

Resurrection Effect

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to echo David's welcome of you, and especially those who are visiting this morning. We've been going through 2 Corinthians in a sermon series, and we're going to be looking on page 966 in the Bibles that are in your pews.

And this passage that we're in right now, right in the middle of 2 Corinthians, is an incredible passage because these verses are really about eternity coming into our everyday down-to-earth lives.

And if you, I can put up a little thing of rocks to remind you of last week's sermon a little bit, especially if you weren't here last week. But last week we heard about how God puts this treasure of knowing Jesus in jars of clay, which is a word for our bodies with all of our weaknesses, imperfections, to make clear that surpassing power comes from God.

And the knowledge of Jesus we heard last week shines through our cracks and our imperfections to other people. And what God is doing in this world is he is in the process of transforming us jars of clay as he works his grace through all of our weaknesses to more and more people.

And it is a grace that expands and grows in our lives and in the world. Paul was exhibit A of the jars of clay.

[1 : 38] And he was the target of lots of criticism and personal attacks because it was a very public ministry, of course, that he had. And because he had lots of weaknesses that he points out.

You get a taste of what he experienced if you have been following our federal elections. It's a very good example, in fact, of what Paul was probably going through. Mercifully, that campaign comes to an end tomorrow.

And I imagine that all the candidates are weary of it all. And they're breathing a sigh of relief when it's all over. Though it may be a short respite.

Not that I'm predicting anything. But Paul knows that weariness that comes from criticism, from disappointments, from betrayals and frustrations with his own personal weaknesses.

And he knows his physical limitations. He must have been tempted many times, don't you think, to pack it in with this Corinthian church?

[2 : 40] And to forego, you know, more challenges that might happen in his ministry. But yet, something very different happens in his life. We know from looking back at Paul.

He was willing to take on more and more challenges in other cities. In Ephesus. In Jerusalem, where his life was threatened. In Rome, where he's imprisoned and would one day die.

And why is this? Why is it that he persevered? Well, the answer is in our passage. At three times, Paul repeats why it is that he was able to keep going.

It's because God constantly gave him courage. Look at chapter 4, verse 16. It says there, We do not lose heart. And then jump down to chapter 5, verse 6.

We are always of good courage. And in case we missed the point, he says it two verses on from there. Yes, we are of good courage.

[3 : 47] And notice that immediately before and just after each of those little testimonies, Paul talks about these unseen certainties. These promises of God for him and for us.

Powerful promises. They are the means of grace that God uses to encourage people. Now, Paul doesn't share this just to put a positive spin on his life.

And to say things are going well despite all appearances. He does it so that he can give you God's gift of courage.

That we will receive God's gift of courage into our lives just as he has received it into his. It strengthens us to persevere when we face discouragement that comes, when we face our own challenges and our own weaknesses, that gift of courage.

Now, I think one of the strengths of our Canadian culture is that we exalt people who persevere. So our heroes are people like Terry Fox, who ran for thousands and thousands of miles through pain, through all kinds of challenges and difficulties.

[5 : 03] And he did it over a long period of time simply to bring good to many people. And then Ken Taylor, who died this past week, just a few days ago.

He was a Canadian diplomat in Iran 35 years ago. And in the hostage crisis, when Americans were taken hostage back then, he hid six Americans for 10 weeks.

And during that time, as you probably know, he worked out a plan, a way to get them to escape from Iran. It took all kinds of ingenuity, perseverance, working through very difficult things and keeping up the spirits of the captives who were being hidden.

And all this in a very hostile country with all kinds of challenges. Now, each of those heroes had a clear goal. And I think this is the reason for their perseverance.

Terry Fox's goal was to raise awareness and to raise millions of dollars for cancer research and to treat that disease in people. Ken Taylor's aim was very simply to save the lives of six people.

[6 : 16] Very clear. And this is helpful to us because it's what helps us and makes it possible to persevere, is that we also have a very clear goal as well.

And Paul tells us what that clear goal is. Look down at chapter 5, verse 9. He says, In other words, to be channels of his grace into this world and into the lives of other people.

That great ambition, that aim that Paul is talking about, shapes all of our ambitions and all of our plans in life. We are meant to persevere in this aim because that was Jesus' own aim in his relationship with his father.

Do you remember when Jesus was baptized? What were the words that he heard from God the Father coming from heaven? They said, the words said, This is my beloved son.

In him I am well pleased. Audible voice from God. And this is our aim. Paul knows this is a great challenge for us. Because we are prone to disillusionment.

[7 : 37] We're prone to weakness that comes with being clay jars. And we become discouraged. We can become distracted from that ambition of pleasing God.

So he writes this passage for us. 4.13 through 5.10. To give us God's courage. That that word would be a vehicle through which God would actually bring his strength and courage into our life. To accomplish that aim. And the way he does it is to reveal unseen certainties that God has given each of us. To strengthen us. To persevere.

