

New Year's Eve 2017

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Hey, good morning, everybody. I'm Derek Harris, in case you don't know me. I'm one of the new pastors here. Just got here about two months ago.

My wife and my son, John Paul, who is six years old, my wife Anna Catherine and I, we moved here about two months ago, and we are so happy to be here. I look out here, in those short two months, I see your faces, and I know so many of you already and count you as dear friends, and we just look forward to the years ahead.

It's an honor to be here to preach the Word today, and if you don't mind, it's a wait as well, which we'll hear about the weight of glory today, but this is a different wait. So I'm going to pray. So if you wouldn't mind bowing your heads with me.

Father in heaven, thank you for this congregation. Thank you for your Word. Thank you for the opportunity to preach it. I pray that anything that I say that needs to be forgotten, that they would forget it, and all good things from you that they would remember.

[1 : 14] It would take root in their soul, and it would grow. And I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So, like I said, we recently moved here.

Now, part of moving to a new place is competitive sports, right? When you have kids. And recently, my son, John Paul, has started his first ever basketball league.

Isn't that right, John Paul? He's in here. Kids, hang on today, by the way. I'm glad you're in here. Okay? So if you're in here, this is for you too. But his basketball league, his co-ed, his five and six-year-olds, is organized.

It's complete chaos. It's organized chaos. It's adorable. It's absolutely horrific. It's adorably horrific.

A typical game is spent with parents on the sidelines yelling things like, You can dribble the ball. No, run the other way.

[2 : 15] You're on defense. You can shoot the ball. You're on the same team. Quit doing ballet twirls. Don't sit down in the middle of the court.

Now, my wife, Anna Catherine, and in her high school days, she was known as the intimidator, by the way, in basketball. She's agreed to be an assistant coach, and she's quite the baller.

But during one of our recent games, I looked over on the sidelines, and coaching in that moment called her to console the team, a few of which who were crying because they had been handsomely defeated, like the Auburn Tigers would beat down anyone.

But they had been handsomely defeated so bad that they had to take the score off the scoreboard. And so she's crying. One of the girls is crying, and one of the guys is crying.

And nothing that she seemed to say would comfort them in that moment, nothing except redirecting their attention to the team's snack. Ah, yes.

[3 : 14] We all know the team's snack, right? The best part of competitive sports at a young age. No matter the score at the end of the game, you're always going to get that team's snack, right?

Will it be Capri Sun? Will it be Oreos? Maybe it's goldfish. Maybe it's pizza after the game with the team. But the hope of that team's snack actually made the sadness a little bit more bearable.

Because there was a yet unseen reality ahead far better than the current circumstances. It outweighed them. And it's not much different, really, for us, if you think about it.

When we look at our lives, when we look at the world around us, we have a lot of reason to be sad and to despair. Do we cry uncontrollably?

Maybe. But what do we do and what do we run to to console us and to help us cope with the pain? Is there yet unseen reality for us ahead that's far better than the current seen circumstances?

[4 : 22] If so, what is it? And I believe the answer is found in today's Scripture. So let's read these verses together. I'll read them and you read along with me.

You don't have to read out loud. Okay, now we're jumping into a book we haven't been, Okay, now we're jumping into a book we haven't been in.

This is the book of 2 Corinthians, and it was written by the Apostle Paul. Now, he also wrote most of the New Testament. Fun note, there are originally four letters to the Corinthians.

We only have two today. Two of them were lost. They were referred to as A, B, C, and D. So this letter is actually the fourth. This is letter D. We lost A and C.

So what you have in the Bible is B and D. 1 Corinthians is B. 2 Corinthians is D. Now, Paul is writing to a church that he started in a town on an island actually called Corinth.

[5 : 37] And if you lived there, you were known as a Corinthian. They were riddled with anything bad you can imagine they had.

Imagine Bourbon Street. That was Corinth. Okay? So he's writing to Christians that are surrounded by a lot of reason to despair. He's writing to people that are not very different than you and I.

So as we read this passage, though, I think that God wants us to hear three specific things today. First, sometimes things aren't what they seem to be. Second, I love you.

