

LESSON 13

AUGUST 29, 2021

UNIT III. FAITH GIVES US HOPE

BE CONFIDENT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Romans 7:14-26

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: 2 Corinthians 4:16–5:10

PRINT PASSAGES: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:1-10

KEY VERSE

We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV)

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We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. (2 Corinthians 5:1, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Acknowledge the hope that Paul, when faced with death, manifested in God’s eternal promise.
- Experience awe in the faith of family and friends who are facing their mortality.
- Develop a growing trust in God’s promise of eternal life through faith.

KEY TERMS

Affliction (4:17)—Greek: *thlipsis* (thlip’-sis): persecution; oppression; distress; tribulation; “troubles” (NIV).

Eternal (4:18)—Greek: *aiónios* (ahee-o’-nee-os): agelong; everlasting; endless.

Glory (4:17)—Greek: *doxa* (dox’-ah): praise; honor; splendor; majesty; magnificence, as in God’s presence.

Outward (4:16)—Greek: *exó* (ex’-o): outside; without; “outwardly” (NIV).

Renewed (4:16)—Greek: *anakainoó* (an-ak-ahee-no’-o): made new or restored.

Seen (4:18)—Greek: *blepó* (blep’-o): to be looked at or upon; perceived; discerned.

INTRODUCTION

Like many children's hospitals, Le Bonheur Children's Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, is a great place in which to serve and volunteer. At Le Bonheur, people work together to improve the health of children who suffer with a variety of ailments and diseases. Volunteers and employees alike find that every effort to bring a smile to the face of a child usually brings a smile to their own face as well. Often, children with serious and sometimes terminal illnesses radiate a glimmering ray of hope and faith. I have witnessed this hopeful faith in one of my children. Years ago, the writer's young son was afflicted with a persistent high fever requiring emergency medical treatment at Le Bonheur. Within a few days after the surgery, he was laughing and bouncing around the hospital room. Sometime later, when he was not feeling well, the son requested another trip to the "heart doctor" (a literal reference to the hospital logo, which is, quite appropriately, a heart), saying that they would make him feel better. If a child can be confident that the people who "lived where the heart was" would make him well, how much more should believers trust the loving heart of the God who promises them eternal life in His presence. The child's unwavering confidence in the medical staff at Le Bonheur is a reminder of Christ's statement regarding the childlike faith that God seeks in the hearts of those who desire to enter heaven (see Matthew 18:3). This kind of trust is desperately needed in today's world where many people's confidence, security, and peace of mind have been shattered by fear and trouble. We live in a difficult world in which many people struggle under weight of all kinds of pressures. Knowing God's heart toward us, however, gives us confidence to approach Him with the pure, innocent trust of a child and the certain hope that our troubles are only temporary.

THE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

The Holy Spirit serves as our guarantor of a future promise. He blesses us with an earthly preview of the glory that believers will experience in God's presence at the end of the age. The judgment seat is somewhat like the victory podium at the Olympic Games. Those who belong to the family of God will receive the reward for good things done in the body and experience the sadness of forfeited rewards that result from running toward empty goals and falling short of God's standards for spiritual fitness (compare 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 4:4; Romans 14:10-12). It is good that by means of Christ's redemptive work and the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us, we can remain steadfast in every season of life. Through life's ups and downs, we may remain confident that God has sealed us and given us an eternal hope of glory in God's presence. From the vantage point of first-hand experience, the apostle Paul shared his insights regarding the ultimate benefit of temporary afflictions in the life of the believer that work, what he called, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). Paul challenged his readers to persevere through life's peaks and valleys, successes and failures with an unshakable hope and faith. Knowing that we have an eternal possession in glory, Paul wrote that we must not faint, but move onward and upward by God's sustaining, renewing presence.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Focus (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

KJV

16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

NIV

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

These words of the apostle Paul follow his explanation of how Christian sacrifice and suffering not only produce life in others but also bring about glory to God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1-15, not in our lesson). Paul encourages suffering saints to persevere through physical weariness and worldly pressures, trusting in the daily renewal of God's grace (verse 16). Maintaining the right focus gives us strength and confidence in the work of the Lord, especially when the work becomes difficult. This focus enables us to see clearly and navigate victoriously through the treachery of distresses, perplexities, and persecutions (see verses 8-9). Paul encourages struggling believers by reminding them of the temporary duration of afflictions; even our worst experiences endure only "for a moment" (verse 17). Paul reinforces his point by explaining that such affliction actually works on the Christian's behalf to produce a future glory that ultimately outweighs the cumulative weight of our sufferings (verse 17). Therefore, Christians should direct their focus away from the things of this world (which are all short-term) and look toward those things which are unseen and eternal (verse 18). Instead of focusing on the weight of the hardships, burdens, and trials that so easily trap us, we must focus on our champion, Jesus Christ. This faithful focus gives a better perspective on our situations—one that helps us to endure and overcome as we continue the work of Christ with secure confidence and steadfast hope.

