

We believe and therefore speak **2 Corinthians 4:13-18**

¹³ *Since we have that same spirit of faith, which corresponds to what is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken," we also believe, and therefore we speak.* ¹⁴ *For we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us (together with you) into his presence.* ¹⁵ *In fact, all this is for your benefit, so that as grace increases, it will overflow to the glory of God, as more and more people give thanks.* ¹⁶ *Therefore we are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day.* ¹⁷ *Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison.* ¹⁸ *We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.*

An important subject matter in our church body today with all the vacancies in both pastoral and teaching ministries, is recruitment. In preparing for the upcoming district convention held in Watertown on Monday and Tuesday, I've been reading the Report to the 12 Districts. Included in that booklet is the Report of the Ministry Recruitment Task Force. This report contains 20 recommendations that this committee feels should be made to encourage recruitment for ministry. The report also mentions the responsibility for recruiting for ministry lies in every one of us. Every Christian needs to ensure that the gospel get shared with everyone whether they accept it or not. That was apostle Paul's goal for doing ministry. He wanted to reach as many souls as possible. But that meant also facing persecution and even the threat of death from those who opposed the gospel. Still, that didn't stop Paul or even slow him down. The salvation of souls was his highest goal. To do this and not get discouraged, he always maintained a proper focus in life.

The apostle could have easily become discouraged by what he was seeing in life. Earlier in the chapter had admitted to being nothing more than a clay jar. He was a fragile container that God was using to store the treasure of our Savior's good news. And sharing that good news did not make life any easier for Paul. In the verses before our text Paul lists a number of vices: being hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Paul had to suffer quite a bit to get the saving word out about his Lord. Trouble came his way because of it. Facing death was an everyday occurrence for faithful preachers like Paul. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, *"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered"* (8:26).

Why would Paul subject himself to such misery in life and even the threat of death? He quotes a psalm to explain his reason: *"I believed; therefore, I have spoken," we also believe, and therefore we speak.* Like the psalmist, Paul had to suffer deep afflictions. Like the psalmist he called for help from God. Later in this 2nd letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes mention of what he called a "thorn in his flesh." He describes it as a messenger of Satan sent to torment him. It got so bad that three times Paul pleaded with God to remove it. But God would not. Instead, God comforted Paul with his sufficient grace and with God's power made perfect in weakness. So Paul chooses to delight in his weaknesses, and in insults and hardships that he must endure. He doesn't flinch at any persecution.

He doesn't grow weary of proclaiming the Gospel. He speaks of the hope of the resurrection knowing that the One who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with him. The assurance of his resurrection gives Paul the courage and strength to bear up under his heavy load of afflictions. The resurrection of Jesus assures us that the death of God's Son was sufficient to wipe out the guilt of all sin. His resurrection established righteousness for every sinner in the sight of God. We are joined with Christ in his death. His death is our death. The same holds true about his resurrection. Christ's resurrection is our resurrection. He is the firstfruits of them that sleep.

How glorious it will be when Jesus presents us to his Father. He presents us redeemed wearing a robe made white in the blood of Christ. The Father will welcome us as his own and receive us into his heavenly mansions. Our Savior promised it: *"In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to be with me, so that you may also be where I am"* (John 14:2,3). Our eternal home awaits where we will be free from all the sorrow and suffering, pain and death that we must face in this life. His resurrection points us to our own resurrection when Jesus will return again and raise us from our graves. We'll receive immortal bodies so we can live body and soul in heaven forever.

Paul continuing to do ministry despite the dangers, meant more and more people were enjoying the grace of God. His grace is inexhaustible. That was Paul's reason for ministry: that more and more people come to enjoy the grace of God. You and I are here because God's grace has impacted our lives. We know that afflictions we must endure do not merit us the glories of heaven. Our Savior won us that glory by his suffering and death. And those who inherit the glories of heaven must for a time pass through tribulation. That is God's way for us. We must through much tribulation enter into his kingdom (Acts 14:22).

So it didn't bother Paul that he must face danger and even death in his ministry. He always kept a proper focus. Listen to how he describes it; *Therefore we are not discouraged. But even if our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day. Yes, our momentary, light trouble produces for us an eternal weight of glory that is far beyond any comparison. We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal.* Afflictions in life and the certainty of his death, Paul gladly accepted them all. He calls these things *light* and *momentary*.

Paul had an interesting perspective on his sufferings in life. He wrote to the Romans, *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"* (8:18). With his thoughts on the heavenly prize, Paul simply doesn't let negative things occupy his thinking. He didn't focus in on what he saw with his eyes. What he saw with those eyes was only temporary. He instead focused on what's eternal. Only with eyes of faith you see that death is not the end. Instead, it's the beginning of life, eternal life with our Lord. When you live by faith you live with confidence in your Savior. God's Son,

Jesus Christ took on the full wage of your sins. He suffered all God's punishment while nailed to a wooden cross. He died the eternal death that we deserved. And he rose victorious over the grave. He's the first fruits of us who die in faith and will rise again on the Last Day.

We live by faith and not by sight. By faith we look past the sufferings in life and we stay focused on the glory that awaits us in heaven. That eternal home which we can't see now, we will see because our Savior has promised it. Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians, "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.*" (13:12). With great anticipation we await the day that we will see Jesus face to face.

So we live by what God has promised us. Our first parents brought sin and death to our world, as we heard in our first lesson. God then promised a Savior, the woman's seed who would crush Satan's head. And God shaped our world's history to bring his Son into our world. His Son came to destroy Satan which he showed by driving demons out of people. And he didn't quit until he had every one of mankind's worst enemies defeated. The last enemy is death, which he defeated for himself personally by rising back to life. When he returns on the Last Day, death will be defeated and be no more. Imagine a life which never ends in death. No more tears. No more funerals. Only celebration that goes on forever.

So we go on living by faith. We stand firm. We let nothing move us. We always give ourselves fully to the Lord's work. We know our labor in the Lord is never in vain. We look beyond what we see with physical eyes. The sign in front of church says, "*Come and see Jesus.*" He's here. You can't see him with physical eyes, but you know he's here. He promised, "*Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them*" (Matthew 18:20). Today you get to see Jesus in a holy supper. You see the bread. You see the wine. But where is Jesus? Well look beyond the bread and wine. There you'll find your Lord. His body and blood are there, given and shed for you. You can't see it with physical eyes. But he's there. He said so: "This is my body...this is my blood." So in this meal you receive the same body and blood your Savior used to win you forgiveness. Then you walk away from this table refreshed knowing you are forgiven and at peace with God.

And then you're ready to enter your mission field. You do so knowing that you're not alone. The Holy Spirit is with you to give you strength and the words to speak. And your Savior has promised you, "I am with you always, to the very end" (Matthew 28:20). So we're never alone. And since he's promised his word with not return empty but will accomplish what he desires, we know we'll always have success in sharing his saving promises.

We believe therefore we speak. We share what we believe with the souls God has brought into our lives. And we pray that God's Spirit will bring faith to their hearts so they by grace will give thanks to God. And even if some reject what we say and only want to bring us trouble, we still can be thankful, just like the first disciples were. We rejoice that we were considered worthy to suffer for our Savior. And know that suffering is only temporary. Compared to the eternal glory that awaits us, suffering is only light and momentary. So keep living by faith, not by sight. In the end you won't be disappointed.