

Transcription of 19ID3211

II Corinthians 4:16-18 "How is Your Endurance?"
March 31, 2019

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 16.

I think life in a fallen world is always difficult. There's always a mixture of joy followed by sorrow, or then blessing that somehow then turns into suffering, or triumph that then finds tragedy. And that's true of everyone, whether you know the Lord or not. Every relationship and happy time and future hope is always mitigated by the fact that there's a lot of suffering in the world due to sin. And that certainly doesn't exempt us from it, whether a sinful world, or growing older, or sickness, or dying. Those are all common to man and they're ones that all of us are experiencing. But we have an even greater challenge, and we have a greater blessing. On the one hand, God has promised to us that every occurrence in our life, whether they are naturally caused by those things or not, God will use for good. So that we have an assurance that if we lose a job, are under financial pressure, maybe have a health challenge, that God has promised to use those things for the greater good in our lives, that all things work together for good. He doesn't promise that to the world, because the world doesn't look to Him. But He promises it to you.

But there's another side as well, and that is if you read about suffering in the Bible, and especially in this book where Paul just personally lays out the kind of difficult life that he's had, you should know that all of that suffering is directly attached to his serving God. This isn't Paul suffering because he's getting older, losing his hair, or losing some vitality; this isn't Paul suffering because he got a bad deal at the car dealership, or he got a bad shake at work; this is Paul suffering because he opens his mouth for Christ. This is Paul's bleeding because he takes a stand for the gospel. This is Paul sacrificing his life so that Jesus' name would be proclaimed. And that's the kind of suffering Paul's talking about.

So often we'll hear church people say, "Oh, man, I'm really going through it." "What's going on, man?" "I had to work three days last week overtime. Oh, I can't believe it." Yeah, that's not the kind of suffering the Bible talks about. Oh, my goodness. If I only knew how hard you had it. Paul hurt because he put Jesus first. And to the extent that you and I are willing to go to the world that is anti-Christ and preach the gospel, we're going to hurt too. No easy way to get through that. Oh, you think there's a way to escape it. Here's how Paul could have escaped it. He could have just kept his mouth shut, saying nothing. He gets saved, he goes, well, I'm going to Heaven, you figure it out, and he'd have been fine. But he didn't do that, and neither should we.

So James on the one hand he tells us that every disappointment and grief and tragedy and persecution, and any unexpected turns in life, that God oversees them. You take joy in everything; right? You can rejoice in all things when you fall into these various trials, because God promises to use them, but on the reverse side, if you are going to go out and serve God, trust that you're going to hurt over it. That it isn't going to be an easy road to follow. "In the world you'll have tribulation," Jesus said, "but I've overcome the world." Your only hope is "I've overcome the world."

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians his first letter, he said, "Everywhere I go amongst the churches of God, I boast about you and your faith and of your patience, how through all the persecution and tribulation you've been able to endure in faith." That's the kind of suffering that Paul is talking about. And it's not the kind of suffering the Western church wants to hear about. We want God to bless us and to extend our vacation and make sure it doesn't rain, and oh, man. Such nonsense by comparison.

So Paul, he writes here in this chapter in verse 1, and then what we are going to finish to verse 16, 17, 18 this morning, he writes, I don't lose heart, though I'm being beaten and persecuted and cast down and struck down, carrying in my body always the marks of Jesus, but I'm not going to lose heart. But understand that he was speaking specifically about how in serving the Lord he had paid a great price.

So there's a paradox here. You live on the edge of death every moment for Jesus, and as a result I've become even more and more fruitful. When Paul wrote to Timothy he said, "Timothy, be strong in the grace that Jesus has given you." He said in the same letter, "Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus." He said towards the ends of the letter, "Endure afflictions so that you can fulfill your ministry."

Paul in writing early on in Chapter 4, and I think this is our third week in this chapter, but Paul said, I can handle all the persecution, because I had grace and mercy given to me. He looked at the people that were giving him trouble and grief in sharing with them, and he said that's how I used to be, and then I found God's mercy, and so I know they can be changed. He mentioned that he realized that there was warfare for the souls of men; that if nothing else, that some of the responses he got and the anger and the difficulty were a direct result to the fact that there was warfare for souls. And he realized that the Lord's word and His power and His spirit would overcome the enemy, and so he stuck with it. And he continued to share. He realized that the Lord alone can change a darkened heart, so I'm not going to lose hope.

