks anything here can bring true inner rest, they’re living in a fantasy that will be shattered almost daily. The hope that those in the scriptures discovered had nothing to do with this world; it was their ability to see both through and past the material to the eternal realities of our union with Christ.

They both saw and chose to live in the invisible. Since all I’ve shared is true for all of us, we have been given complete freedom in spite of who we are and all the weakness we see in ourselves, to set our minds on things above and on things to come, because they are all already ours.

(1 Cor. 3:21-22) *All* things are yours: whether . . . things present or things to come—*all* are yours. And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

We don’t have to earn them; they are the gracious gift of our Father Who is free to bestow them on us because of the sacrifice of His Son *for* us. God pre-determined to give us all these things, and more than we can imagine, before the foundation of the world; and because of the Cross, He can – and He has.

As we see in our passage in 2 Cor. 4:17-18;

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 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 we can set our sight on the things which are not seen, our hearts will rise above this dying world. We will still feel our pain and the pain of those around us, especially those we love; it will burden us as it burdens the Savior Who suffers with us, but deeper than that pain can be a hope that nothing can take away from us.

There is one phrase in our passage in 2 Cor. 4 that I want to spend a couple minutes on; it's vs. 4; "I believed and therefore I spoke".

Where there is faith; anything that we *truly* believe, there will be a response. We *all act* on what we believe to be true. And as we've seen in various places, like Heb. 11 for example, faith moves us into action – the more we see of what the Lord is after; of what His purpose and goal are for the Church, and for us individually as His children, the more we will also want to see that happen.

Much of the stagnation we see in the Church is due simply to either laziness or an unwillingness to pick up our cross and follow our Lord; but a great deal of stagnation is due to a lack of seeing what's possible; of seeing what God desires and has provided for us in Christ.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we've seen that there is always, only a remnant of God's people in any generation that are hungry enough to dig deeply into the scriptures and search out what this life is really all about. According to last-days prophetic passages, in our generation the shrinking remnant is more predominate and obvious than any other generation. Here's an excellent explanation and encouragement to pursue all God has for us; both for our sake and for His glory.

The Lord wants something more than the emotional enthusiasm of a revival. What the Lord wants is a heart-condition which has not departed from Him; not those who are caught up in a great movement, but those who have been

true to Him in the difficult tests of time. Those who in the midst of the spiritual declension of the church around them have remained true to the Lord's purpose; not those who have to be motivated by outward demonstrations and signs, but those whose hearts are steadily and firmly set upon God's thoughts, His interests. Their desire is that the Lord may have what He is after. The overcomer embodies the original intention of God and is God's instrument of achieving His purpose. Everyone else may have settled for less, but the overcomer cannot do this. Even if most of Christianity becomes something other than God's original intent, the overcomer will pursue the highest and fullest of all that God is after no matter what the personal cost.

This number is shrinking rapidly- not only the number of those in the body of Christ who are unwilling to pay that price, but also the number who are even aware of what God's true purpose for the Church is.

We all know how difficult it is, sometimes, to believe that our inward man is being renewed day by day when all we seem to experience is our outward man perishing. But we have been asked to walk by faith, believing that our affliction is working an eternal glory in us. If the Lord says that this is happening; it's happening. Looking at things seen is not going to help us; we have to, by faith, look at what is not seen, but promised. Those are the things that are both true and eternal.

Most of what we read in 2 Cor. 4 is pretty clear, and many of the verses represent principles that we've seen before because Paul has presented them repeatedly in his letters. But there is one word that I had to spend a little more time on because when I first read through these passages I sensed there must be something more to the reason Paul used this word than might not be obvious on the surface – it's the word "weight" in vs. 17.

The "affliction" we are going through is producing what Paul calls a "weight of glory". We know that "glory" refers to the outward manifestation or radiance of the inward character and nature of God. As we saw last time in 2 Cor. 4:11, Paul calls this being "... delivered unto death daily (that's the affliction part) so that the

life of the indwelling Christ (His glory) can be made manifest through our mortal flesh.”

The word “weight” (*baros* in the Greek) refers to something that can be either a painful burden or simply something extremely heavy, but in *our* context, this word is related to spiritual substance and glory. Here’s a couple explanations;

First, Dr. Constable;

Paul introduced another paradox. Suffering now will result in glory later. He could consider the afflictions he had undergone as a servant of Christ as "light" only in comparison with the heavy weight of glory he would receive at Christ’s judgment seat.