You're not alone. There is a purpose. And third, trust me. So let's take a look at these. First thing that I think he wants you to hear today is this.

Sometimes things aren't what they seem to be. And in that, he wants us to consider our perception of reality. When I say perception, I mean awareness, understanding, comprehension.

[6 : 38] Paul was no stranger to despair. Okay? He knows that when we look around, things can be very, very, very discouraging. And many times confusing. But sometimes they're not what they seem to be.

For instance, one thing you need to know about me. Secondly, my angry face is identical to my I'm listening to you, I love you face. Okay? So you may think I'm mad at you sometimes, but it may not be what it seems to be.

So sometimes you'll see me just trying to go and awkwardly smile to let you know, hey, I'm not angry. I'm actually gelling with you. I can't change it. And then I'll get mad that you think I'm angry when I'm really listening. Right?

This has been the source of many conflicts in my life. I live over the mountain. Owens Crossroads. OC, as I like to call it. One day I stop at this gas station.

It's a Chevron. And I see a sign for a fine wine store. And I'm like, hmm, fine wine store in a gas station. I got to check this out. So out of curiosity, I go in and I check it out.

[7 : 38] And I didn't expect much. But what I got was an amazing wine store. Not only could I buy wine from all over the world, and I think it's the best wine store in Huntsville, but if I wanted to, I could walk across the store and get a slushie and a ring pop and a bag of Doritos.

Sometimes things are not what they seem to be. In fact, they're better than they seem to be, right? I asked some people, what are some things in our lives that are different than we would have originally thought?

Here's some answers I got. Life. It hasn't turned out the way I thought it would. Parenthood. My kids are better or worse than I thought they would be. Instagram. I thought I could connect with people, but I just get sad and feel worthless.

Christmas, kids. I got everything I wanted, but I'm not happy. It didn't make me feel the way I thought it would. Finances. Maybe you thought you'd be a millionaire by now.

People. They let us down. Politics. Politics. I won't even go there. And miracle wrinkle cream. Okay? I thought it was going to give me back my youth.

[8 : 48] That's just what actually somebody said to me. But sometimes things actually aren't what we think they are. And if you read the news, if you look around, if you look on the internet, we have reason to actually get sad.

So if you're sad, hey, okay. So was Jesus, right? He looked around. He was a man of sorrows. Why do you think? He's so in touch with the world around us. It's a world of despair.

His disciples saw it. And they give us words to focus on here in the scriptures. Is it possible, though, that our perception, how we perceive things, is actually off from the way that we're created to see things?

Paul knew the answer to that is yes. And that the visible world around us gives us reason to despair. That's why he begins verse 16. Let's go back to verse 16 with an exhortation.

So we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away. Our inner self is being renewed day by day. He says we do not lose heart. Okay, if you look back to chapter 4, verse 1, or ahead to chapter 5, verse 6, he's hanging in this zone again.

[9 : 55] 4.1, he says, again, we do not lose heart. But in chapter 5, verse 6, he says we're always of good courage. This is his perception. There's a positive thing going on that's a real focus on something ahead.

But it's causing his world around him to change. So in the midst of a horrible circumstance, he's hanging on to something bigger. But what's translated as so right there should actually, I've heard, better be translated as the word therefore.

And whenever you see the word therefore, you should stop and ask, what's it there for? And the word therefore in this, if it were so, it should say, therefore we do not lose heart.

Some translations do translate it. It's there to let you know that these verses are tied in with the verses that were ahead. And Paul has been teaching about the resurrection from the dead. That's what he's talking about.

That's the focus of what he's talking about. And it's there to let us know that this is a continuation of that teaching, which will later be closed out. The resurrection from the dead is Paul's hope.

[10 : 58] What is your hope? What is my hope in the midst of the world? We all know it's sad, but what's our hope? Whatever you may be going through right now, don't give up hope.

One time I was in a time of despair. And so what we did is we turned on Wheel of Fortune to watch Wheel of Fortune. Because that's what you do when you're in despair, right? And so my wife and I were watching Wheel of Fortune.