This morning we start in verse 16 with the word "therefore." For all that we've studied, and Paul ended last week as we talked about the privilege of carrying this message of God's saving grace through His Son in these clay pots. That we called ourselves cracked pots last week. That's pretty good. We're his vessels. God chose to bring the saving knowledge of His Son through the lives of us cracked pots. I think the angels would have done a much better job. I think the Lord Himself could have done a much better job. This is His choice. We are His choice. But understand that the battered life that Paul led was caused because he was devoted to the precious fruit of seeing souls saved. That's what drove him and that's what kept him going. And that's why he was able to say through all of this, "I'm not going to lose heart."

So this morning we read in verse 16 this: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, the inward man being renewed day by day. Our light affliction, which is just for a moment, is working in 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 that are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." I think if you look at Paul's life in the gospels and you hear him say these words, I'm not going to lose heart, and then he says of his life, these are just light afflictions, I want to know what he knows. Because it seems to me that anyone that could suffer as much as he did and under such serious kind of hostility all of his life, if he says to me this is just a light deal, and I'm encouraged, he's got a secret he has to share with me.

If you just cursorarily -- I'm pretty sure it's a word. And it's an adverb, I know that, because of the l-y. I learned that in school -- but if you just cursorarily look over Paul's life in the book of Acts -- we just finished it, spending 17 months on it on Wednesday nights. I'm glad you were all there -- you come away with the understanding that Paul didn't have a moment's rest. I mean, when he got saved outside the city of Damascus there in Acts 9, he went in and he wanted to share that Jesus was for real at the synagogue, and it made people so mad early on that they had at night let him down the wall through a basket and he barely escaped with his life. That's how his life started with the Lord.

In Acts Chapter 13 when he was in Antioch in Pisidia, he began to preach the gospel and some began to be saved, but most folks didn't. They were envious, they were blasphemous, they stirred up all of the devout and prominent women and chief people of the city, and they expelled him from town. "Don't you ever come back here." They threw him out of Dodge. Imagine. Not for being a nice guy who made good tents, but for opening his mouth for Jesus in a very hostile world.

When he went to Iconium in Acts Chapter 14, there was this violent attempt to stone him. He had to run for his life, ran down the road another 30 miles to Lystra and Derba, where as he was preaching, a man crippled from birth sat in the front row, and God said to Paul, "Pray for this man." And he did and the Lord heals him. And the people of town who were worshipping false gods said, "Well, this is the gods come down from Heaven." They tried to worship Paul. And Paul goes, "Man, I'm not a god, I'm a man. I worship God." And they were so

embarrassed, they dragged him outside of town. They stoned him and left him for dead.

In Philippi, Acts 16, when he started the first church in Europe, it was pretty humble beginnings; a lady at a river, a demon possessed girl that was delivered, but it led to his arrest and his beating. They eventually drove him out of town from Philippi as well.

He went to Thessalonica in Acts Chapter 17. He upset the Jews there. There was a mob that attacked the place where he was residing. There was a riot in town, and under cover of night they packed Paul off and they ran him off to Berea. How'd you like to be in ministry?

In Berea, there was a little time without opposition, until the people in Thessalonica found out that Paul was there, and they sent their goons there, and Paul had to run for his life again. This is all for preaching.

He got to Corinth in Acts Chapter 18. He was so discouraged, he vowed never to preach again. I can't do this anymore. It took the Lord showing up and saying to Paul, "Paul, I've got a lot of people in the city. I'm going to protect you. No one's going to hurt you." And it took that for Paul to continue. And for 18 months God protected Paul. But I'll tell you what, there was great hatred even from the Jews against Paul. He finally said, "Well, your blood be on your own head. I'm going to go to the Gentiles." And though he wasn't chased out of town, he was certainly hated in town.

He goes to Ephesus, spends three years planting a church before there's a riot led by the unionized idol makers, who are so angry with Paul that people had got saved so much they were not buying the idols in the streets. And Paul tried to go into the big square to defend himself and the church folks said, "They'll kill you, buddy." By then Paul had quit caring about getting killed. He just wanted to fight back, but they pushed him on down the road.

