

2 Corinthians 4 (Part 2): 7-18 - Life from Death

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This is part 2 of our study in the fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians, and we're making our way through this entire letter. In fact, we're making our way through the entire Bible, and this is just part of the journey. We're going to pick it up in verse 7 and we'll read through the end of the chapter.

Follow along as I read.

“⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³ Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ 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, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Oh, thank You so much, God, for Your Word—and this is a wonderful passage. Thank You for Your grace, Your power. Thank You, Lord God, for eyes to see and ears to hear; and we're going to really need You to activate those in us today as we go through these verses. Unpack them and talk about what they mean.

Use this time, Father God, to challenge our hearts with insight and understanding; and we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

This is a passage—you probably noticed as I read through here, there's a lot of things in this passage that you may have heard before. You might hear people quote a lot. Good grief, there's even a Christian band that got their name from these verses: Jars of Clay, for those of you who are out of it. There's just really cool stuff in these verses that can be a challenge for me.

But whenever a passage begins with the word, *but*— you, guys, remember school and you learned about the word, *but*? It's a conjunction, and when a word like, *but* begins a sentence, you know that the author is wanting to compare or contrast something that was said earlier with something that is about to be said.

What he said earlier is what we covered last week. Now, of course, in Paul's letter there was no last week; he wrote this all as one thing. But last week, we talked about the treasure that we have when we come to Christ. It's that treasure that happens inside every believer when the Holy Spirit fills our lives and lights up our lives with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

Remember we talked about that? The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We talked about how, when Jesus comes to fill somebody who has turned to Him by faith, the light comes on and they begin to understand the Scripture. They begin to understand the things of God. We literally say they know God. We use that phrase. Do you know God? I know God. They know God. He knows God. Well, we forget what that really means. It's not an intellectual knowledge. It's a spiritual insight. It's an understanding, and it's a treasure.

And that's what Paul calls it. He says we have this treasure. There's this incredible treasure in us of the power, the presence, the illumination of the Holy Spirit, who lights up our lives and helps us to understand spiritual realities—and it's a wonderful thing.

But here, beginning in these verses, Paul contrasts that treasure with something he wants to talk about now. And so, he begins by saying, “*we have this treasure in jars of clay, (or your Bible may say) earthen vessels.*” What he's talking about here is our physical bodies. Paul uses an example of something that he knows in daily life.

You and I don't—I mean, some of you might have pottery around your house. I don't know how many of you use it for much, except maybe holding flowers or

something like that, or maybe an occasional use when friends come over or something. And I love pottery. It's beautiful. We don't use it as much.

It was part of their daily life back in Paul's day. It was pretty much everything that they used for bowls and cups and pitchers and so forth. But one thing that was interesting about jars of clay or earthen vessels is that they were incredibly fragile. I mean, you drop it once and it's a done deal. Something's going to come off of it, if not break all together.

And that's one of the reasons why Paul uses this term to describe our physical bodies. Because first of all, our bodies are fragile just like those earthen vessels. But the other reason he refers to us as earthen vessels is because— now this is deep; you might want to write this down— we are earthen vessels.

Huh, you like that? We are made from dirt. That's what the Bible says. We talked about creation a moment ago. Is Genesis history? Is Genesis scientifically accurate? The Bible says that God made the first man from the dust of the earth.

You know what's interesting about that? You take the human body, you boil it down to its basic elements, and you know what? We have the same thing in common with dirt. Seriously, that's what our physical bodies are. They're dirt. There's so much dirt. I mean, they're more than that, obviously, because they've been animated by the Spirit and the life of God that we have in us, and so forth and so on, but we are very much like those earthen vessels, those jars of clay that Paul talks about.

We have this treasure. We have the Holy Spirit living in us. We have the power and the presence of God in these dirt vessels that are very fragile, very prone to breakage, and are really not all that impressive, to be completely honest with you. And the older we get, the more we face the reality of the breakdown of these vessels.

