



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

“When Affliction is Light”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading for today is 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 16 through verse 18. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 16 through verse 18.

Now, for any who may not have been here week after week, we're in that section of 2 Corinthians, in which, the apostle is writing about the ministry to which he has been called by the Lord God, specifically, his ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles ministering, as he puts it, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Now, in verse 16, he says,

“Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. While we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen.”

Now, incidentally when Paul says, which are not seen, he means not seen by us, not that they are totally invisible, for they are seen by those who people heaven itself, and therefore, they are the real things that can be seen but they're not seen by us. For the things which are seen are temporary, that word translated “temporal” is better rendered

temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. May the lord bless this reading of his word, and lets bow together now for a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we come to Thee through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the forgiveness of sins which has been given to us by virtue of what our savior has accomplished, and we come to Thee through our union with him. We thank Thee and praise Thee that he was our representative doing for us what we never could have done, bearing the punishment for our sin and making it possible by a marvelous grace that we should be endowed with the righteousness of God, the righteousness that is acceptable to Thee.

And how marvelous it is to know that by the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross, the penalty was paid, and we go free because of what Christ has done. We're thankful and we give Thee praise for all that has been accomplished for us. And for this, the knowledge of God, which has been given to us, how could we ever express to Thee, Lord, that which is upon our hearts. We are grateful and thankful, and we pray, Lord, that our gratitude and our thankfulness may be expressed in more devoted service of the truth of God as found in Christ.

We thank Thee and praise Thee for this country in which we live, and we pray for its leaders. We ask, Lord, for that thou wilt wisdom and guidance and protection for the citizens of this country. And we pray for those who love freedom wherever they may be, as well. We thank Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ and those faithful preachers of the word of God who proclaim the word, may, Lord, they experience the blessing of God the Holy Spirit as they speak of Christ today. And may there be responsiveness on the part of those who hear. May the whole body of Christ be built up, edified, prepared for that wonderful meeting that we shall have with him who loved us and has loosed us from our sins.

We thank Thee for local churches all over this land and, in fact, all over this globe where Christ is lifted up and honored. Bless their ministry, bless their testimony, and supply their needs. We pray for the Chapel and its ministries, for our elders and deacons and for the members and the friends and the visitors who are here. Lord, we ask spiritual blessing, edification, and growth for all of us. And for those of us who are experiencing afflictions and who have requested our prayers, Lord, we pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them. Sustain them and bless them in the midst of trials. Glorify Thy name in their lives, supplying their needs, whatever they may be.

We thank Thee for this time together. We pray Thy blessing upon the singing of the hymn, upon the ministry of the word and upon our Christian fellowship, and we ask, too, Lord, that Thou bless our meeting this evening as we meet to remember him who has given himself for us in the bread and in the wine.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as we continue our study of 2 Corinthians, is “When Affliction is Light.” The apostle has been explaining in this portion of 2 Corinthians why he and his fellow servants courageously carry on Christian ministry. And one might ask, why? Well, Paul has said, for example, that we have this treasure in earthen vessels and as one looks at the context and notes the statements the apostle makes just before that, it becomes plain what he means by treasure. For example, in the fourth verse, he has said in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. The gospel of the glory of Christ is part of that treasure that he has in earthen vessels. And then in the sixth verse, perhaps a little more clearly, for God who said light shall shine out of darkness is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. So, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face Christ or simply, as he says, a treasure.

Now, we said last week that this treasure is simply, the knowledge of God, as he puts it, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. The greatest knowledge that anyone could ever have and the most necessary knowledge that any human being should ever have. While it might be wonderful to have medical knowledge or philosophical knowledge or religious knowledge or scientific knowledge, the knowledge that is significant for us, who are creatures, is the knowledge of God. And to have all kinds of knowledge in other spheres would be to leave this particular existence an ignoramus if we do not have the knowledge of God, the most important and significant knowledge that we could possibly have. So Paul speaks about the knowledge of God, that is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as a treasure. We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

Now, Paul speaks of more than just that. This, of course, would be sufficient for him to carry on in Christian ministry. But to define it more specifically, he speaks of it as the knowledge of the hope that we have in resurrection. In the 13th verse, he has said that having the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believed, therefore, I spoke; we also believe, therefore, also we speak knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. And so the apostle says therefore we do not faint because we are ministering the hope of the resurrection, not only ministering it, but we have this hope within us.