He gets to Jerusalem in Chapter 21 of Acts. He's accused falsely of breaking religious rules. There's a riot in town. They grab him and nearly beat him to death in the streets. The Romans come and save him. When they drag him to safety after talking with him, they threaten to beat him. To get to the bottom of it, Paul has to say,

"I'm a Roman," or he'd have gotten beat up again. The next day he was forced to meet with the Sanhedrin by the Roman authorities, and again there was a riot in the streets. The day after, 70 people swore an oath together that they wouldn't eat till they killed Paul. Two years in jail in Caesarea, two more years of jail in Rome, a deadly trip that almost cost him his life, having to stand before Nero. He finally got out and was cleared. Spent the next two years out of prison before he was re-arrested and beheaded.

This is not an easy life. But I'm telling you, he could have escaped all of it had he just shut his mouth. And so can you. You can sit in church today and, "Oh, Lord, bless me, bless me. Please keep it warm for the weekend." But it's hardly what God cares about. He cares about souls. He entrusted you with that mission, and if you're going to follow and share your faith with others, it's going to cost you. For Paul it was 15 years of struggling so that people could hear. He would write of his life, "Who can separate me from the love of God? Tribulation can't, distress can't, persecution won't, famine can't do it, nakedness and peril at the sword. We die all of the day long. We are counted as sheep from the slaughter, but we're more than conquerors through Him that loved us." It's a different kind of suffering that you encounter in the scriptures, not the kind so often that we take to heart or we think is our lot in life. For Paul, he kept his eyes on the Lord. Pain and isolation and abandonment and disappointment and hurt and persecution and physical abuse, natural disaster, betrayals, beatings, stonings, imprisonment. That was pretty much his resume. But he kept his eyes on Jesus, so he was able to say, "I'm not losing heart." And then he says in verse 17, "This is just light affliction." Really? Are you nuts? Light affliction is that I need a second shot before they pull my tooth.

I talked to a man a couple of weeks ago that I've known for a long time, and he was sharing about how he was going to retire. He'd been working 27 years two jobs just to provide for his family. Never made much money. He worked 16 hours a day, five days a week, for 27 years. I said, "What kept you going?" He said, "I love my family." Paul, what keeps you going? I love Jesus. I love Him enough to give it all, and he did. And if you can find a church like that today, and a people of God like that that were willing to do that, then I think our

country stands a chance, because they're going to hear it from us.

In these last three verses, Paul gives us three heavenly reasons for earthly endurance, and I'll give them to you early in case you have to leave. No. 1, you should value the spiritual strength you are given over the physical strength that you have; second of all, you should value the future over the present; and thirdly, you should value eternal realities over temporal ones.

Verse 16, spiritual strength over physical strength, he says this: "Even though our outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day by day." That's why we don't lose heart. Outwardly Paul's body was decaying. In fact, the way he lived his life -- and from what we read, I'm sure he looked 100 though he died in his 60s. Our flesh, let's face it, the minute you're born it starts to rot. I always liked Ecclesiastes Chapter 12 where Solomon is getting ready to say here's what you do with your life, fear God and keep His commandments. That's really all you need in your life. But early on in Chapter 12, maybe, oh, eight or ten verses, he starts to say "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, before the years start coming when you say of those years, 'I have no pleasure in them': while the sun and the light, and the moon and the stars are still out, when clouds don't follow the rain." In other words, that time in your life when everything's just easy. "But there's coming a day when the keepers of the house tremble," speaking about your legs, "and when strong men bow down; and when grinder's teeth fail because there's few of them." And he goes on and he describes this time when you're afraid of heights and there's terror in every way, and you wake up at the sound of a bird. When life isn't so easy, remember then your Creator, because you're going back to the dirt, back to the dust. Your spirit's going back to God from which it came.

Paul was physically battered. I mean, when someone says "I carry about in my body the marks of Jesus," I'm thinking that guy looked like a washed-out boxer; a guy who fought in the cage, but never won. He was 0 and 40, you know. And I'm sure that for him the aging process of teeth and eyes that don't work, and hair -- in fact, there's no mention of hair in Ecclesiastes 12. I don't know why they left that out. That should have been in

there. Paul was an amazing guy. Through the sleeplessness, through the illnesses, through the hunger, through the cold, and through the arduous travel and then the beatings, I mean, this guy was racked. Here's what he said: I'm not losing heart because though I'm perishing outwardly, spiritually I couldn't be doing better. Through all that I went through, I am now better off spiritually than I've ever been. My inward man is being renewed day by day. I think Paul, and he says it in most of his epistles, but to the Colossians he said, put on the new man. That man is being renewed every day according to the knowledge of Him who created him. Or if you will, Paul was able to stay with it because though outwardly he'd suffered plenty, he saw that even the suffering inwardly made him stronger. Or if you will, the suffering strengthened him.