When I was young, I would have read a verse like this and said, huh, what are you talking about? I was bulletproof when I was a teenager, that's why I drove my car 110 miles an hour all the time. Death wasn't something I thought about. Weakness wasn't something I thought about. There was just this perpetual spring of youth and strength and, ugh, testosterone. And it's gone now. It's gone. It's a distant memory. I drive the speed limit now. Thank you, Javier. I drive the speed limit. But he actually picked me up once.

Anyway, our bodies are so fragile. Paul is bringing out this contrast. We have this treasure in these earthen vessels, and again, we're not terribly impressive.

So why did God do this? Why did God put this wonderful treasure of His Spirit, His presence, His light in these earthen vessels?

Look at verse 7 with me again:

... we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

That's why. That's why the power of God has literally been put in these unimpressive vessels so that it might be seen as what it really is: the power of God.

Do you guys remember the story? I bet many of you do of Jonathan Edwards. Does that name ring a bell for you, historically speaking? Jonathan Edwards was a preacher who lived in the 18th century, and he was incredibly used by God during a time in American history referred to as the Great Awakening. It wasn't American history in the terms— America was basically the British colonies at that time, and yet God was moving powerfully among people, and bringing people to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Edwards himself was a pretty unimpressive guy in terms of like, preachers, and how he preached, and his mannerisms, and so forth; yet God used him powerfully.

Let me read for you a quick story about one of the most well-known times of his life. It was July 1741. Jonathan Edwards had accepted an invitation to preach at a nearby church in the town of Enfield, Connecticut. It was the height of the Great Awakening, which was from 1740 to 1742, and one of the most intense outpourings of God's spirit in American history. The fire of God was falling everywhere.

Now, despite the fact that Edwards had already delivered his sermon: Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God to his own church with little effect. He decided that he was going to use it again when he went to Enfield.

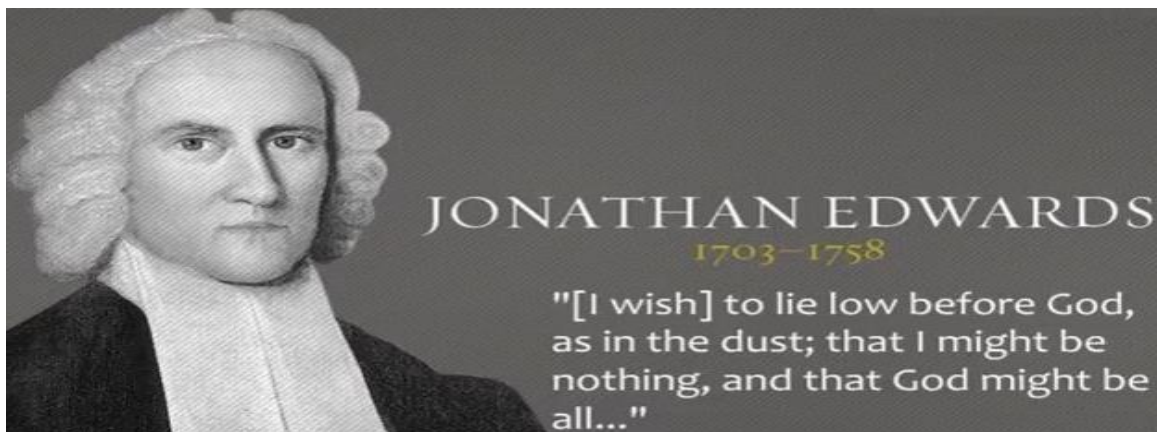
His techniques were completely unimpressive. He always read his sermons in an even voice—which is a really nice way of saying in a monotone. He didn't shout. He didn't use theatrical antics, instead desiring to impress his listener with their need for God. Nothing in his style or presentation could account for what happened that day in Enfield, Connecticut. And an eyewitness by the name of Stephen Williams writes the following:

“We went over to Enfield, where we met dear Mr. Edwards of Northampton, who preached a most awakening sermon. And before the sermon was done,

there was great moaning and crying that went out through the whole house. 'What shall I do to be saved? Oh, what shall I do for Christ?' and so forth, so much so that the minister was obliged to stop because of the shrieks and cries."