And finally, he talks in verse 14 in the immediately preceding verse of the glory of God through the Corinthians and through Paul as well. For all things are for your sakes, he says, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God, therefore, we don’t lose heart. So the apostle, in the light of the treasure that we possess in earthen vessels and in the light of the hope of the resurrection and the light of the glory of God expressed in the gratitude of individuals who have found Christ, sustains and encourages the apostle in his ministry. Someone has said that gratitude is the memory of the heart, and the apostle knows how powerful it is

for individuals to understand what has been done for them and then out of gratitude to respond in Christian service.

Now, profoundly, also, this passage opens up the nature and the rewards of fruits of Christian affliction. Now, when we say Christian affliction, we don’t mean every kind of affliction but the affliction that comes to us because we’re seeking to represent Christ. There is a lot of affliction that individuals sustain that is not affliction for Christ. So Paul is talking about Christian affliction; that is, the things we suffer because we are serving him. So this passage doesn’t have to do with suffering in general. It has to do with suffering specifically for the testimony of Christ.

And Paul’s words open up the nature and the rewards of that Christian affliction that is done for Christ and, furthermore, gives us a true light on what death really is. In fact, Paul moves out even beyond that and has some things to say about the physical universe and its relationship to the spiritual things. It’s a remarkable three verses that we are looking at.

Some years ago, I read a statement by Dan Crawford, a famous missionary to Africa, and it has stuck with me through the years. In fact, I more than once have cited it, and some of you have heard me even if you may have forgotten the statement, but Dan Crawford said concerning a death of a fellow missionary these words, he was describing what he felt as he saw this Christian who had labored for the Lord for many years pass into the presence of the Lord. He described him in this way: “a white fragile-looking traveler.” Incidentally, in a moment I’m going to make reference to *Pilgrim’s Progress* and Christian who describes himself as he left the city of destruction on the way to Mount Zion just by these words as a traveler, but Dan Crawford says, “a white, fragile-looking traveler with a Pauline gleam in his eye. So the fragrant saint died at his post. He had only died into glory as the stars die at sunrise.” What a beautiful statement. He had only died into glory as the stars die at sunrise. That’s the Christians death, and it’s a marvelous picture of what it means for a Christian to die.

So Paul now is going speak of courage in verse 16, of the cause of it in verse 17, and then in verse 18 of the condition under which it flourishes. It’s very simple. You could easily remember that because, well, it’s alliterative. So let’s look at verse 16, and the apostle writes these very interesting words. Therefore we do not lose heart.

Now, whenever we see a little therefore, as Bible teachers have so often said, it’s very important that we take a look at the preceding context because this means that what follows is an inference from that which precedes. In this case, the word is really literally “wherefore.” It’s more a legal term.

And so Paul is thinking very logically, and he is moving very logically through the thoughts that he has been presenting to the Corinthians. Wherefore in the light of that has preceded and the light of the fact that we have this treasure in earthen vessels, in the light of the hope of the resurrection that we have, in the light of the enhancement of God’s glory, by the progress of the testimony to Christ, we don’t lose heart.

Now, he said that once before in verse 1, therefore, since we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. So the apostle is saying, in effect, that I have courage and perseverance as a result of these things. No discouragement. No quitting. Everything is optimistic. And, really, that’s the way a Christian should feel. No discouragement. No disappointments. No quitting. Everything is optimistic for us because think of the future and think of the present in the light of the future. So we don’t lose heart, Paul says. Everything is optimistic. I used to have a friend and that was one his favorite statements, everything is optimistic. As long as we are here, God has some purpose for us. You’re not here by accident. He doesn’t look down from heaven and say, Look, there’s old Richard. I thought he was up here already. I was through with him, really?

