

"Don't Trust The Box"

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[0 : 00] Heather in the Word. We have a saying in my family when it comes to Christmas time. We say, don't trust the box. See, sometimes you buy a gift and it's not fit for wrapping the shape or the size that it is.

And so you find some spare box lying around and you shove the gift into that and then you wrap that up. You know, you take a box for leggings or hand warmers or whatever random thing you find, a vacuum cleaner.

And then some excited kid, boiling with the energy of a fusion reactor, comes up and he tears off the wrapping paper.

And he sees that it's a vacuum cleaner. Whatever kid wants for Christmas. It's nothing like the Lego set that he was hoping for.

So cue the family motto. Everyone chimes in, don't trust the box. The present may have been disappointing on the outside.

[1 : 13] But inside, he opens up and he finds not just one Lego set, but a number of them. And he is shifted into hyperdrive and his joy returns.

Don't trust the box. That's the title of this sermon. And it will make more sense as we go through. Because in the same way, the Christian life can have a disappointing outside, but be full of rich treasure inside.

And so when we look at the costs of being a Christian, we must ask ourselves, Is the prize on the inside worth it to us?

As we read here, we will hear Paul's version of don't trust the box. Follow along with me in 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

We'll be reading verses 16 through 18. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, Yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

[2 : 29] For our light momentary affliction 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.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Notice those first words that Paul starts with. We do not lose heart.

That is the most important takeaway from this sermon. Everything else that's going to be said is for the purpose of helping you to not lose heart In the face of the difficulties of the Christian walk.

So everything that I'm going to say, I want you to work back into your heart to this purpose of being able to face down difficulties And not flinch for the joy set before you.

[3 : 45] The box that we unwrap as Christians stinks. The life that we live can be very discouraging at times.

If you're honest with yourself, You've lost heart on a number of occasions. You've shrunk back because of the difficulties before you. I confess that I've done the same.

So often I'm not the person who I want to be, And especially in the face of difficulty. But there is hope. Paul writes that they might not lose heart.

What we are talking about today is meant to make you strong in the word of God. It is meant to give you hope in the darkness.

In this passage are tools for fighting depression, discouragement, and sadness. Troubles within and troubles without. The answers may be found here.

[4 : 51] So make sure you listen closely. And you see how these truths are meant to put pep in your step and steel in your spine.

So in light of that, I have three S's for you today. Self, suffering, and sight. Through these three S's, we're going to look at three different bad things that we face in the Christian walk.

And then we are going to look at three different times that those bad things hide wonderful things inside.

Over and over in the Christian life, there are these things that are like that great gift hidden inside that bad box. So please follow along so that you may be encouraged by these truths.

First S, self, self. Verse 16. Even though our outward man or self is perishing.

[6 : 03] They're starting strong. Even though our bodies are wasting and decaying away. Yippee, that feels good to hear. I mean, are you as strong as you were when you were 25?

I'm 26 and I'm not as strong as I was when I was 25. So it starts quick. Our outward man is wasting away.

We grow weaker as the years pass on. Our health declines. We rack up injuries. We grow tired. I remember watching my good friend Wally as he got up into his 70s.

He had to... He was so faithful in so many ministries. But as he got older, he just had to start letting them go because he couldn't manage them all anymore.

He loved them and he wanted to do them. But the energy just wasn't there anymore. And yet Paul wants us to be encouraged.

[7 : 14] He tells us, Hey, all of our bodies, they're falling apart slowly, wasting away. They're not going to last forever. They've got an expiration date. Don't lose heart.

So how are we to be encouraged? Well, as we look at the box and realize that it's only fit for trash, as we look at our bodies and realize that they wear down, he says, don't trust the box.

Don't think that because the box is wearing away, the prize is going away too. He writes, Our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Your bodies might be fading with time, might be wearing down over the course of life. But if you are walking with the Lord, your soul should be being strengthened more and more in the Lord.

What your body lacks, you should see growing in your spirit as God sanctifies you and strengthens you. You are growing to be more and more wonderful by the grace of God.

[8 : 43] As God sends his spirit into your heart to make you more loving, more patient, more kind, more like the Savior.

I mean, what would you rather have? the ability to bench press 250 pounds or the wisdom to comfort the brokenhearted?

What matters more at the end of the day? Though your outer man is fading away, the inner man is renewed day by day.

Would you rather be known for a long life or for living a loving life? Rejoice at the work that God is doing in you.

Though we feel the pains of time, so too we see the joys of God's grace over many years. 1 Timothy does such a good job of showing that the body is of less value than the soul.

[9 : 54] Paul instructs Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 verses 7 and 8, Train yourself for godliness. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

The things that God is working in you are not just valuable for a little while and in a small way, but they are valuable forever.

Rejoice in those more than you despair over your weakness. So do not waste time complaining about your weakness, your tiredness, your sicknesses.

Instead, turn your focus and remember that as the box is crumbling on the outside, God is making your soul into a rich treasure fit for his glory.