Now, again, some of you have probably heard that story before. Here's this rather unimpressive man with an unimpressive preaching style who gets up and reads his sermon like this with a monotone voice and begins to just go through and tell people that they need to know Jesus Christ as their Savior and God. It's all very just right there. And yet what happened? Well, the Spirit of God fell on that place, and people began crying out to God.

That's not only the picture that Paul wants you to see here of treasure in earthen vessels. But I also found a quote from Jonathan Edwards that I want to show you up on the screen here. Take a look at this picture too. This is a quote from him. He said:



"I [wish] to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be all..."

Isn't that a fascinating quote? You know what's interesting about that? God met that prayer. And even though he himself, the vessel, the clay pot, was not very impressive—you wouldn't look at that clay pot and go, whoa! — God moved powerfully, fell powerfully, upon the people who were listening to him preach that day.

And what do we remember about the message that Jonathan Edwards preached in Enfield, Connecticut? What do we remember about it? That Jonathan Edwards was this just man of God who pounded the pulpit and people got saved? That's not what we remember. What we remember is people got saved. It isn't Jonathan Edwards that we recall necessarily related to this. We recall that

through this incredible falling of the Spirit of God upon the people, many people got saved, and we recall the power that attended this rather unimpressive preaching.

That's what Paul is talking about when he says we have this treasure in jars of clay.

As he goes on, he's going to highlight now the dichotomy between you and I as jars of clay, earthen vessels, and the weaknesses that go along with that with God's power; and he's going to show that our appearance, what we look like or how we appear to others as a jar of clay is one thing, but how the power that resides in us is quite another.

Listen to what Paul goes on to say in verse 8. He says: “*We are afflicted in every way —*”

Now that's the appearance. That's the appearance. That's the jar of clay. We are— in other words, we got cracks. Don't we, guys? We got cracks! I'm a cracked pot. Crackpot. Yeah, and so are you. We're marred. We've been dropped. We should have been probably thrown away a long time ago, but here we are. He says:

“*We are afflicted in every way (but look at this; here's the reality) but (we're) not crushed.*”

That's the reality. He goes on to say: (we are) “*perplexed—*”

You know what it means to be perplexed, right? This is the appearance; it means you and I often look at what God is doing and we can't figure it out. So many people come to me and they think I can figure it out for them—which I can't. But something will happen in their life, and they'll say, pastor Paul, I just don't understand what God's doing, and I go, neither do I. We're perplexed. We don't understand God's full plan. We don't see how things are working themselves out. That is the appearance.

But look what Paul goes on to say: “*but (we're) not driven to despair.*”

You know why? Because even though we don't know the whole plan, we know who does; and the one who has that plan in hand also has us in hand. That is why we're not driven to despair.

Do you see the difference between the appearance and the reality? He goes on. Verse 9:

The appearance is we're, "*persecuted* (and that is what's happening), *but* (he says, the reality is we're) *not forsaken*. (God hasn't forsaken us. He says the appearance is we are) *struck down*, *but* (the reality is we are) *not destroyed*."

Do you understand what he's doing here? All these descriptions of our appearance is the cracked pot, the earthen vessel, the jar of clay that is so weak, so fragile— it's like, just throw the thing away. And yet the reality of our lives in Christ through this treasure that resides in us is something other than what is seen on the outside.

Now, what Paul is describing here, however, reminds us that we are not immune from the difficulties and challenges and hardships of life as Christians, right? Well, we all know that. But here, he is saying it again. This is our life: afflicted and perplexed and persecuted and on and on. We are dealing with all of those things, right? I mean, we all are. We're all dealing with challenges: physical, emotional, spiritual, relational challenges. And the appearance— because we're these clay pots, the appearance is this thing is about to overwhelm us. This thing is about to destroy us— these things that are happening in our lives.