Now, every time we consider the will of God and the purpose of God and realize that we are here, it’s for a divine purpose, every one of us. So everything is optimistic. God has some purpose in our being here at this very moment. In fact, he has some

purpose in your being here at Believers Chapel, if only to get angry at what may be said. That's purposeful, too, because when the gospel goes forth, we all have experienced rebellion against it probably at one time in our lives on the way to ultimate acceptance of it. So he speaks of courage, but he goes on to say that there is a constant renewal taking place in the hearts of the saints and, particularly, speaking of himself, he says but through -- though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

Now, what does he mean when he says the outer man? We probably should not think simply of the body. Of course, the body, the outward physical body is a decaying thing. So though our outer man is decaying must include our outer physical body, that is, the earthen vessel, but probably more is involved in this, probably the apostle means the whole physical constitution. That is, it is not simply the body but also the mind, the emotions, the will, other things that are associated with the physical body. For all of us know that as we pass on -- now some of you young people don't know this as well as I know it, but as the years go by, the faculties fail, and those failures even touch our minds. I know you think I'm sharper than ever was, but I am not. I assure you, I am not. [Laughter] And you knew that anyway. You just expected me to say what I said, but it is true. My memory is not what it used to be. It's better than most of the people that I know, of course [laughter], but nevertheless it's not what it used to be. My mind is not what it used to be and, further, other things as well are not what they used to be.

So when Paul speaks about the inner man and the outer man, he's not speaking essentially of the physical things that we see only. So though our outer man is decaying, the inner man is obviously that which is being renewed day by day must therefore be our inner spiritual nature. One of the most melancholy spectacles that we shall ever look at is an older man or woman outside of Christ growing old because that melancholy spectacle represents the decay of everything that a person is, but I will say more about that a little later on. I want you to notice that expression our inward man is being renewed day by day.

There’s a marvelous incident in Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* in which Christian, as I said on the way from the city of destruction to Mount Zion, arrives at Interpreter’s House of Parables. And when he’s in Interpreter’s house he’s shown a number of things by Interpreter. He’s shown, for example, that room in which there is dust. And as he’s looking at the room that is filled with dust, someone comes in and begins to sweep the dust. And the dust of the room becomes so bad that he almost feels that he is choking to death. And then a damsel comes in and spreads water all around and the dust is gone and the room is cleansed. And then, of course, Christian asks the question, what does this mean? And Interpreter explains that the room is designed, “To signify the heart of man, which was never sanctified by the sweet grace of the gospel. The dust is his original sin and inward corruption that have defiled the whole man. He that began to sweep at first is the law, but she that brought water and did sprinkle it is the gospel.

Now, where is thou source that as soon as the first began to sweep, the dust did fly about so that the room could not by him be cleansed but thouest almost choked therewith -- this is to show thee that the law, instead of cleansing the heart by its working from sin doth revive, put strength into and increased into the soul even as it doth discover and forbid it for it doth not give power to subdue.”

And then later on, Interpreter shows Christian the room in which there was a great fire. I’ll pass over a number of things, but he saw in his dream and Interpreter took Christian by the hand, led him into a place where there was a fire burning up against a wall and one standing by it always casting much water upon fire to quench it yet the fire did burn higher and hotter. And so Christian said, “What means this?” as you might expect him to say, and so Interpreter answers that “This fire is the work of grace that is wrought in the heart. He that cast water upon it to extinguish it and put it out is the devil, but in that thouest seeth the fire notwithstanding burn higher and hotter thou shalt also see the reason that. So he had him about to the backside of the wall where he saw a man with a vessel of oil in his hand of which he did also continually cast but secretly into

the fire.” And so Christian said, “What do you expect, what means this?” And so Interpreter explains, “This is Christ who continually with the oil of his grace maintains the work already begun in the heart by the means of which notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of his people prove gracious still. And in that thou sawst that the man stood behind the wall to maintain the fire this is to teach thee that it is hard for the tempted to see how this work of grace is maintained in the soul.”