And I was like, you know what? I'm so frustrated. So we stopped and I said, I'm going to pray. I'm going to actually trust God's word. I'm going to cast my anxiety upon him. And I'm going to look for his peace. And so I did that.

I muted the TV. We prayed. I look up right when the prayer is over. And you know what it says? The puzzle's right there. Still muted. It says, don't give up hope. Right?

Pat Sajak was a messenger of the Lord. No. So that was cool. And I don't want you to give up hope. Right? Whatever you're going through right now, it may not be what it seems to be.

[12 : 00] Paul says, outwardly we're wasting away. What he's talking about is our bodies. Right? We're all moving towards something that's going to end. But inwardly is our spirit is being renewed day by day.

Christmas was just over. We had our 91-year-old grandmother in town. And I took her, was taking her back home because she lives in Arkansas. And we were meeting someone halfway to pick up. And she just lost her husband last year.

And she said, you know, Derek, when I read the Bible, something just changes in me and it gives me hope. And I can't explain it, but it helps me keep going. She's talking about what Paul's talking about.

There's an inward renewal that happens when we encounter the truths of God. And that's what you're created to look at. But you're surrounded in a world that just distracts you all the time. Now, we don't leave the world.

No, we learn how to live in it. And we learn how to be transformed within it. Outwardly, we're wasting away. But if you trust your life to Jesus Christ, you're standing on a foundation of something so much greater and so much more beautiful.

[13 : 03] And everyone in this room and in this world is welcome to take that step. That step of faith to stand on that foundation of Christ. And like Paul, we can look to Jesus in faith.

By looking ahead to the resurrection, we can have an unquenchable hope. Because for those who are united to Jesus Christ through faith, the resurrection from the dead, literally coming back to life after you die, is the unstoppable reality for you.

This is the message of the gospel. Not that Jesus died only, but he came back to life. Get your head around that. You can live forever.

Now, we either believe that or we don't. But that's the message that Christ brings to us. And that either transforms this world today, or it's just another thing that we read.

Like children crying on the sidelines of that basketball game, we're all in despair over something that we see. It clouds our perception from the gospel hope.

[14 : 09] But Paul's encouraging us to look to what's ahead and not to lose hope. Because sometimes things actually aren't what they seem to be. They're better. Way better. Secondly, God wants us to hear these words today.

Imagine him saying this to you. I love you. You're not alone. There is a purpose. He calls it an eternal weight of glory in the scripture.

Paul does. That hope, that purpose. You know, what is it that gives you hope? Whatever you're going through, good or bad, to find that purpose or meaning.

Right? Because what he means is ultimate meaning. Not just something little, but the end of the game, so to speak. What is it that gives you hope as you sit here? What gives you hope to get through this sermon being over?

It's thinking about lunch. I know it is. A lot of y'all are thinking right now, where are you going to go eat? Right? And that helps you get through the sermon. It helps me. And so it's got to help you.

[15 : 11] But what is it that gives you hope in that ultimate thing? In that ultimate thing? There's a good chance, you know, we can think of things that help us get through tough situations. There's a good chance that somebody in here is an engineer.

A very good chance. And there's a good chance that someone in here is an engineer that works on rockets. Right? And if we're going to work on rockets, we have to first go through that painful process of design and testing.

Right? And sometimes you may only realize the outcome when the rocket is actually launched. But that trial, that tough time, can lead to something so beautiful.

One time I had a terrible tooth infection. It was awful. And it led to me needing to get my wisdom teeth out. And there's a reason why they tell you to get those things out before you're 28.

And that reason is pain, misery, and everything you can imagine horrible for one solid week. Okay? But I had to trust that surgeon. And the way I got through that week was looking to what's ahead.

[16 : 11] And that's no more tooth infections. And, man, they had to hammer that thing out and it hurt. But what if that's true in our spiritual lives? What if what we go through in life is really leading to something better?

What if God feels our pain with us? What if we don't know the fullness of good actually until we've undergone the surgery? And he's saying, I love you.

You're not alone. There is a purpose for what you're going through. Verse 17 tells us what it is. Let's jump back to those verses. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

He's saying there's a light at the end of this tunnel. We're not alone in the tunnel, in fact. God is in the tunnel with us. But do you ever get bogged down? If you're like me, you do. You get bogged down in the darkness and you lose sight of hope.