So do not lose heart in the light of the difficulties of a worn down body. That's the first S, self.

[11 : 05] Second S, suffering. Raise your hand if you've ever had to sacrifice something to get what you want. We all will have done it at one point or two points or three or over and over.

We all sacrifice and suffer. No one gets to escape it. No one has a perfect life without any difficulties. So the question is not, will you suffer?

The question is, is your suffering worth it? Is the sacrifice worth what you get for it?

So I'm telling you to count the cost. Look at the Christian life and the difficulties you'll face and then look at the reward you get and ask yourself, is that sacrifice worth it to me?

You will find no better deal than suffering with Christ and receiving his reward. Look at how Paul highlights the deal in verse 17.

[12:23] For our light moment, our light affliction, which is but for a moment, that's the sacrifice, is working for us, here's the reward, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Here is your half of the bargain. You have to suffer for a time under a light affliction that is momentary.

If you want the treasures of Christ, you are going to have to pay the cost. Do not think that you can have Christ's riches and you can avoid his sufferings too.

Sometimes we try to be smarter than Christ. Oh, well, I'll hide the truth and then no one will be upset with me about the Bible and I get to avoid the persecution and get the reward.

There is no escaping this. If you want the reward of Christ, you must be prepared to suffer with him.

[13:35] He says, a servant is not greater than his master nor a messenger greater than the one who sends him. If they persecuted me, how much more so will they persecute you?

But all you have to suffer is what the Bible calls a light momentary affliction.

In return for a light momentary affliction, what do you get? You get an eternal weight of glory. That's a good deal.

A little bit of suffering for eternal glory? Let's take that a little bit deeper. Did you realize what Paul is talking about when he says light momentary affliction?

Did you realize that he means all of the suffering of your entire life? If I'm suffering and you come up to me and say, it's just a light momentary affliction, I'm going to be very offended.

[14:46] But he is calling all of your misery, all of your betrayal, all of your abandonment, and so on and so forth. He calls that a light momentary affliction.

And he's right. He's right because our suffering is nothing compared to what we get in return.

Imagine you're at a playground and you see a seesaw, you know, it tilts back and forth, and there's a 400-pound man on one end of it. And a 10-year-old girl gets on the other side.

Is it going anywhere? No. A 100-pound girl? No. No. It remains. It would have bottomed out.

It is bottomed out, and it will take hundreds of pounds to cause it to budge an inch. That is the example of our suffering.

[15:50] Once you put the reward of Christ in one end, all of our suffering on the other end does not move the scale a bit. Look at what Paul says.

A weight of glory beyond all comparison. Or he says, far more exceeding that it goes so far beyond the bounds of any suffering you endure.

You can't measure these two weights on the same scale because they're so disproportionate. So I'm telling you, do not lose heart when suffering comes your way.

Because as bad as it is, the reward far exceeds it. You don't have to be sad because you know you have such a wonderful thing coming.

Whatever you have to sacrifice will be worth it a hundredfold. Look at it a little further too.

[17:01] Did you notice that this verse rhymes? I mean, it's not a rhyme like two words that sound the same. It's a rhyme of ideas. Ideas. They match each other.

And that matching is there to show just how great the reward is compared to the suffering. So in return for affliction, we receive glory.

That's the first rhyme. But it's a light affliction. And what is the answer to the light affliction? A weight of glory.

The lightness of your troubles is contrasted with the sheer mass and weight of the glory that is coming. Your affliction is light.

In one sense, easy to bear. And in return for it, you receive a weight of glory. Beyond that, the rhyme continues.

[18:11] Beyond a light affliction, it is a momentary affliction. It is passing away. So for a momentary affliction, do you receive momentary glory?

No, look at this. We receive eternal glory. I mean, imagine if I said, I've got a job opportunity for you. Okay. All you have to do is the very most basic of tasks. And you only have to do them for a week.

And then I will pay you millions of dollars every year for eternity.

I mean, I take it a hundred times over. Brothers and sisters, do not lose heart because that is the deal that you have in Christ.

A light, momentary affliction in return for eternal weight of glory. Realize that your suffering is nothing in comparison with the reward.

[19 : 21] And don't get me wrong. Some of you have gone through tremendously horrible things. The Bible does not make light of those.

Paul, who writes this, was stoned multiple times, whipped over with 49 lashes, multiple occasions, shipwrecked, hunted.

When he says light, momentary affliction, it's not because he sat on cushioned couches his whole life. He knows what it is to suffer. And he still says it's nothing in comparison with the glory of God. So just as real as your sufferings are, the reward of Christ is far more real. You will look back on the hardest days of your life and you will say, it was a small pain compared to the joy I have now. You will say, no one has ever got so much for going through so little. Be encouraged. Do not lose heart.

[20 : 32] That's the second S, suffering. Third S, sight. Don't trust the box. Don't live by your sight alone.