And so I just want to spend a few minutes looking at those certainties from this passage. They are future certainties. And there is a present certainty as well. And I want to look at the future first.

It's important for us. Because all of us have uncertainty in our future. We can be anxious about the children. Our children. How they will turn out. We can be anxious about how we will retire.

[8 : 40] We might be anxious about what job we will get when we finish our education. We can even be anxious about who's going to win the rugby match this afternoon as well.

We don't know what the government will be like tomorrow either. There is uncertainty in our future. That's the nature of it. But in the midst of all that uncertainty, there are three certainties that Paul points out to us.

To keep our aim clear and focused. The first is in chapter 4 verse 14. He says this. He says, He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. That is what God's plan is through all eternity. This is what pleases him. This is what glorifies him. God's great desire is very simply to share his life with his people forever.

And notice that there is a togetherness about this future. Jesus brings us with you into God's presence. And it is with Jesus. So it not only belongs to you to put your trust in Jesus, as you put your trust in Jesus.

[9 : 56] This is also the future of those you relate to and serve in the church. But not only that. It quite possibly is what is ahead for others in your life who do not yet believe.

And this affects our relationships. This reveals a deep significance about the people in your life and in my life as well. You know, all Christians that you know, even the ones who you don't really like that much, are going to be raised and transformed by the Lord Jesus one day.

But not only that, people in your life who don't believe Jesus yet may one day be brought into God's presence with you.

And that is a tremendous encouragement. To keep on praying and speaking to those in your life who don't know the Lord. It also inspires us to love and to serve our fellow Christians differently. You know, I think it would have been a real shock for the hearers of Paul's letter to the Corinth. Especially those who were real anti-Paul party people.

[11 : 14] For them to hear that they are going to be in heaven, in God's presence, with Paul, forever. Sobering thought. And this is the way that we look on our relationships because of this certainty.

C.S. Lewis preached a sermon on the weight of glory. Just that phrase from this passage. And he spoke about the significance that eternity makes for people.

He says this. It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses. Which is what the resurrection of the body will mean. To remember that the dullest, most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature.

Which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. Or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, now only in a nightmare.

All day long, we are in some degree helping each other to one or the other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities.

[12 : 22] It is with awe and the circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all our dealings with one another. All our friendships. All our loves. All play.

All politics. There are no ordinary people. And you know, our society kind of understands this. This is why we have a charter of rights.

To give value to people. But it is imperfect. It is eternity. These unseen things that I am talking about that gives people extraordinary value.

And that changes our relationships completely. Well, the second certainty that Paul talks about is the certainty of new bodies, which is very much related.

Look at chapter 5, verse 1. He uses imagery he's very familiar with as a tent maker. He says, For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God.

[13 : 21] A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And you probably know, and certainly I do, that our bodies, our emotions, our minds can be great sources of discouragement to us, whatever our age.

They can let us down. But Paul says that this is the very context that he, with you and I, actually minister here on earth.

But that context is temporary. And he is emphatic about this. He says in verse 2 of chapter 5, For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly body, our heavenly dwelling.

And then he repeats it in verse 4, in case we don't get the point. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened. So he's saying that groaning is a normal part of the Christian life.

It doesn't mean complaining. It's saying there is something more. You know, I have an office that's right across the hall from David Short's office, down there on Burrard and Seventh. And the walls are not soundproof.

[14 : 31] And I must say, when David's in that office, from time to time I hear groans emanating from that office. Now usually it's after he's ridden his bike to work to the office. But clearly those are groans.

And I think they're probably a longing for the spiritual dwelling that's coming up. The mansion in heaven. But what Paul is saying here is that your weakness, your limitation, that groaning that we have, doesn't mean that you stop pleasing God.

In fact, God's plan is that his grace and his power is revealed now in the midst of our weakness. In fact, through those weaknesses, it is in those temporary bodies with the groaning that we are to please him.

But there is a bigger story that all of that is part of. God will further change our bodies so that we can serve him without limitation. Look at chapter 5, verse 4.

Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God.

[15 : 44] That's how certain it is. And what this is telling us is that our serving God and weakness here on earth is the first part, in fact a pretty small part, of a ministry that is going to continue with us being swallowed by life.

Having a body that pleases God eternally. And that new body, Paul says, is like the difference between a tent and a mansion. We begin doing now in our tent what we will do in a much more glorious and loving way in part two, which will never end.

So you can see that your act of ministry, of pleasing God now, is incredibly significant. You, with your transformed body, will continue to do it with a new freedom, a new joy, a new ability, with limitless possibilities to please God.

That is the adventure that God has begun now in your life, in this tent that we have. Well, the third and the last future certainty that Paul reveals to us is very simply that Jesus will judge us.

And there may be a little bit of shock to that. Look at chapter 5, verse 10. End of our passage. He says this, So I hope there's some puzzled looks out there.