And you may think, oh, that's great. Paul can say that. He knew Jesus. Okay, Paul was no stranger to suffering and pain. Let's look at 2 Corinthians 11, 24. Would you put that on the screen for me?

[17 : 19] Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked.

A night and a day I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys. Danger from rivers. Danger from robbers. Danger from my own people. Danger from Gentiles. Danger in the city. Danger in the wilderness.

Danger at sea. Danger from false brothers. Keep going. Next one. In toil and hardship. Through many a sleepless night.

In hunger and thirst. Fast forward. Apart from other things. There's the daily pressure on me for the anxiety of all the churches. Who's weak and I'm not weak? Who's made to fall and I'm not indignant?

If I must boast, I will boast in the things of my weakness. That show my weakness. There it is right there. Paul was no stranger to suffering.

[18 : 13] But in the midst of weakness is God's strength. And in the midst of weakness, God is saying to you, I love you. You're not alone and there is a purpose. This is the great dichotomy of the kingdom of God.

If you follow Jesus Christ or you're considering it, know this. The world defines strength in status, power, money, and fame. But God defines strength in Jesus Christ.

The lowly, the humble, the loving, the forgiving Son of God who laid aside glory for a time for me and for you. He humiliated Himself to the point of death on a cross on this earth so that we can be exalted with Him forever in eternity.

One time I was in Washington, D.C. I lived there for nine years. And there's this road that surrounds it called the Beltway. And I had to take the toll road to get onto the Beltway.

Okay, and the toll road, right before you enter the Beltway, there's no lines. Okay, so imagine thousands of people trying to work themselves into about five lanes. It is complete chaos.

[19 : 18] Okay, and so this morning I was particularly having a hard day, but I look up and I see the beauty of the sky. It was beautiful that morning. Then I look down and I see a complete and utter mess.

It was like, God, human beings. And I was like, where are you, man? Where are you? And I just kind of had one of those moments with Him. And at that moment I look at the car in front of me and right there on the bumper is a bumper sticker that just says Jesus.

And it hit me. I'm in it with you, Derek. God is here with us in this mess. That is who Jesus is. He became, He took flesh to Himself for us.

This is what we just celebrated at Christmas. We're all born in this tunnel of darkness in a world of sin and misery as our confession tells us. Decay, decomposition, but God is making all things new and we are not alone.

There is a purpose. There is a weight of glory ahead as Paul called it. And he called this pain here temporary, light, momentary affliction.

[20 : 28] This is why Jesus says, come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened. I'll give you rest for your souls. Right? Because we come here each week with so many struggles and temptations.

But we've got to take them to Jesus. My job as a pastor is to remind you, to encourage you, to admonish the idle, to encourage the weak, to be patient with all. And the only way I know to do that is to look at what those who knew Jesus personally, like literally flesh to flesh, we can say we do.

But those who walked with him, this is what they focused on. Take your pain to Jesus. He will walk with you. He promises future hope and he says that sometimes things aren't what they seem to be.

But I love you. You're not alone. And there is a purpose. And finally, I think that God wants you to hear these words today. Trust me.

That's the third point. Could you bring that up? Trust me. He wants us to see things from his perspective, his position, his point of view.

[21 : 37] Perspective is a frame of mind. Well, how can I see things from God's perspective? You may ask. The only way that I know to tell you is for you to use his eyes.

To see things the way that he does is you have to actually use his eyes. He gives us his eyes through faith. The Bible calls faith the assurance of things hoped for, the certainty of things not seen.

And Paul teaches us how to see through God's eyes with the eyes of faith. He says, here's what you focus on. Not the seen, but the unseen. Let's read that last verse.

Verse 18. Could you bring up that slide? Thank you. As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient or temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

If you think about this, it's no wonder that Paul talks about the seen and the unseen so much. Because what was the most influential moment in his life? Anybody remember?

[22 : 40] Just blurt it out if you want. The road to Damascus when he was converted and God did what to his eyes?