Now, F.F. Bruce;

His choice of the expression ‘the weight of glory’ may be influenced by the fact that in Hebrew ‘weight’ and ‘glory’ come from the same root. It is only because the coming ‘glory’ is so ‘weighty’ that the present ‘affliction’ seems so ‘slight’, just as the eternity of the coming ‘glory’ makes the ‘affliction’ seem ‘momentary.’ It is not simply that the ‘glory’ is the *compensation* for the ‘affliction’ [cf. Romans 8:18] . . . rather, the ‘glory’ is the *product* of the ‘affliction,’ produced in measure ‘beyond all comparison’ . . .

Finally, this is a fuller illustration of this process from Sparks;

The Lord does not put us in glass houses to grow us, to be His trees; the Lord does not protect us from the storms, the adversities; He exposes us to the bitter winds and the scorching suns of adversity and trial. The Lord is working in us that which is according to His own Nature – the enduring, the everlasting God – that which will not be easily carried away. He is putting substance in you. Today we fear that the appeal to become Christians is so often in terms of having an easy time; being happy and enjoying yourself; well, thank God for ALL divine joy, but this is true to the House, to the City, that the *first* thing the Lord is working toward and seeking to work into His people is that substantial, steadfast, enduring faithfulness that is according to His own nature. God is producing men and women like cedars of Lebanon;

like the hewn stones – weighty, accountable, and responsible to carry weight – and all that is meant by strength.

I can only remind you again of what a large place that has in the Word of God: be strong in the Lord in the strength of His might, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Think again. Do you want to understand why the winds are allowed to blow so fiercely; the storms? To get us away from cheapness, lightness, frivolousness and to make us *people of weight*, of substance. Strength – through testing, through adversity – strength to endure throughout all ages. There is much which is going in our generation that will be carried away in the last great testing, and if, therefore, trial and adversity is the only way to deepen us, to put caliber into us, I suppose we must expect more of it as the time shortens.

So, once again, as with each time in Paul's epistles he raises this issue (which he does, very often), we are faced with a dilemma. It's emphasized so frequently by Paul that it's almost like he knows we are going to have a difficult time holding onto it. Being pressed above measure puts our faith to an unbearable test, and the only way to endure that pressure without crashing is to believe that what Paul says about suffering accomplishing a great and eternal weight of glory, which is the radiance of Christ coming through us, is really happening.

If all we see, and all we believe in, is the suffering itself, it makes it very hard to trust the One that's allowing it to happen. But if by faith we hold onto what Paul is telling us in 2 Cor. 4:17, then we can at least keep our inward man in a place of hope and expectation.

There's nothing easy about any of this, but if this process of affliction is not allowed to run its course, we can miss out on its benefits as it builds and forms the strength of the Lord in us.

We all wish there could be another way to get us there. Jesus also requested the possibility of having the cup pass from Him. But the Cross was necessary for Him or there would be no salvation for us. And a deepening of faith and an increase of

Christ formed in us can't happen without us becoming gold tested in fire until the unwanted impurities are burnt away.

And never forget – Paul said that when he was weak, he was strong. Meaning that, like you and me, we feel weaker every year, not stronger. Our experience is increasing helplessness, not increasing power to overcome. The final overcoming Church as described in Rev. 3:3-13 is characterized by having very “little strength”.

This is what makes it so confusing – it's a paradox. The only way we know that God is genuinely working His own strength into us to make us like houses built on a rock instead of on sand, is by faith in passages like the ones we're studying tonight. It's not by how we feel or what we think we are, it's being done by the silent, inner work of the Spirit because of the faithfulness of God. All we experience is the perishing of the outer man; but the hidden man of the heart is being renewed every day.

To bottom-line this: God will take care of everything that's needed for us to grow up spiritually. He'll offer the scriptural education we need; His Spirit will show us the meaning of what we learn. He will arrange all the circumstances and relationships in our lives to define us, to reshape us and to form Christ in us, and He will forgive and override our failures.

From us, He only asks for faithfulness; He asks us to be honest and transparent before Him, He wants us to study His Word, to bring our prayers to Him, and to trust Him to do all that's needed to get us to the place spiritually where we (and He) wants us to go.

As complex and confusing as much of modern Christianity has made this life; that is the bottom-line. We trust Him, respond to Him as He guides and directs us, and remain honest with Him- and He will take care of everything else.