[17 : 26] Because it is mistakenly saying that Christians will be judged. The we is Paul and all the believers that he's writing to. And you probably are thinking, Wait a minute, didn't Paul say in Romans that God's judgment has already taken place for those who trust in Jesus?

Isn't it the case that Jesus takes on himself the punishment for our sins? Didn't he say there is no condemnation? That is absolutely true.

And we must keep that in our minds. This is the grace of God. But this judgment is very different that Paul talks about here. It is a judgment that always leads to salvation.

Jesus, who has already saved you, will evaluate your work and my work. He will disclose it and test it.

And the best explanation of this judgment is from 1 Corinthians 3. Listen to Paul's words. He says, You see what this is saying is that Jesus, Jesus, who has loved us and saved us, will walk us through our life.

[19 : 04] And he will disclose to us what our lives are about in God's sight. And what we will see is that clearly God will praise you for acts of service to him that have been completely unseen and probably disregarded by our world as being totally insignificant.

But he will say something very different. He will say, Well done, good and perfect servant and faithful servant. And there will be joy in heaven for all these things.

But there's also to be some kind of loss of reward for the works that you and I have done that have displeased God, that are not of him, that actually do not go with that aim of pleasing him.

It has nothing to do with the foundation of Jesus. And those things will be shown to be worthless.

They will be burned up in their significance. And this judgment will be good for us so that we take with us only the work that has brought God's goodness, that is pleasing to God, into eternity with us.

And this certainly is very relevant to each of our lives. I think it actually helps us take stock of everything that we are about. Everything we do, everything we say, everything that we are about.

[20 : 24] And we can ask ourselves, Is this pleasing to Jesus? How will this action, how will this thought, the things that I'm doing, look on my judgment day?

What will last into eternity? It's an incredible way for us to evaluate our lives. There is a deep encouragement here for us to persevere in serving Jesus, in living for him, and serving each other. There's an inspiration to be wanting Jesus' words to come to us, well done, good and faithful servant.

That is a greater reward than all of the status, than all of the recognition, than all of the wealth that we could possibly have in this world. It is the ultimate in reward.

And I want to close by saying that this is not easy. And we have a loving God that has given us this aim.

[21 : 26] And it is the aim that only comes because we love him. Why else would we want to please him? And it is never God's will to leave us to go after this aim and to persevere on our own strength.

Only he is sufficient for this. Back in verse 5, you can see that there is a present certainty that is all important in this. Very simply, he says, God has given you and me the Holy Spirit as a guarantee. And it is a guarantee that these incredibly powerful future things are ours. that the Holy Spirit who will transform our bodies comes into us in this body now.

He changes us now to be more and more like Jesus. And there is a very practical relevance of the Holy Spirit to my life and to your life today as we hear this.

Because if we are weak jars of clay with the treasure of Jesus inside, part of each day really is to ask the Holy Spirit to be our helper so that we are channels of his grace in and through our

weakness.

[22 : 38] Look at this amazing promise in 416. It says, Though our outer self is wasting away, our inward self is being renewed day by day.

It's a profound contrast by the work of the Spirit. I have a friend who is in his 80s who just died recently and five years ago he had a, really a sentence from his doctor that said, Your heart will not last more than two years.

And he was somebody who really lived a very, a Christian life that I would say was not noticeable. And yet, something happened in that time.

In the last five years, I saw a change in him. A much greater interest in reading God's Word. He became part of a Bible study that I helped with from time to time. There was a greater interest in praying and understanding what God has for him as well.

I saw a transformation in him as his body was completely giving out. He lasted three years longer than the doctor said. But inwardly, day by day, he was being renewed.

[23 : 51] renewed. And, and the question that I have and that you should have have is, what does that renewal look like in his life, in your life, in my life as well?

And I think quite wonderfully, Paul gives a glimpse of that inner renewal in a prayer that he prays in first, in Ephesians 3. And here's what he says.

This is his prayer. He says, I pray that God will grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit, the Holy Spirit, in your inner self.

So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. That you being rooted and grounded in love may have the strength to comprehend the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge.

This is the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. He strengthens us to comprehend Christ's love for us. As we read God, the God-breathed words of the Bible, as we simply pray to ask for his help, as you take steps to serve him in a way that is unique to you, that strength that makes us know the love of Jesus for us allows us also to persevere in that great ambition to please him.

[25 : 14] to live for the praise of his glory. So today, may God give you confidence through these unseen certainties that I've been talking about this morning in this passage.

Give you confidence to take real risks in your weakness to please God in your relationships, with your time, with your money, with the variety of gifts that the Holy Spirit can give you.

It is certain that his overflowing grace will make your greatest ambition successful. It is a tremendous privilege, this aim of pleasing God.

It is almost unbelievably good. And so I end again with C.S. Lewis' words. He said, to please God, to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness, to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in, as an artist delights in his work, or a father in a son, it seems impossible, a weight or a burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain.

But so it is. So it is. Amen.