But you know what? All of these things that are happening to you and I are opportunities. I want you to see them not for what the appearance might be but what is really happening. They are opportunities for Jesus to show His reality in our lives. See, we just talked about the appearance and the reality here in these other verses that Paul laid out for us. There is the appearance but there is also the reality. Your problems, your challenges, your difficulties are the appearance, but what they are is opportunities for God to show the reality of His power, His presence, His goodness, His ability in your life.

The thing that you and I have to stop doing is we have to stop trying to fix things ourselves, and we have to be the jars of clay that we really are, and we have to admit to Him: I can't do this; I can't deal with this; I can't fix this; and I have to just let You because I believe, Lord God, that all of these challenges and things that I'm going through right now, these are an opportunity for You to show Your power, for You to show Your ability, Your strength, Your wisdom.

I am perplexed on the outside. I mean, the appearance— listen, I give all the appearance of someone who is defeated. I do. But the reality—if I will but become weak in Christ and let You be strong through me, the reality is, there's a power going on here that I can't begin to understand. And if I will just let You

work through me, and do Your work, and accomplish Your purpose through me, there's a reality here that I haven't even begun to tap into as I make His power operational in my life.

Oh, don't you want to see His reality of power and presence begin to emerge in your life? I'll tell you one thing: I sure do. From one cracked pot to another, I'm telling you right now, I get really tired of being so weak, so inefficient and so burdened—you know what I mean—by all the things that life presents. Oh, I so want to see God's power. Don't you? I want to see His power emerge in my life. I want people to stop seeing Paul, and I want them to see Jesus when they look at my life. I don't want them to look at just this cracked pot, this earthen vessel; I want them to see the treasure.

And that's what Paul is saying in this passage. The reason He has allowed this treasure to be placed in these earthen vessels is so that it might be seen and known that what is operating in you is not you, it's Him.

Again, we look at Jonathan Edwards, and we look and say that was not Jonathan Edwards; that was God that fell powerfully upon those people that day. I mean, here's a guy sitting up there, reading his sermon, and people are crying out for mercy, so, we're looking past the man.

Sure, we may be afflicted—and I know that many of you are. You look at your life and say, yeah, afflicted, that's my address. But the reality is, you are not crushed. Yes, we are perplexed, but the reality is we are not driven to despair. And on and on down this whole thing.

And then Paul makes crazy statement in verse this 10. Look with me here in your Bible in verse 10. He says:

We are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

Do you know what Paul is doing in this verse? He's laying out a principle. It's a Bible principle and it's something that we see—and we are actually living out on a daily basis but we often don't recognize or we don't want to recognize it. Here's what he's saying basically—he's saying: As you and I die in the ministry, as we become weak, as we are seen for what we are, as these dying earthen vessels—which again is the outward appearance—the reality of what comes from that is life, and life that is manifested all the more through our death.

I know it sounds like a crazy sort of a thing. Some of you might be thinking: Isn't the apostle Paul talking here about ministry? I mean, I'm not in the ministry per se. I do work a job. I don't really know how to apply all this talk about the ministry.

Listen, you're in the ministry. Are you married? You have a ministry. Do you have any children? You have a ministry. Do you have family members? You're in the ministry. Do you know people or work with people who don't know Christ as their savior? You're in the ministry. Are you a believer in Jesus who is yielding themselves to His will? You are in the ministry. Listen, we're all in the ministry, so let's get that settled, okay?

The worst thing we ever did in the history of the Christian church was called people in my position, ministers. It really was. We started thinking of the clergy as the people who are in the ministry. What does that leave for you? Well, we're the people who aren't in the ministry. And then, so if there's ministry to be done, we look to those guys up there and say, hey, do the work of the ministry.

You know what the Bible says? It says that my job as a pastor and a teacher is to equip you to do the work of the ministry. So, there, right? That's the reality. You are in the ministry and it's my job, as a pastor and teacher, that's my ministry to equip you to do the ministry. You're in the ministry, okay? And part of ministry, if you want to see fruitfulness and life come out of your ministry, there's a principle that Paul's trying to talk to you and I about.