I mean, you look and all you see is the vacuum on the box. So it must be a vacuum, right? No, wrong. Look for the deeper truth. Ask questions until you find out the truth about what's inside. The box lies and you need to know that you can't believe your own eyes. Verse 18 says, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. If you spend all of your time staring at this, staring at this world, and the things that are obvious, you're going to get discouraged.

You're going to lose heart. If your focus is on the stuff that you can feel and touch and taste and look at, you are going to find yourself sad, joyless, hopeless, despairing.

[21 : 57] This world is broken, and it was not meant to satisfy you. So do not look to it for your happiness. I think about the news.

It's such a great example. Modern news, especially the big channels, you watch it, and all it's going to do is make you sadder.

You know? No one goes, oh, I started watching the news for an hour every day, and I became such a happy person. Looking at this world is a one-way ticket to being a dying person, just like the dying world.

Jesus ties how we look to our spiritual health when he says, do not lay up treasures for yourself on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

See, not an earthly reality, but a heavenly reality. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be. One of the best ways to tell what your treasure is is what you look at.

[23 : 12] You know, if you sit there and you stare at your car, it's a nice car, or your beautiful house that you worked so hard to maintain, that's your treasure.

Or if you stare at Christ, you show he's your treasure. And then finally, the eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, that is, if you look at good things, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, if you look at bad things, your whole body will be full of darkness. And if the light of your body is darkness, how great is that darkness?

So take heart. Do not be discouraged when you look at the world, but remember to look past what you see to the unseen things.

The best, the truest, the brightest things are unseen currently. The things of scripture, the truths of God, the promises he has given us, the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 26] I've not seen the Holy Spirit, but he has brought more joy to my life than a thousand movies. The things that are seen are mere distractions, and the unseen things are the real substance.

The things that we look at in this life, they feel so real right now, but one day it will all be gone. But the things you cannot see, those are eternal.

Remember this when you talk to people. You might feel in the situation that the person you're talking to is annoying or difficult, inconvenient, they blabber on, they talk too loud, all these various complaints we hide in our hearts.

But know that while their body might fade away, they have a soul that is going to live forever. You might not see it, but it is there.

And you should be far more concerned with loving that soul than with dealing with their body. Look to the things which are unseen, for they are eternal.

[25 : 40] I lied a little bit. There's a fourth S. That fourth S is the Savior.

We're talking about gifts that look bad on the outside, but are rich on the inside. That is the cross.

The cross of Christ does not look appealing or like a treasure or a gift in any way.

When you see a man tortured and broken, suffocating under his own body weight, it does not look appealing or like great treasures and good news.

And if you look deeper and understand that this isn't just a man, but the king and creator, that's a ridiculous wrapping for a present.

Who wants that? John 3.16 says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Okay.

[26 : 51] He gave his son. We know that he gave his son to suffer and die on the cross. Why? That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

wrapped in this ugly shell of a suffering man, crushed and broken, abandoned, falsely accused, mistreated, maligned, betrayed by his own friends, tortured, wrapped in that broken shell that cries out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

is salvation, is the gift of forgiveness of sins. In that most horrendous of moments, the most beautiful thing of all creation happens where God, at the price of his own son, cancels all of our debt, every last piece of our sin.

full atonement is made. Not just part of it. Not enough so that you can pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But enough of it so that Christ can cry, It is finished.

One song says, It is finished. It is done. No more debt I owe. Paid in full. This is the truth of Christ on the cross.

[28 : 20] wrapped in a weak box in full of treasure. And God does this for good reason. He desires to win people who truly come for him.

Let me figure out another way. Think about the gift analogy. a good kid when they open up the wrapping paper and they find a gift that's not what they wanted.

Do they yell and scream and throw a tantrum? No. They go, It's not what I wanted, but thank you.

God is after those who aren't just there for the stuff that he offers, but who want a relationship with him.

He wraps all of his glory in weak packages so those who are just trying to cut to the reward and skip over him will go away with nothing.

They look at the cross and they go, Who wants a God who suffers? That doesn't look impressive.

God is after the people who are so interested in a relationship with their Savior in reconciliation with their Creator.

[29 : 51] That they look past the broken exterior and find a loving Savior. Will you be such a one?

Will you turn away at the gross box and leave the treasure missing? Or will you take heart knowing that following Christ means dying to yourself and rising again with him?

Can you say with Paul in Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.

In the life I live, I live in him. The things which are seen are temporary.

This is a light, momentary affliction. The outer man is fading away, but take heart, we are being renewed inwardly day by day.

[30 : 59] There awaits for us an eternal weight of glory, and the things which we cannot see are more real than anything that we can touch and sense.

Let us pray. Lord, I ask that you would send your Spirit to us to cause these words to make a home in our heart, that we would look at the light and be filled with light, and that it would radiate out from us.

And in all these things, might people see sinners saved only by your grace and the blood of Christ. It is in his name we pray.

Amen. Amen.