

2 Corinthians Ch4v16-18 - Glory Through Suffering

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- [0 : 00] Chapter 4, 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Thank you, Ralph, for leading us this morning!
- We've been working our way through this letter to the church in Corinth, written a long time ago, but written for the church in every age, to God's people.
- Well, we're going to pray, and then we're going to look at God's word together. Let's pray. Father God, you are the one who sees and knows all things.
- And you see us today, not just us sitting here, but you know our hearts. You know the things that are concerning us, the things that have happened to us.
- And we pray that as we hear your word, it would speak into our lives, and allowing us and helping us to see all our concerns from your perspective, and to see the work that you are doing in us.
- [1 : 47] And so we pray that you will move by the power of your spirit, and work in us what is good today. In Jesus' name, amen.
- Amen. We're going to read chapter 4, verses 16 to 18.
- It's a short text this morning, but jam-packed with wonderful truth to encourage us. Chapter 4, verse 16.
- Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.
- For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.
- [2 : 55] So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.
- Some of you will be familiar with the name Joni or Joni Erickson Tada, a young girl who in her teens had an accident. And since that time, for the last 50 years of her waking life, she has remained in a wheelchair.
- She was paralyzed from the neck down and has suffered terribly in her life. Joni is a Christian, and she loves Jesus.
- In her book, which I recommend to you, it's called A Place of Healing, she writes about a friend of hers called Melinda.
- Let me read to you some of that story. Melinda is struggling with a severe, and I mean a heartbreakingly severe, case of diabetes.
- [4 : 15] In the process, she has lost both her legs through amputation. She has lost her eyesight, and she has lost several fingers.
- Not long ago, she called to me to tell me that the doctors were about to remove another finger. My heart went out to her, as it always does.
- But my heart is also inspired by her struggle, and here's why. Melinda has not lost heart.
- The diabetes may be taking much away from her, but it can't take that away. The doctors can't amputate that.

The woman is quite literally wasting away week by week, day by day. But she has not lost heart, because she places her trust and confidence in Christ.

[5 : 21] In chapter 4, we have seen how embracing the Christian life and ministry will mean weakness, suffering, and death.

In fact, to be a Christian means we will face troubles and trials of all kinds. And when we go through those times, we can lose heart.

We can want to give up. But we don't need to. We don't need to lose heart. Because chapter 4 is written to us for our encouragement.

Look back at verse 1. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, the ministry of declaring the good news about Jesus, we do not lose heart.

And then down in verse 16. Therefore, we do not lose heart. So to help us this morning not to lose heart, we need to be able to see our struggles through God's perspective.

[6 : 48] To understand them as God would understand them. So we're going to look at these few verses together and see what God teaches us.

How we can respond to our struggles. First, we do not lose heart because we have an unbreakable reality.

We do not lose heart because we have an unbreakable reality. Verse 16. We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

That's our reality. Our outward self, this body, is wasting away.

But our inward self is being renewed each day. I have some sobering news.

[7 : 54] I'm dying. And so are all of you. As we get older, our weakness becomes more apparent.

Our energies decline. Our thought process slows. Our sufferings become more acute. Our aches linger and our pains increase.

Our dying becomes more unavoidable. Our fight grows tired. Our bodies wear out. Psalm 90, that we were reading earlier, says this.

Our days may come to 70 years or 80 if our strength endures. Yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow.

Even the young people, you fit and healthy people out there, you're not immune to this trajectory.

[8 : 57] The writer to Ecclesiastes puts it like this. Remember your creator in the days of your youth. Don't forget God.

Before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, I find no pleasure in them.

Now you might think I'm being a little bit morbid and a bit dour and it's not very cheerful this morning. But I'm just spelling out the reality of God's word.

Weakness leads to suffering and suffering will lead to death. Outwardly, we are all at this very moment wasting away.

But, in the midst of our aches and pains and our groans and cries, we are, verse 16, being renewed day by day.

[9 : 59] An unbreakable reality is taking place as we waste away. So what is this renewal? What's the transformation that's going on in our life?

Well, we've already been given a hint of it. If we go back to chapter 3, verse 18. Chapter 3, verse 18.