Here's the principle: Life comes out of death. I know it sounds weird, and it really goes against our natural understanding of things. We think death comes out of death. But in the kingdom of God, in the reality of the Spirit, life comes out of death. You have death, and you have life.

And guess where we learned this from? We learned it from Jesus, for heaven's sakes. In what appeared to be the most colossal failure known to man, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross came the most powerful expression of life that man will ever know, which of course was seen through the resurrection of Christ three days later.

But boy, that thing sure looked pretty sad there for a while. Jesus even told His disciples— I don't think they understood but He said— you guys are going to grieve here real soon but in a very short time after that, your grieving is going to be turned to joy. Because there's this principle, you see, and here it is: Out of death comes life. Here we're going along as Christians thinking that, gee, that's great. Jesus died for me and now I have life. That's pretty cool. We figure He's

going to do all the dying. But the fact is, this principle of life coming from death applies to you and I in the ministry.

That's what Paul is saying. As you and I walk in our ministry, whatever it may be, whether it's in your family, your home, your extended family, in your business, your Sunday school class, your Bible study group, whatever your ministry is— and those things change—as you die, as an earthen vessel, as you are what you are, a cracked pot that is very weak, very prone to fragility, then life comes from that essence. And we begin to realize that the reality—even though what we see out here looks like it's absolute defeat, the reality is victory—and it's weird, I know.

Have you ever stopped to think about why the body of Christ—why we, the church, grow when we're being persecuted and hounded and harassed? Isn't that weird? You would think that when we're getting shut down, when all appearances on the outside are that— you guys, you can't meet in this place anymore; we're going to close the doors and it's now illegal to do this—and this happens in communist countries. They begin to just shut the church down, and they begin to close it and say you're not going to do it. We're going to make it illegal to speak in the name of Jesus; you cannot gather; if you do, we're going to arrest you. Guess what happens to the church? Puffff— I can't do that sound effect good enough but you understand an explosion happens. Growth happens. When the outside appearance is of defeat, there's this life that begins to burgeon forth from it. It's a difficult principle to get used to and to understand.

One of the things that we've all been aware of is the way Christians, some Christians, around the world have been suffering horrifically for their faith. We hear about it on the news, like in Syria or in Iran or something like that, where believers are being— they kneel them down in a row and just systematically start to cut their heads off. It's happening, you guys. We look at that, and we tend to see it as a tragedy. But that's the appearance. Beneath all of that, God is bringing forth life—and that is the way that He brings forth life.

We read in the Book of Acts of some of the most horrific persecutions that took place to the church as a whole. And what do we see coming from those persecutions? The spread of the Gospel. Life. Many people lost their lives. We read about Stephen being stoned to death and we're like, oh, we lost one there. Not in the kingdom of God! Do you understand? Stephen, he didn't feel like he got a raw deal. He looked up to heaven and he saw the face of Jesus. He saw Christ seated at the right hand of the Father, and the glory was so incredible that it says his face shone like that of an angel. He was literally glowing. And as he

died and prayed, we read in the Book of Acts, life spread out. Yes, there was the death of a man, but life came from it.

That's the principle that we see in the Word of God, and it's something that we experience both figuratively, like in the news, and literally and figuratively, like my ministry as a husband. I look at my ministry and I think: How does God want to bring life into my family? He wants to bring it into my family by my death. He says to me, in Ephesians: "*Husbands, love your wives, ... as Christ ... loved the church, ...*" (Ephesians 5:25)

How did Christ love the church? He laid down His life for her. He died. Husbands, in the same way, love your wives. You want to bring life out of this relationship between you two? Men, understand this principle: It happens as you lay down your life. You want life, then you better embrace death to self.

I've never— in 39 years of marriage, I've never had an opportunity to lay down my life physically for my wife. I probably never will. I live in a pretty calm part of the world, and I don't deal with people barging into my house with guns blazing. It just doesn't happen. But every single day, I am given an opportunity to lay down my life for her in different ways, in a figurative sense, and not be selfish, but instead prefer her above my own desires, above my own wants and wishes. That's the death that God wants me to embrace so that life might begin to flow in our marriage.