I suspect that your greatest spiritual lessons were learned when things were hard, when you had a need. I doubt any of you learned anything running down hill. "Whee. What's the Lord doing? Whee. I don't know." Life can be so easy, there's no way to learn. But lose a job, lose a child, start to lose, and all of a sudden "God, help me." And I find that His strength now solidifies my heart, and so in the hardest of times I learn that He's good. But, you see, if I'm not out there sharing my faith, there's no suffering that comes into my life other than what everyone goes through, and I don't learn to trust God. The spiritual strength I get is far better than the physical strength, if you will, that I'm losing. Paul was physically weak. He is a little short guy with a crooked nose and bulging eyes and a bent back. He wasn't very scary. Oh, maybe scary looking, but not much of a threat. And yet he says of himself, inwardly God is doing this great work. He said in Chapter -- I think it's in Chapter 12 of this book -- let me see -- "I will gladly take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, and in my distress, for Christ's sake." And there it is again, because I'm serving the Lord. Because when I'm weak, then I'm strong. You grow the most when you're under pressure. You're under pressure when you step out in this world to serve the Lord.

When the Lord spoke through Isaiah there in Chapter 40, he said, "Have you not heard and have you not seen, and don't you know that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of all, of the ends of the earth, He never

faints, He doesn't grow weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He'll give power to the weak, and to those who have no might He will increase their strength. Even the youths will be fainting and weary, and the young men will fall, those that wait on the Lord will renew their strength; they'll mount with wings as eagles, they'll run and not grow weary, they'll walk and won't faint." You see, it is when I'm walking with God and serving God, even though there is a price to pay, there is also a great benefit that comes to me.

They may wear out your flesh, but they can't wear out your heart. Paul said so to Timothy. He said my first defense, no one stood with me. All forsake me. But the Lord stood by me. He strengthened me. So that the message through me might be preached and the Gentiles might hear, and He even delivered me out of the mouth of a lion." If you value the spiritual strength that God brings over the physical strength that you might be losing in the process, it is a decision worth noting. And then you won't lose heart, because the best time in your spiritual relationship in the Lord is usually when you're under pressure, which is why we try to avoid that, because it means I have to spiritually grow.

Second of all, verse 17, value the future over the present. "For our light affliction, which is just for a moment, is working in us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." I mean, Paul towered over his enemies in terms of trouble, but instead of harming him, it just secured for him a greater heavenly reward. I love the comparison. Notice the comparison: Light affliction on the one hand, a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory on the other.

The word "light" means momentary or it means insignificant. Paul would write to the Romans I think in Chapter 8, "For I would consider the present suffering to be not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us." In other words, the coordination between glory and suffering to him was out of balance. I know, well, I shared the Lord with them and now I got fired, or now they won't talk to me, or now they won't even consider me. Oh, but compared to what is waiting for you in Heaven.

Peter wrote his first epistle, "Rejoice to the extent that you have been made a partaker of Christ's suffering,

so that when His glory is revealed --" or in other words, when the Lord comes, "you may have gladness with exceeding joy." I'll tell you what, on the day that you stand before the Lord, you will never regret putting yourself out there for Him, but you may very well regret not doing that at all. Oh, you got by, but is the goal of the Christian to get by, or to win and gain fruit? Jesus was our ultimate example; right? He humbled Himself, became obedient to the point of death, and because of that, a name is given Him above every name.

For Paul the radical difference between what he was going through here for serving the Lord and the glory that was coming is way out of balance. In fact, the words "far more exceeding" is the Greek word for our English word "hyperbole," and hyperbole by definition means exaggeration; right? Out of balance. That the glory will be so much greater than the affliction that we will suffer. Moses knew that, Abraham knew that. What is that Hebrews 12 -- 11 verse where it talks about, "By faith Moses, when he came of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. He esteemed the reproach of Christ of greater riches than the treasures in Egypt." He had it right. And I think if our mind-set in living in this world as a Christian is just, God bless me, bless me, we're missing the boat. This isn't your home. You don't want to live here forever. This is a place that God has sent you to serve.