And we all, who with unveiled faces, contemplate the Lord's glory as we look at Christ, as we see Christ, we are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Wonderful. The Spirit of God is at work in our inner being. We are, as God's people, at this very moment, being transformed to be like Christ with ever-increasing glory.

And one day, this renewing, this transformational process is going to reach its goal. We will be like Christ.

[11 : 26] We will be like Him. We will see Him. And we won't sin anymore. And we won't struggle anymore. We are, verse 16, being renewed.

It is happening. We are being transformed. It will happen. It's an unbreakable reality. And this is the trajectory that we are on.

God is preparing us now for the age to come. As our external self decays and dies, so our inward self transforms and renews.

It's like the butterfly effect. The caterpillar crawls underneath your window ledge. A chrysalis forms.

And from it emerges a most beautiful butterfly. Well, as death takes place within us, so at the same time, life comes forth.

[12 : 41] And one day, one day, yes, it is true, we will be like Christ. This is our unbreakable reality. Outwardly, wasting away, yet inwardly, being renewed day by day. Therefore, we do not lose heart.

So we have an unbreakable reality. certainty. We have, there we go, an unshakable certainty.

We do not lose heart because we have an unshakable certainty. Verse 17. For, the reason for this renewal, the reason for this transformation that's going on in our life is because, verse 17, our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

You see, when we face our troubles, whatever they are, we begin to doubt and wonder. Am I going to make it to glory? What if my suffering overwhelms me and crushes me?

[14 : 05] What if I do lose heart? But look closely to what it says, verse 17. Our troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory.

Our troubles are causing us, they are preparing us for our eternal destiny. They are achieving for us our eternal glory.

wonderfully, God in his sovereignty and wisdom gathers up all of our sufferings and all of our tears and he uses all of them to get us to glory.

It's the Romans 8, verse 28, principle. And we know that in all things, in every circumstance and every detail of our life, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

And what is God's purpose? But to make us more like Christ and to bring us to glory. He will do it.

[15 : 27] You see, with God, your troubles don't keep you from glory. They get you to glory.

This is our unshakable certainty. And with that in mind, we begin to see our troubles from God's perspective.

Yes, we're weak. Yes, we suffer. Yes, we're dying and wasting away. And for most, that process is difficult and hard. It's a daily agony for some people.

It's like a torture. Cancer isn't nice. Dementia isn't pleasant. Losing your hearing or your eyesight or your mobility is at times unbearable.

They are not, as the Apostle Paul seems to suggest in verse 17, light and momentary. How can you call my painful disease or my crushing disability light and momentary?

[16 : 38] It's hard. Seems that the Apostle Paul didn't get to go to his pastoral caring course, did he? But he does have a message for us because he does understand.

He's telling us that we're to compare our troubles with the glory to come. Verse 17, our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us, in contrast, an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

on your phones, I'm sure you've got a stopwatch. Every time you have a trouble, click start.

And when it ends, click stop. Do that with every trouble and with every hurt and with every pain that you may endure through life.

And imagine that you add them all up, all those troubles, all those hardships. Let's just say for the sake of illustration, it comes to 45 years, 20 days, and 13 minutes.

[17 : 59] That's a lot, isn't it? Now get your stopwatch and press start when glory begins. And press it when it stops.

That's the point. That's the point. Glory doesn't end. It never finishes. It never stops.

It goes on decade after decade, century after century, millennia after millennia. Now compare your troubles in this age to the glory to come.

They are momentary. glory. Your life's suffering is like a blink of an eye, a nanosecond compared to the eternal glory that is to come.

or think of it like this. Get your old-fashioned weighing scales out. You know, the balancing ones.

[19 : 10] Collect all your troubles, all your hardships, and place them on the left-hand side. And again, for illustration purpose, let's just say they all add up to 120 kilograms.

That's a heavy weight. Not many people here could even push it or lift it, certainly not carry it. Now get all the glory that is stored up for you and place it on the other side of the scales.

Compare the weight of your troubles with the weight of glory. It's like putting a piece of dust on one side and a cruiser ship on the other side.

Our troubles are a feather compared to the tonnage of glory. That's why Paul can say back in verse 8, we are hard-pressed on every side.

but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.