And that's just one example. Marriage is just one example where this principle of life from death comes into play. Jesus said the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. That's an example. He's modeling for you and I ministry. I don't care if it's your Sunday school class or it's your spouse or your children, whatever ministry you're involved in. It will burgeon with life as you and I lay ours down and spend ourselves.

Paul would spend himself on behalf of others. When he wrote to Timothy when he was near death, he said— or near his time of death— he wrote to him and said, I am being poured out like a drink offering. (2 Timothy 4:6) That's the way he saw his life. I'm being literally poured out like a glass of water, and after evaporation takes place, you'll never even know that I was even there. I'm being spent. Yeah, Paul was spent, and we're still benefiting from the life that he lived today. Isn't that amazing? Because it's the principle that's put into place.

Let me show you how Jesus described this principle. It's from— I'll put it on the screen for you. It's from John chapter 12. Goes like this. Look on the screen:

John 12: 24 (ESV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

And yes, he was talking about Himself and His upcoming death on a cross; but He was also talking about a principle of the kingdom, whereby life comes from death.

So, he goes on in verse 13. Look with me in your Bible:

“Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, (in other words because we believe what God has laid out in His word saying) “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak,¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”

Now he's talking about the physical resurrection of the dead, which is the culmination of this principle of life from death. He says in verse 15:

“For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.”

“So...” Whenever Paul begins a sentence with the word, so, he's about to give you a conclusion. Here's his conclusion: *“So (verse 16) we do not lose heart.”*

Meaning, what? Although we have the appearance of defeat all around us, we have the appearance of weakness all around us, we have the appearance of just bearing all these difficulties all around us, we don't lose heart. We don't lose heart. Why? He says:

“Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”

Wow, what an attitude about our physical bodies. Paul believed God gave him a physical body so that he could give it back to God with all of the energy that he had to minister. That's why God gave him a body. That's what he believed: His body was for the Lord.

Pretty different from what we believe here in the United States of America, isn't it? I mean, we take our bodies— what is our body to me? It's something to attract people with. Right? It's something to dress up, paint up, get into shape, make people look at us and go, whoa— of course that train's long past for me. But you know what I'm saying? That's how we view our bodies today. My body is something to serve me. This is my body. What do I use it for? Well, getting around, doing things.

Paul said, here's my body, it's for you. Did you notice what he said here earlier? He says, it's all for you. This is all for you. It's for your benefit. I literally have a physical body so that I can serve you, not me. Paul didn't have this attitude like, it's my body and I'll do with it as I please. I mean, doesn't that just want to make you wretch when you hear that sometimes? It's my body. Paul never said that.

What he said was, the life I live in this body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me, and now I give myself back to Him. That's how I live my life in this body. It's for Him. If there's strength left in my body, it's strength to give to the Lord. And if I am dying by the expenditure of energy, then I know that life will come from it because there is an unmovable principle that God has established in the universe, and that is, life comes from death, and the more I die, the more life emerges.

Right? Okay, now he's really going to freak us out beginning in verse 17 with just really different language:

“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

Check that out. Now, this is a man who endured shipwrecks, stonings, beatings, going without food, going without proper clothing. He was constantly hunted. Do you remember Paul was the guy— there was a whole group of guys who went on a hunger strike saying that they weren't going to eat until he was dead and cold in the ground. That's the life he dealt with. Do you know what he calls it? Light and momentary afflictions. What do we call it? I don't think we have a word. And here's why. Verse 18:

“...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 (meaning temporary, moving), but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

And I read that verse right there, and that's where I just— the conviction of the Lord is just all over me because I don't live this with any regularity. What Paul

is saying here in these couple of verses is that there are two ways to look at the problems, challenges, pains, and difficulties of your life. There are two perspectives, if you will.