That is what Paul is talking about and, in fact, Bunyan was thinking about that. He cites verse 18 right in this context so he’s thinking about it, too. So when we read, “Therefore we don’t lose heart for though our outer man is decaying nevertheless there is a fire that has been placed in the heart of the saints of God which, though Satan tries to quench it with his water that he pours on it, the Lord Jesus continually maintains by the pouring out of the oil the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the heart of every one of us. So our inner man is being renewed day by day. That’s the way we explain why Christians enter in to the severest of tests, seems to us, and nevertheless the faith that God has given them is not only not quenched but actually often is stronger as it has passed through the test.

So what a marvelous affirmation this is. Therefore, we do not lose heart but though our outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. That’s something the Lord Jesus does for all the saints of god. My favorite text is, “Being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Christ.” That’s what this means. He keeps working in the heart and renewing us in spite of the experiences that we may be forced to face.

Now, secondly, the apostle begins the 17th verse by pointing us to the procuring cause of his courage. For -- for, to explain, to give the ground to what I’m saying, for, momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparisons. Now, let me say, in case I forget to say this, that when Paul says in verse 17 that this affliction produces for us an eternal weight of glory, he is not suggesting in any

way that this is a meritorious thing. This is, as I have put it, the procuring cause of his courage, but it’s not a meritorious thing. It’s the means by which God does his work. But now we look at the text, for momentary light affliction, a light momentary affliction. Now, the common figure of the scales is in his mind, and we can think of weighing something on the scales for he says, this momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

Now, when he says that affliction is light, it’s only in comparison, of course, with the glory that he will speak about the eternal weight of glory. Now, think for a moment. Suppose you were a non-Christian man who has experienced a little affliction and all such do. In fact, they’re heading, if they do not turn to Christ, to the greatest of all affliction, the affliction of eternal judgment, but in this life, too, we all, because we are human beings under the judgment of God, under divine judgment for Adam’s sin and also possessed of original sin and manifesting it in the acts of sin which characterize our lives. So we will suffer affliction. We shall all die, of course.

Now, when looking at Paul’s statement, who has experienced some affliction, might wonder how the apostle could make a statement like this. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, as the Authorized Version puts it, you might say, if I were speaking to a friend of mine, light affliction? How can anyone speak about affliction of being light? This man is evidently a man who has not known a whole lot of affliction because he couldn’t speak of light affliction. He must be a fellow who has never experienced poverty. If he has experienced poverty and all of the things that characterize it, he couldn’t possibly say our light affliction which is not but for a moment. Or if he is a individual who has stood by the grave of someone who has been loved and now has been lost for time, he couldn’t speak about our affliction as being a light affliction. He evidently is a person who has never known poverty. He has never known trial. He has never known the loss of a loved one. Our light affliction which is not but for moment. As a matter of fact, one could go on beyond this. Obviously Paul is talking about things

in comparison with, as we have said, the glory that is to follow. In the light of the glory that is to follow, the affliction is light.

Now think of it in that way. Think of the object that the apostle has in his ministry. What is his object? Well, he says in one of his epistles, the second epistle to Timothy, that he endures all things for the sake of his elect. That is, he endures all the experiences which he has undergone for the sake of being an instrumentality to the gathering of God’s elect. Well, affliction experienced in that is light in the light of the goal that is before the apostle or his object. If one speaks of the ultimate goal of the glorifying of God, then everything that we experience, becoming a means for the glorification of God is small in the light of the significance of being an instrumentality by which the triune God is glorified.