And speaking of failures (which seem way to constant, at least in my life); listen to these comments by Sparks;

(John 13:1) "It was now just before the Passover Feast, and Jesus knew that His hour had come to leave this world and return to the Father. Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the very end." I think in

that statement, there is the most wonderful thing that ever came into this world. Jesus had a lot of trouble with those men. They had often misunderstood Him. They had often disappointed Him. They were really a very poor lot of men. He knew what a poor lot of men they were, but He loved them unto the uttermost. That is the first thing about this love. It is not offended by our failures. He does not withdraw His love because we make mistakes. We may often disappoint Him, we may often fail Him, we may often grieve His heart, but He goes on loving us. He loves us unto the very end. He is not offended by our failures.

Again, the final verse in 2 Cor. 4 is vs. 18, “. . . 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.”

Paul has reemphasized this principle numerous times, and as we’ve seen before, when any author of scripture does this, it means that it is extremely important. Not only important in terms of an increased knowledge of the Bible, but also in related to how we are to live the Christian life.

The mindset Paul is reminding us of here, is the only way we can stay above our enemies (the world, the flesh and the devil); it’s the only way we can have an inner life, an inner rest, under the pressures, temptations, deceptions and distractions that our enemies are constantly bombarding us with.

They are relentless- and this is our defense. It is in seeing the invisible and the eternal, and realizing that everything else is part of a shadow world, a matrix, we live in that wants to pull us into it and away from true, spiritual reality.

We have to close soon, but in researching what other authors have said about this, I didn’t realize how many of them had no problem putting this at the top of their list of what Christians must do if they want to survive spiritually in a generation like ours. So, what I decided to do is give you a smorgasbord of various views on the importance and meaning of this passage. All of what these men and women say have similarities, but you will also see the unique and beautiful ways each one’s personality and relationship with God comes out in what they say.

We'll start with H.A. Ironside;

We are not to be occupied with present things that we see, but we should seek to be occupied with the things that are not seen, for they are, after all, the real things, the eternal things. The things that no human eye has seen are the things that are lasting. When everything that the eye looks upon will have vanished, we shall have Christ, we shall have heaven, we shall have the Holy Spirit, we shall have the love of the Father, we shall have communion with the people of God for all eternity when earth's vain shadows have passed away.

Now, Corrie Ten Boom;

Look around and you will be distressed; look inside and you will be depressed; look at Jesus and be at rest.

The principle is clear, the more that heaven and the longing to see the face of Jesus engages our heart, the less will the passing shadows of the earthly seduce and sink our hearts. What you are looking for will determine what you are living for-- are you looking for the visible and temporal or the invisible and eternal?

Jim Elliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians of South America, said this about the invisible eternal world, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

And finally, Charles Spurgeon;

How was it that when cast down Paul was not destroyed-that when troubled he was not distressed? What sustained him? He gives us the key to this fortitude by telling us that he counted his afflictions light because they were, in his estimation, but for a moment ; and they were working out for him a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. He was calm midst rage and tumult, violent prejudice, and adverse, and even disastrous, circumstances, because, in the language of the text, he looked not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, reckoning that the things which

are seen are not worth looking at, so transient are they, while the things unseen are of priceless worth, because they are eternal.

What should a man look at but what he can see? And yet the apostle tells us *not* to look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

The present is so soon to be over that Paul does not care to look at it. There is so little of it, and it lasts such a brief time, that he does not even bother to give it a glance, he looks *not* at it. Here he is persecuted, despised, forsaken. "It will not last long," he says. "It is but a pin's prick; it will soon be over, and I shall be with the fellowship above, and behold my Master's face." Thus it behoves us to do if surrounded with trials, troubles, present sorrows; we should not rivet our gaze on them. Rather let us treat them with indifference and say, "It is really a very small matter whether I am in wealth or in poverty, in health or in sickness; whether I am enjoying comforts or whether I am robbed of them. The present will be so soon gone that I do not care to look at it." That is how the apostle regarded it. He reckoned that his present joys and present sorrows were so soon to be over that they were to him a matter of indifference, not even worth casting his eye that way to see what they were, for they will soon be over, and gone into history. A whole eternity lies beyond, and therefore a short temporality dwindles into an insignificant trifle. What a blessed philosophy this is which teaches us not even to glance at passing, transient troubles, but to fix our gaze on eternal triumphs.