[20 : 38] The weight of glory means we are on the side of victory. This is our unshakable certainty, our light and momentary troubles are achieving us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Therefore, let none of us lose heart. third, we have an unchangeable priority.

An unchangeable priority. Verse 18, so, and here's our priority, this is what we are to give our time to, in the light of our troubles, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal.

The seen are the material and the tangible things of life. Things like our work, our hobbies, our possession, our money, our homes, all the things that we look to for our comfort and our happiness.

But the reality is all that we can see, all the things that we hold dear, they are all temporary. Even the things we most love, and even the people that we most treasure, are all transient.

- [22 : 23] Everything we touch, everything that we can grasp and hold, perishes, spoils, and fades.
As the writer James put it like this, what is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while, and then vanishes.
Just a vapor. We cannot hold it. The things of this age and the world that is around us do not last, therefore, there is nothing in this universe, in this world, that can satisfy us.
Nothing is strong enough to overcome our sorrows. Our longing for contentment, our desire for happiness is never fully realized.
What is seen, what we have, what we hold and touch, it's all temporary, temporary, But the unseen is what is eternal, it is what is yet to come, it's where life does not perish, things don't spoil, things don't fade, it lasts forever, it's a place where nothing breaks, nothing ends, nothing dies, it is nothing less than the new heavens and the new earth, the new creation, it is eternal joy.
- [24 : 02] And the very fact that it is unseen means that it is yet to come. Chapter 5, verse 7 tells us we are to live by faith and not by sight.
We long for something better and greater than this mere world around us. Our hope is in what is promised. The Apostle Paul put it like this, hope that is seen is no hope at all.
Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. Our glorious joy to come is eternal, so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.
That is to be our unchanging priority each and every day. Fix our eyes on what is unseen.
So how do we do that? How do we fix our eyes on what is unseen? Well, two things to apply to us.
- [25 : 26] I don't have it there, so here's the first one. Loosen your grip. How do we fix our eyes on what is unseen? Loosen your grip.
God's love. Because it was never God's design that this world should be our home. In fact, all that we love and enjoy here right now in this age are shadows of the reality.
One writer put it like this, one of my favourite quotes. things that is to go to heaven fully to enjoy God is infinitely better than the most pleasant of gifts here.
fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, children and friends are all but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance.
These, the gifts around us, are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.
- [26 : 43] You see, we so often live as if this earth were our permanent home. We grip so tightly the things that we love that we cannot see anything else.
And when suffering comes, we lose all hope. But all that we have are shadows pointing us to the reality to come.
Our hobbies, our work, they're the streams, but God is the fountain of joy. Our friends and our health, well, they're just drops.
God is the ocean filled with love. Loosen your grip on this life love.
And look to Christ who is unseen. Adjust your gaze is the second thing we do.
- [27 : 43] Look to Christ because without Christ, without him, there would be no glory. You see, it's the presence of Christ that makes glory to come and eternal joy.
In other words, if you could go to heaven right now, and if Christ were not there, it would be joyless. It would be empty.

Christ is the one who makes glory happen. He has defeated your sin on the cross. He has destroyed the death and grave. He alone satisfies us and fulfills us.

As Psalm 16 says, you fill me with joy in your presence and with eternal pleasures at your right hand. So let us together loosen our grip.

Let us adjust our gaze. Repent of making the gifts greater than the giver. Turn from seeking joy in the things that do not last and look in faith, walk by faith, trust in the one who gives life in all its fullness now and forever more.

[29 : 07] We are to be like the old Christian who said this, when Christ calls me home, I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school.

Are you waiting for glory? I can't wait. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word that speaks truth and reality into our troubles and into our trials.

You are so good. Would you please help us by your spirit to loosen our grip on the things that we see and that we may adjust our gaze and look at what is unseen and what is yet to come.

May our eyes be fixed on Christ, the one who makes glory possible, the one who is our glorious joy.

Thank you that as we trust you, you keep us and you will bring and use all that we face to ensure we reach glory, a glory that far outweighs anything in this world.

[31 : 05] Thank you, Jesus. Amen. We're going to sing together.

God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform, his plants, his footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm. I invite you to sing as we entrust our lives afresh to the one who has our life in his hands.

Let's sing, let's sing to encourage one another that we may not