Or if we were to speak of our affliction in the light of our just desserts, then we can think of our affliction as being light. Because listen to what the Scriptures say about our just desserts. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has he rewarded us according to our iniquities. For high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his lovingkindness toward those who fear him.

He hasn’t rewarded us according to our iniquities. If he had, we would have been plunged into hellfire already for eternity. In the light of that affliction that we experience in the service of the Lord is light no matter what it is in the light of the great, just desserts that we deserve, as lost sinners. Or if we think about our Lord’s afflictions, what afflictions the Lord Jesus did undergo. I’m not speaking about those physical things of which we are familiar. I’m speaking about the things that go far beyond that to the inner workings of the soul of the Lamb of God who was our substitute and representative and who bore the judgment for our sin.

One can see this so plainly as it made its impression upon the inner man of our Lord Jesus Christ. There he is in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of John in the city of Jerusalem, and some Greeks have come, and they want to see him. Now, there were

certain Greeks among those who were going off to worship at the feast. These, therefore, came to Philip who was from Bethsaida of Galilee and began to ask him saying, Sir, we wish to see Jesus. Philip came and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip came, and they told Jesus, and Jesus answered them saying, the hour is come for the son of man to be glorified.

What does that mean? Why that means that our Lord recognizes that the time has come for the atoning sacrifice by which sinners may be saved and by which the gospel may go out to the Gentiles ultimately through the ministry of the apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle Paul. And the very fact that those Greeks are now showing interest in the things of the Lord is an indication to the Lord Jesus that the Holy Spirit is beginning already the preparatory work that will lead to the salvation of Gentiles through the apostle and his fellow workers.

It’s not surprising at all then that we read that Jesus said the hour is come for the son of man to be glorified. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it. He who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If any man serves me, let him follow me. And where I am, there shall my servant also be. If any one serves me, the father will honor him. And now the Lord Jesus says, My soul has become troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name. There came, therefore, a voice out of heaven, I both glorified it and will glorify it again.”

So when one compares the inner trials and tribulations of the sin substitute with the afflictions of the saints who profit from all that Christ did, our afflictions, no matter how great they may seem to us in this life, are light and momentary. Further, it’s not long before the Lord Jesus, here in the same gospel, is with Peter, and the apostle has drawn his sword and not being too familiar with how to use the sword has tried to strike the high priest’s servant on the top of his head and split him into two parts and has managed

to get his right ear. That's all. And Jesus turns to him in the presence of his apostle and Malcus, the servant and says, Put the sword into the sheath, Peter. The cup which the father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it? That's affliction. That's the ultimate affliction. That's when the Lord Jesus bears the untold and unknown sufferings, spiritual sufferings for human sinful sin.

So in the light of that, I think I can understand the apostle saying our light affliction which is but for a moment. And if we think of the blessings that we enjoy, forgiven. Think of it. Individuals who stand under the curse of God forever forgiven. Or if we think of the fact that we are heirs of God now and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Joint heirs because he's our representative, of course. And what he did, he did for us. So we're joint heirs.

Freedom from the law, which Peter says was a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear, or the glory that is to come and come soon, then affliction that we suffer is small. It's light. Paul's right. It's light. And then when we think of the fact that the Scriptures say that our life is brief. It's true it's momentary, too. Do you know what the Scriptures says about our life? The psalmist said our life is like a sigh. [Sigh] There's John's life. There's Lewis's life. There's Martha's life. That's all. It's like a sigh. We walk out of our houses. We look at our grass, and it's green. It won't be many weeks before we look at it, and it's turning brown. The Scripture say our life is like the grass. It springs up in the morning, and then it withers away. James says it's like a vapor. So that's our life. That's our seventy or eight years. It's like a sigh.