Blinded him. The first time that Paul saw Jesus was when he was blinded. And on that road to Damascus. So this makes sense that he would write this way.

This was a huge part of his life. It took blindness for him to have faith. What will it take for us to see Jesus? What will it take for us? And you may say, how can I focus on something I can't see?

Well, Paul is talking about the ultimate thing, the outcome of things. Not necessarily something right in front of your face. And God's saying, trust me. If we surrender our lives to Jesus through faith, and faith means trusting him at his word.

Trusting that our sins are forgiven, our souls are set free, and that we're given eyes of faith through which to see when we surrender to him. If we do that, we can see things the way that they really are.

[23 : 43] We can know that we're loved. We can know that we're not alone. We can know that there's a purpose. We can be like the children crying on the bench of life because we've been defeated, but we can look forward then to that future hope, which is life without end.

No more death. No more pain. No more suffering. It's a future hope, and that's what Paul's talking about. That ultimate future hope. That's what he focused on.

That's what the eyes of faith give us the ability to focus on, the scoreboard at the end of the game, so to speak. It's looking ahead to that future reality, that future hope of life, that death does not get the last word.

Christ has won the victory. He's made the shot. He's done the homework. He's won the battle. God's eyes focus on victory all the time, but not necessarily ours, do they?

We need his eyes to see that. We need his eyes to get through it. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote it this way when speaking of faith. Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase. And the verb used in verse 18 there for look is not like I look at this water bottle.

[24 : 53] It's more to set your gaze on something, your ultimate focus. It's ocopeo, regard as your aim. That's different than the word that meant just to look at something in front of you, which was like what's called blepo, which I think is a funny Greek word.

But Paul sets his gaze on that invisible world of God's providence and rule, as one commentator said. And Paul is challenging you and I to do the same. But do we do this in our own lives?

Yeah. I think you can understand focusing on the unseen. Can you think of something in this world, seen world, that serves as a reminder of something that happened?

Think of 9-11. Right? We set up a memorial to go there to remember those men and women who sacrificed their lives and to remember those men and women who actually ran to, as Will has been saying recently, ran to the pain and the suffering as our God runs to us.

A tombstone. It's so easy to forget life, isn't it? So we have tombstones where we go and we remember people that we love, what they stood for, what they meant to us.

[26 : 04] It's a stone to remember. In the Bible, this stone was called an Ebenezer. And it was set up, originally, in 1 Samuel, you read about this, that Samuel set this up to represent Israel's victory over the Philistines, that God had delivered them.

It was a seen reminder of the eternal God. A way to remember that God's trustworthy. And maybe you and I need to set up some of those this year. Maybe we need some Ebenezers in our lives.

Something to point our temporary eyes to something eternal and something tangible that we can hold in our hands. Jesus said, your eye is the lamp of your body. But because of our sinful natures, we're so good at setting up Ebenezers of despair rather than Ebenezers of life.

Ebenezers that become temporal reminders of spiritual despair, saved rings from broken marriages, so to speak. Looking at an Instagram and focusing on what you don't have. We're really good at that stuff.

Paul Miller is a great author. If you've never read his book, A Praying Life, one of the best books I've ever read. And one of the best chapters is called Following Jesus Out of Cynicism. But he says this about America.

[27 : 16] America is a place where cynicism is the dominant spirit of the age, a spirit of depression and despair behind every silver lining is a dark cloud. Maybe we need to make a habit of Ebenezer-ing.

And yes, I did just make a verb out of a noun. For us, in our lives, in times of despair, someone gave me this one day. It's called My Daily Gratitude Thank You Book.

And I thought this was the cheesiest thing I'd ever seen when that person gave it to me. But during our times of despair, we just would write down one thing each day. I found I can always think of just one thing that I'm thankful for.

Well, I said this today. Today I'm thankful for a family that loves me and lets me be myself. It's all I had for that day. My wife would go in and write something and we didn't have an order to it, but it helped.

It helped us a lot to focus on the Lord. One time I went on a missions trip to Cuba and I have this. It sits in my kitchen every day and I look at it. It reminds me of God saving someone's soul despite myself and this is what that family gave me as a gift.

