

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

¹³Since we have that same spirit of faith, which corresponds to what is written: “I believed; therefore, I have spoken,” we also believe, and therefore we speak. ¹⁴For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us (together with you) into his presence. ¹⁵In fact, all this is for your benefit, so that as grace increases, it will overflow to the glory of God, as more and more people give thanks.

¹⁶Therefore we are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison. ¹⁸We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

Our Momentary, Light Trouble

I.

“Our momentary, light trouble.” That’s our theme for today. Paul just seems to lump everyone in to this sweeping generality. Hadn’t Paul ever met anyone with monumental, overarching troubles that cast a pall on their entire lives?

Some people have serious troubles in their lives. One young man I visited in prison had tried to kill his own parents when he was high and in search of some money for his next fix. I have been at the bedsides of any number of people in their last moments of life—some of them in a great deal of pain while they wait for the Lord to call them home. Numerous people I have visited as shut-ins have serious and debilitating diseases. Some of those people are relatively young. One lady who was not a member of my congregation came to me and told me a horrific tale of being held as a sex slave by her husband, who sold her sexual favors to his buddies and kept her in confinement, making continual threats against her life and the lives of her loved ones.

Those are some serious troubles. You probably have a number you can add to the list from people you have known. Perhaps you have some troubles that are equally momentous. Maybe some of your troubles are less severe, but overwhelm you none-the-less. Is Paul trivializing the trials and tribulations of life? Is he just an insensitive boor?

Paul has the gift of understatement. Not only does he *know* people with serious problems, he himself *is* someone who had serious trouble. In last week’s lesson he summarized those problems, saying: “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, EHV). If the Corinthians didn’t know his troubles more intimately when they read *this* chapter of his letter, they soon would. Here’s his litany of hardship: “I’ve done more hard work, been in prisons more often, been whipped far more, and I’ve been close to death many times. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. One time I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I have spent a night and a day on the open sea. ²⁶ I have often been on journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger on the sea, in danger among false brothers. ²⁷ I have worked hard and struggled. I’ve spent many sleepless nights. I’ve been hungry and thirsty. I’ve gone without food many times. I’ve been cold and lacked clothing” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27, EHV).

That’s some hardship, isn’t it? Beaten to the ultimate limit allowed by Jewish law five

times. Shipwrecked. Not just shipwrecked, but hopelessly adrift on the open sea all night and all day without any locating beacon or life vest, just hoping some passing ship would see him and come to his rescue. Danger, danger, danger. Repeatedly he uses the word danger to describe the things he endured. In the next chapter, without going into any detail, he says that he had some thorn in the flesh he prayed that God would remove from him. He doesn't tell whether it was a mental issue, or a physical issue, or something else he had to deal with in his life.

Paul had lots of problems. Lots of troubles.

“Therefore we are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:16-17, EHV).

There was something greater than Paul's problems. Something greater than *your* problems. Something that puts everything else in this life in perspective. Something that makes even the most monumental trouble in this life seem light and momentary. That “something” is heaven.

The Bible describes heaven for us in human terms because we can't even *begin* to comprehend the glory of heaven. Heaven is described as a banquet table groaning with so much food we wouldn't know where to begin. It's described as a city with streets paved with gold. It's a place where angels sing God's praises. It's described as a place with a distinct absence—“no more” pain or crying or suffering or tears and, of course, no sin which causes some of those things.

II.

Sin is really what causes all “Our Momentary, Light Trouble,” isn't it? Sometimes it's your own, actual sins and misdeeds that come back to haunt you. You do something wrong and have to deal with the earthly consequences for it. The man in jail for attempted murder could certainly see that his own sin had caused his troubles. Sometimes it's the sins of others that affect you. Paul's beatings and his false imprisonments were not due to his *own* sins and misdeeds, but the faults of others. Still, they created times of trouble for him. Still other times trouble comes your way just because you are an inhabitant of a world that must deal with the effects of sin. Natural disasters and pain and disease are things added to the world as a consequence of sin in general. Being shipwrecked, as Paul was, or facing serious diseases, as so many people face every day, just occur because live in a sin-filled and sin-damaged world.

III.

But Christians are to keep everything in perspective. When you put earth and what we face on earth into an eternal context, what we have in our individual sliver of time is “Our Momentary, Light Trouble.”

“Since we have that same spirit of faith, which corresponds to what is written: ‘I believed; therefore, I have spoken,’ we also believe, and therefore we speak” (2 Corinthians 4:13, EHV). We saw last week that Paul likes to use little bits of Scripture to pull your mind's eye to the broader context of the Old Testament.

“I believed; therefore, I have spoken.” The quote is from Psalm 116. If you have been to a graveside service I have conducted, you have most likely heard me read from Psalm 116, even if I didn't note where the passage was from. This is how the new Evangelical Heritage Version reads: “The ropes of death entangled me. The walls of the grave hemmed me in. I found distress and sorrow. ⁴ Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘Ah, Lord, please save my life!’⁵ The Lord is gracious and righteous, and our God is compassionate... ⁸ Indeed, you

have delivered my soul from death, my eye from weeping, my foot from stumbling...¹⁵ Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his favored ones” (Psalm 116:3-5, 8, 15, EHV).

Paul’s quote is virtually the middle of this Psalm. The Psalmist begins: “I love the Lord, because he hears my voice. He hears my cry for mercy” (Psalm 116:1, EHV) and he ends it: “Praise the Lord” (Psalm 116:19, EHV).

Paul’s one-sentence-quote intends to call to mind the whole Psalm. Like the Psalmist, Paul had deep afflictions and troubles. Like the Psalmist, so do you. Like the Psalmist, Paul experienced the salvation of the Lord. Like the Psalmist, so do you. “Since we have that same spirit of faith, which corresponds to what is written: ‘I believed; therefore, I have spoken,’ we also believe, and therefore we speak” (2 Corinthians 4:13, EHV).

IV.

Paul speaks with the same faith as the Psalmist. So do you. “For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us (together with you) into his presence” (2 Corinthians 4:14, EHV). The resurrection to eternal life is what is awaiting us. This is what Psalm 116 was pointing to, and why it is so poignant at the death of one of the saints—the favored ones of God.

“Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison” (2 Corinthians 4:17, EHV).

Momentary, light trouble. No matter how great the troubles, they are not insurmountable. Why? First of all, of course, we know that God is with us through all those troubles. Most importantly, those troubles are momentary and light because we have the Lord Jesus and the forgiveness of sins he won for us on the cross.

“We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18, EHV). Things that are seen lie on the surface. We can look all around us as we worship outdoors today and enjoy the sights and sounds of the natural world God has created. It is all too easy to look at the things that lie on the surface of our lives, too. We can see every one of the momentary, light troubles that we face every day. Because we live in the moment, those troubles don’t strike us as light, and often not as momentary.

Paul attaches no importance to those things which lie at the surface of life and instead focuses his attention on what God gives us forever. Heaven is coming. Heaven is even more beautiful than the most beautiful sight you have seen in this world. Heaven is *not* momentary. Heaven, though it is not seen by us with our eyes right now, is eternal. Look with the eyes of faith to that eternal home. Amen.