Oh, the psalmist was right. Teach us to number our days. Number our days that we may use what we have to the glory of god. So when Paul says our light affliction which is but for a moment, why he was absolutely right. It's light and it's for a moment. And furthermore, it's the procuring cause, not the meritorious, I repeat, the procuring cause of glory. It's producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Christian suffering, mind you, not all suffering. Christian suffering, suffering for Christ

Paul is talking about, not all suffering. Suffering for Christ. Please remember that. Some of the suffering that we undergo is suffering that we have brought on ourselves and has no relationship to Christ whatsoever. But this is suffering for Christ.

Now, I’d like for you to notice just briefly three great contrasts, and I’ll just repeat them. In the first place, the apostle contrasts that which is momentary with that which is eternal. That is the affliction is momentary but the eternal weight of glory is everlasting. And so that which is momentary is contrasted with that which is eternal. John Calvin has a comment that I liked, “A moment is long if we look at the things around us, but once we have raised our minds to heaven, a thousand years begins to look like a moment because of the eternal life that awaits us there.” The second contrast is the contrast between lightness and weight. That is the affliction is light. It’s momentary, but the glory is eternal and heavy. And, finally, affliction on the one hand and glory on the other.

Now, my Christian friend and my non-Christian friend, too, in the audience, this is the outlook of the greatest sufferer for Christ that we know of. Now, if -- or perhaps you have doubts about that. Well, I don’t think if you read the Bible much you would, but it helps us to review what the apostle says about his sufferings in other places. Listen to what he says in the 6th chapter in this very book. He says in the fourth verse, but in everything commending ourselves as servants of God and much endurance in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love. Well, that sounds rather bad.

But turn over to the 11th chapter in verse 23 in following, the apostle gives further indications of the things that he has suffered. Are they -- he’s talking about the false apostles -- are they servants of Christ? Doth speaketh as if insane, because Paul doesn’t like brag. He’s talking like a crazy man, he’s says, but I want you to understand. I know I’m talking like a crazy man, but I have to do it because these fellows are truly crazy. But at any rate, he says, “Are they in service of Christ? Doth speaketh as if insane. I am more

so in far more laborious, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. A night and in a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers and dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen (he’s talking about his Jewish countrymen) dangers from the Gentiles.” In other words, the apostle is the object of Jewish and Gentile persecution. There’re no differences. We’re all men, and we’re all are rebellious against God. We’re responsible for reacting negatively to our Lord and to the ministry of the apostle and to the ministry to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers from false brethren. I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights and hunger and thirst often without food and cold and exposure. No need to go on. You can see this is not your really lovely life that you would like to be living yourself.

Now, mind you, this is the person who says for our light affliction which is but for a moment, but in comparison with the glory, Paul says it’s producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. If the sufferer who has suffered more for Christ, it seems, then anyone in this age from the time of our Lord’s cross to the present, may speak of his sufferings as light in comparison with the eternal weight of glory. My Christian friend, what must the story be? And later Paul in the 12th chapter will say he’s caught up to heaven and see things that is not lawful for him to reveal.

So the glory, one can only speak of it as only unimaginable glory, and Paul says it’s for us. For us, not simply for him, but for us. Producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. And finally in verse 18, the condition under which it flourishes, this perseverance, this non-quitting-ness, while we look at the things, not at the things which are seen but at the things not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal or temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. The severest

conditions are light for those with this outlook and secure for them, Paul says, eternal glory.

This a marvelous analysis of this transient age and the abiding age to come. Paul's eye was on the things not seen, that is not seen by us, but listen, the real things, the real life, the life that we cannot see but which, through the word of God, the divine revelation received by faith, we see plainly as that which awaits us. This is Paul's worldview. It's the true and real worldview. The only worldview that ultimately prevails before heaven itself.

When one looks at man and the life of man and reflects upon the man of the world and the human frailty and sees the constant decay and the suffering, things which cast, as Philip here says, a haunting shadow over all his ambitions, one cannot help but see how marvelous is the view from the apostle's standpoint. Look at men. See the hopes. See the ambitions. See the visions. And as the years pass, see them fail. See them grasp and not quite attain. And hear men, as they finally reach the place where it's obvious they have no future, say, well, I was not able to realize what I wanted to realize. That's the picture the apostle presents of the haunting shadow cast over all man's ambitions by his sin and rebellion against God.