One perspective is to look at it through the temporary nature of life lived on this planet, life in this world. And if you look at your life and all that you're going through, all the pain, all of the difficulty, all the stress, all the unhappiness that you've had to deal with, if you look at it through the perspective of the world, what's going to happen? It's going to be oppressive to you, isn't it? I mean, you're going to be just so oppressed that you're just going to get angry, you're going to get bitter, and you're going to start saying things like, well, if there is a God, He's obviously not good. That comes out of somebody who is looking at their life through the perspective of this world and they are looking at it so intensely that it's everything. My pain is everything.

Now, the other perspective that Paul talks about here related to looking at the difficulties and challenges of our life is the perspective of eternity. He says what we're going through now is transient—and that word means, again, moving; it's moving; it's not going to stay here; it's moving on. When you look at it that way, in the scope or the perspective of eternity, my problems become less overwhelming and less oppressive, and I begin to look at them as light, momentary afflictions that are actually benefiting me.

That's the other point. Not only are they temporary, but they benefit me. Look what he goes on to say in verse 18—well, here at the end of 17, if you look at the very end of verse 17, he says:

What are all these things going on in our life? He says what they're doing is they're, “*preparing for us an eternal weight of glory (that is) beyond all comparison.*”

Do you want to know why you're not jumping up out of your chair right now and hooping and hollering? It's because what Paul just said takes faith to see, and what you see and what I see on a daily basis is pain and tragedy and difficulty and hardship and stress and unhappiness. Right? That's what we see; that's what we feel; and so that's what consumes our minds, our hearts. As I said before, the more you focus on it, the more it will consume you—literally to the point where it will consume you.

So, Paul goes on to talk about—if we begin to look at it through the perspective of eternity, that first of all, this is not going to last forever, and second of all,

look what it's doing in my life, it is actually doing a good work that is going to be so glorious so as to be beyond compare.

What that means is when I look back one day, when you look back one day at the things that happened in your life, as tragic, difficult, stressful, painful as they may be, you're going to look back on those things one day, and you're going to be able to compare those things with the glory that God has brought into your life through them, and you're going to say, there's no comparison.

There's absolutely no comparison, and you're going to look at all those things that God allowed into your life, and you're even going to say, thank You, Jesus, that You allowed me to go through that because look what I got out of it. What I went through during the painful season was temporary; what I got out of it is eternal. It goes on and on without end. And that is the reality.

But here's the point: You can't see the reality except by faith. It's the only way you can see that reality. You and I look at the pain of our lives. People come up for prayer, which they need to do, but they come up— and you can tell when somebody is just totally fixated on their pain or on their current circumstances because they're usually— they come up and they're overwhelmed, and you can see it. You can see it on their face; you can see it in— Pastor, you got to pray for me, man. I'm just, oh man. And I get it. I know what that's all about, believe me. It just weighs our hearts down to the earth.

What Paul is encouraging you and I to do is to look past all of that. By the way, the only way you can look past it is with eyes of faith. Natural eyes can only see pain. Spiritual eyes that are given to us by God can see the promise that comes after. And that's why Paul ends this section again in verse 18—look with me there—by saying:

“...as we look not to the things that are seen (meaning with the natural eye) but to the things that are unseen.”

When you read that verse right there, it doesn't make any sense to the natural mind. How can I look at something that can't be seen? How can I look and see something that is unseeable by faith? This underscores for you and I the fact that we have been called to live a life of faith, not looking at the things of this life, but looking at the things that are connected to the promises of God.

And so, he says:

“For the things that are seen are (moving; they're) transient (and they're temporary), but the things that are unseen (meaning only seen with eyes of faith, those are the things that) are (lasting and) eternal” And will benefit you for all time.

We must live by faith, brothers and sisters in Christ. And that is a challenge, is it not? Oh, merciful heaven, that is a challenge. Living by faith, looking by faith, viewing this life by faith, oh. But that's what we're here to encourage one another to do, right? That's why we come to church, to be encouraged in this sort of a thing, and to encourage one another.

Sometimes you're looking at somebody, you're praying with somebody, and you can't say, don't worry, this thing is going to be better, don't worry, because you don't know. You start talking about things of faith; then it's a different conversation.