What do you think? What kinds of afflictions have hindered you from serving the Lord? Have you overcome them? If so, which lessons and strategies can you share to help others facing similar struggles?

Forecast (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)

KJV

FOR WE know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

NIV

FOR WE know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling,

3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

5 Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Here, Paul compares our earthly bodies to our heavenly or resurrected bodies (verse 1). Despite the vulnerability and limitations of the physical body, the forecast is still bright for those who walk by faith in Christ Jesus. Christians can know the truth about the unseen world through God's Word and the guidance of Holy Spirit. Our eternal bodies are prepared for our possession by the hand of the almighty God. While we dwell in the temporary "tent" of our humanity, we will experience physical and emotional hardships that cause us to groan and feel burdened. In our groanings, we call out to God because our spirits long to be with Him (verse 2). Although our humanity exposes us to pain, we rest in knowing that when God clothes us—that is, when we pass from humanity to immortality—we will no longer be vulnerable to the difficulties of this life (verse 3). Paul reasserts that our spirit has a restless yearning for God's presence (verse 4). We continue to live with the hope that someday, our dying body will be swallowed up by eternal life—that is, every believer lives with the deep inward desire for God's eternal presence (verse 4). Christians can be certain of what is to come because eternal life is the specific plan of God for every believer. For this reason, God has given us His Spirit to dwell with us and keep us until the time He gathers us together in His presence (verse 5).

What do you think? How can you be sure that your fate is certain with God eternally?

Future Fate (2 Corinthians 5:6-10)

KJV

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

NIV

6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.

7 For we live by faith, not by sight.

8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The focus and future are clear for those who trust that God loves them, Jesus is saving them, and the Holy Spirit is keeping them. We may be fully confident that although we are absent from Christ in bodily form, as we walk by faith, we completely believe without any wavering that we would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord (verses 6-8). Some may misread these three verses and assume that Paul had a death wish. While the apostle is obviously and rightly suggesting a strong desire to be with the Lord, he is not suggesting, by any means, that believers should rush their earthly transition. He makes this point clear in the next verses. Christians are to continue to labor and work until God's plan for them is complete. Those who leave ahead of God's time will negate the special opportunity for the Spirit of God to use them on earth for His glory and forfeit the chance to see God's complete work in their lives. The believer's ultimate goal, writes Paul, is to please God, in life and in death, for we will stand before God to receive a just reward for the deeds of our lives (verse 9).

God gives us grace but still holds us accountable to live before Him in faithful obedience. Christians who serve God faithfully may be confident that they have not labored in vain to please Him (verse 10).

What do you think? What are some of the rewards received at Judgment? Take a moment to research what the Bible says about the rewards of the believer.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

This unit deals with how faith in God gives us hope to persevere through life and reminds us that, for the Christian, the life to come is far better than this one. Having this assurance, we must work diligently for Christ while we are in these temporary bodies, knowing that God sees and remembers everything that we do in His name.

YOUR LIFE

This week, reflect on the times when you became weary and considered giving up on being faithful to God. When we are discouraged, we look for someone to blame, but our dedication to God is personal and should be permanent. List your past excuses and identify how you overcame them. If you are still struggling, acknowledge that as well.

YOUR WORLD!

This week, recall the names of members of your church (or Sunday school class) who have been missing for a while. Consider those whom you are aware of who have stepped away due to a misunderstanding or hurt feelings. Reach out, listen to their stories, and encourage them with the Word of God. Whatever the reason may be for their absence, pray and encourage them to return and become engaged in serving God within the circle of the community of faith. If the person is you, then seek a trusted confidante to hear your story of discouragement, hurt, or struggling faith. Be as open and honest as possible.

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, today we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Help us to remain faithful to the work You have designed and destined for us. Help us to draw others closer to You. Guide us as we serve You with confident hope of spending eternity in Your presence. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

While reading the background Scriptures, consider this thought: "How can songs and poems express joy and gratitude in victory?"

HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY, August 30 "God Hardens Pharaoh's Heart" (Exodus 14:1-9)

TUESDAY, August 31 "Don't Just Do Something; Stand There!" (Exodus 14:10-20)

WEDNESDAY, September 1 "Victory by the Sea" (Exodus 14:21-31)

THURSDAY, September 2 "Blessed Be God, Our Savior" (Luke 1:67-75)

FRIDAY, September 3 "Victory in Jesus" (1 Corinthians 15:51-58)

SATURDAY, September 4 "Moses Sings of God's Triumph" (Exodus 15:1-10)

SUNDAY, September 5 "Moses and Miriam Praise God" (Exodus 15:11-21)