Well, I think there're few passages in the Pauline literature that reveal Paul's inward spiritual concerns as well as this one does and his concerns and his suffering and in his death that is soon to come. The life of Christ secured his life. The resurrection of Christ secured his resurrection and the hope of it. And the more he endured, the more glorious he felt he would find eternity. In fact, when he comes to the end of his days, as he puts it in 2 Timothy chapter 4 in verse 7 and verse 8, he says, I fought the good fight. I've finished the course. I've kept the faith. In the future, there is layed up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteousness judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me but to all who have loved his appearing. What a beautiful picture this is for you Christians, for you believers to think that outward man is perishing, but

nevertheless the inner man, that fire created by the Holy Spirit which represents your faith in Christ which cannot be quenched but is nourished constantly by the Holy Spirit through the word of God and through his ministry to you in efficacious grace. That working constantly will ultimately bring you the eternal weight of glory.

But if you’re unsaved, if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, there is no fire in the heart. There is no ministry of the Holy Spirit who is constantly through our Lord pouring oil on the fire in the midst of the temptations and trials that come from Satan himself. If unsaved, we’re without hope. Our afflictions, my friends, are not light they’re heavy, and they’re increasingly heavy. And furthermore, they’re not momentary. They are the harbingers of eternal doom. This is the hope of the man outside of Christ. So we enjoy now the only heaven that the lost will ever enjoy. Think of it. That’s the picture the word of God presents to us.

James Denny, the well-known Scottish theologian, professor of theology at the University of Glasgow, in comments on this very passage says that “The decay of the outward in the godless is a melancholy spectacle, for it’s the decay of everything. In the Christian, it doesn’t touch that life which is hid with Christ in God and which is in the soul itself a well of water springing up to life eternal, but for the worldly,” Denny says, “it touches everything.” That’s all he has, nothing else but this life.

It’s remarkable the things that people say when they come to the ends of their lives. Beethoven, what magnificent talent was given to Beethoven. I wish that I had the art and music appreciation to appreciate, but I know that there is something there that was truly exceptional, truly exceptional, but Beethoven didn’t have the one knowledge that really counted. Beethoven was a lost man. Beethoven, in spite of all of the skills that he possessed, in spite of all of the -- may I use the world’s favorite word which only belongs to God. I feel like I’m stealing from God when I use it -- Beethoven’s creativity was magnificent, but on his death bed Beethoven said “Applaud.” You might expect him to say, Thank God for the marvelous revelation of the music. Its skills, its principles, the

things that God has given me, and praise God for what he has done. Instead, “Applaud, friends, the comedy is over.” Think of it. Applaud, friends, the comedy is over. That’s the difference between a man who dies out of Christ and one who dies in Christ.

May God help us to learn the lessons that the apostle is speaking about. If you’re here today and you do not know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, come to him. Believe in him. The apostle in the next chapter will unfold significantly the things that he has accomplished. Rest yourself in him and may life become something truly significant for you. That’s, I’m sure, the prayers of the elders, the believers, and that’s surely my prayer for you, too. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so thankful to Thee for these marvelous words that Paul has written which minister so much to us, encouraging us, reminding us of the fact though the outward man is constantly decaying, our inward man is being renewed day by day. We thank Thee for the hope that we have of resurrection of a new body, the glorious body like unto our Lord’s own body of glory and for the joy of eternal life, not simply eternal existence.

And, O Father, for everyone in this audience who may not know our Lord, may at this very moment, their hearts be turning to Thee with a confession of their sin and an acknowledgement of the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross for sinners and of the fleeing to him to rest upon him and what he has done as our hope for time and for eternity.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“When Affliction is Light” by S. Lewis Johnson
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