[28 : 21] But put these little things like do you have something in your life maybe that could help you remember that God is real in the midst of the temporal? Something you can hold in your hand. What do you think you need to put in your life to trust God this year to remind you of that future unseen hope and that reality?

It might be this right here. The Bible. Right now I hold in my temporary hands time bound hands the word of the unseen eternal God and the same author that made me gave us this right here.

But to hear him I've got to actually read what he says. That's why he says thy word is a lamp into my feet and a light into my path. Maybe we need to make a little more time this year to see those words so that we can find our focus and our purpose in this world that's often times dark.

The reality here is that we all have a world view. You know what a world view is? It's the view through which the glasses or lenses through which I view the world. Okay?

And every basic world view answers four questions. Where did I come from? Why is the world such a mess? Is there hope? And so what? And the Bible answers those four questions in distinct ways.

[29 : 41] Here at this new year where did I come from? You came from God. He created you and he created you for a purpose. The world is such a mess because of sin. Sin led to condemnation and sin is the reason that death and everything horrible exists in this world.

Is there hope? The only hope I have to give you is Jesus Christ because he's the only one who made this eternity known to us. And he's not only made it known he took it for us the sin and the condemnation and death so that we can have life.

Not only did he live though paying for the sin we can never pay for he came back to life and now he reigns as king of all. He's the alpha the omega the beginning and the end but so what?

So what is surrender? We don't understand the so what until we surrender and we don't find the purpose until we surrender. The difference between Christianity and every other religion is the difference between two words doing and done and that's why we can rest when we come to Jesus.

That's why we can hope when we hurt because God hurts for us God holds us and he will resurrect us and make all things new. But Derek I want to do this and I don't know how you may say I want to focus on the unseen but how can I with all this stuff drowning it out as you said.

[31 : 04] I tell you this trusting starts with surrender surrendering everything you have to the one with greater authority surrendering your footsteps to the voice of one who tells you where to walk like Paul did.

We must make time to surrender to listen to let God retune our hearts and to refocus our spirits and God saying trust me not you trust me do you trust him?

have you given your life to Jesus? I mean really if you have do you make time to surrender? Do you make time to remember that?

To hope? Are you just too busy? I'm pretty sure we're all busy but without Jesus there's no knowledge and there's no understanding of the things that are unseen.

Without Jesus there's no knowledge or understanding of the things that are eternal. Without Jesus there's no knowledge or understanding of any pain as it has to do with future glory but in Jesus the unseen became seen for us.

[32 : 11] In Jesus the eternal entered time for a time for us and through Jesus' death on that wooden cross unmeasurable temporary pain became eternal forgiveness for those of us who open our eyes of faith to see the promised future of resurrection glory.

But the reality is that some of us here we know our diagnosis we've heard it a million times we've gotten the prescription filled in fact but our faith is actually equivalent to sitting next to the bottle.

We talk about taking the medicine all the time we read books that other people have written about taking the medicine we've read the bottle we know the side effects we can even convince others around us that we've taken the pill.

But we never actually took the pill that will cure us. God's saying trust me take the pill. If you've never trusted him today would you do it?

Would you let him set you free? Would you let him be the trustworthy God that he is? Would you let him forgive you of your sins? And give you the eyes of faith to see things the way that they really are?

[33 : 24] would you let him show you that you're loved by him? That you're not alone and that there is a purpose would you trust him today? And if you have trusted him would you run back to him?

Would you make time to remember that surrender? What a great way to start this new year with God's focus. He says sometimes things aren't what they seem to be.

I love you you're not alone there's a purpose trust me. Let's pray. Father thank you for this time and your word I pray that any in here who may not know you that they would take the step of faith today and surrender their lives to you.

I thank you for everyone here I thank you for the opportunity to be a part of their lives and I pray that they would know they're loved no matter where they are they're welcome here no matter what they bring God you love them and I pray they would know it I pray those that do know you Father would run to you and experience new hope this year and Father I pray we would enjoy that as we sing about that hope right now it's in Christ's holy name I pray Amen For more information visit us online at southwood.org