But it is only the suffering of the consequences of serving the Lord that the promises attached to in this place and everywhere in the scriptures. Trials seem endless here sometimes, but I will tell you what's endless: Eternity is endless. And if you'll serve the Lord and you've resolved to do that, the glory that awaits you will be out of proportion with suffering that you've been asked to endure. So don't lose heart.

Finally, verse 18, we should value the eternal over the temporary. Paul said to the Corinthians in, I Corinthians said, "The world is passing away." He writes here in verse 18, "We should not look at the things that are seen, but we should look at the which we can't see, because the things which we see are temporary, and yet the eternal things that we can't see, those are the eternal ones." Have you ever thought to yourself,

everything you see in this life is not going to last? Everything. Everything. Except for the soul of man, this is all going to burn. It's not going to last. Paul said the same thing to the Philippians. He said the same thing to the Colossians. Set your mind on the things above. Our citizenship is in Heaven. We eagerly look for the coming of our Savior. He's going to change our bodies into a glorious one like His. But get your eyes off the world, get your eyes on the things of God, and if you'll do that, you won't lose heart.

You should know at least from a biblical standpoint that keeping your eyes on the eternal is not an automatic function. In other words, that doesn't just happen. In fact, the other just happens. You'll get locked into the world and stayed locked into the world. That's where your focus will be. I got to have that, and I want one of these, and whatever's going on around you, you will be consciously locked into everything that you see. But you'll make a conscience effort to get your eyes off of it and look up.

The allurements of the world, it seemed to be of very little interest to Paul. With all that he writes -- and he's certainly the guy that is most exposed in the New Testament -- he never once says, I want to make a fortune, or I want a bigger house, or a bigger car. You don't find Paul writing or addressing anything that you could see. I don't want a prominent career. His attitude towards worldly things made him in the world a colossal failure, but not in God's eyes, because he was focused on something that the world couldn't see. He was focusing on what God has said. How focused? Well, verse 8 of the next Chapter Paul will say this: "I know one day I'm going to Heaven," and then he wrote, "In fact, I'd rather be there than with you." Paul, you will find in Chapter 5 decides three things in order of importance: No. 1, I hope I'm around till the rapture; No. 2, if not, I just want to hang around here as little as possible; and finally, if that doesn't work, No.3, I guess I'll stay for your benefit. Those were his three attitudes: I hope the Lord comes and we all go; if the Lord's not coming, I don't want to be here any longer than I have to, in fact, I'd rather be there; and third of all, if He leaves me here, I'll serve. That was his desire, looking at the things which are not seen. His passion for the soul of men though was the reason that he continued to go through it.

He said to Timothy in his last letter before they killed him, "For this reason I endure for the sake of the elect, so that they might obtain salvation through Jesus Christ with eternal glory." Look, the only reason I'm going through all I have is so that people could get saved. If you could say that of your own life this morning, you're going to be an amazing tool in God's hands, if that really is the motivating factor for the way you live and what you do. If that is way down your list, like people getting saved is the last thing that is a concern to you, you haven't talked to anybody about the Lord in years, then you're wasting your time. And not only that, the promises of God to comfort you are really not designed for you. They're designed for people like Paul who put themselves out there. Then light affliction and eternal glory will come into the equation.

Paul sought to cultivate a spiritual strength in the inner man. He didn't want to be blinded by the present. He wanted to look forward to the future, and he wanted to set his heart on the eternal realities, not just on the temporal ones. For him, eternity hung in the balance. Everyone, when you walk out that door, is either going to Heaven or hell based on what they do with Jesus. You know how to get them out. You owe them the explanation. And what if they turn on me? Yeah, then they turn on you. But you're just a clay pot anyway, and if they're going to get saved, God will do the work. You're just a delivery service. No one yells at the postman for bringing the bills, or they shouldn't.

If the soul is worth it to you, the price will be great, and so will the reward. Or you can just hang around till we go home. You'll get there. You'll get there, but is that all you want to do? Or do you want to have an impact as well?