

Hope: Not Losing Heart

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 4, please. Twice in 2 Cor 4, Paul explains why he does not lose heart. He feels it necessary to tell those people why he does not quit being an apostle, does not despair and give up serving Christ. By Paul writing them, God is giving us reasons today why we don't need to lose heart. God wants us, now, not to give up in despair.

The first thing to get clear, I suppose, is that the great apostle Paul felt like he had reasons to lose heart, to give up serving Christ. I know what some books and some preachers say about the apostles, they did all those miracles, and the power and filling of the Holy Spirit, and preaching and all those people coming to Christ! What an exciting way to live! If only WE had more faith!

Paul would shake his head and say, "you people don't have a clue." He had reasons to lose heart, but he also had reasons NOT to lose heart, and he built his life around those. And keep in mind also that he does not feel sorry for himself, he will not stop thanking God for God's mercy and for the things God is doing around him.

He says in 4:1 *Therefore ... we do not lose heart*. In the next few lines he gives us two reasons why he could lose heart. One, there were and are many corrupt preachers, those who fool people and change God's message to make sure they have a successful ministry. See also 2:17, many who peddle the word of God for profit.

And two, he could lose heart because so many people do not believe the gospel. He preached about Christ as plainly as he could, but for them the message was veiled, and their minds blinded. These things discouraged him, the corrupt preachers and all those who were blind to the gospel. But he did not lose heart, he says in 4:6, because of the glory of Christ in the gospel.

He knew he was offering people Christ's glory, that when people believed, God shone his light in their lives, and by receiving the gospel they were seeing the glory of Christ, and displayed in Christ they were seeing God's own glory. So he did not lose heart, he kept speaking the truth, as Christ had told him to do.

In 4:16, the beginning of our Scripture for today, he says again, *Therefore we do not lose heart*. And that comes after he described his weakness, what it was like to have God's treasure in a clay jar, he himself (and all of us) being the clay jar. He talked about his troubles and distress, how often he was beaten down, and yet God kept him going.

But though these things were hard, he did not lose heart, because of his hope. In 4:1, he did not lose heart because the light of the gospel displays the glory of Christ. And in 4:16, he did not lose heart because of his hope, his confidence about the future of those who serve Christ.

We need to hear God speaking to us in these things. On the one hand, the apostle Paul wants those people to understand true apostleship, and what life is actually like for a servant of Christ. On the other hand, God is today speaks to us, those who know about losing heart.

Later in our text, Paul will explain why he's still confident (5:6,8). God knows we have doubts, and that we get discouraged, and that we lose heart and would prefer to quit! This is normal for God's servants, and God wants to comfort and encourage us.

Paul experienced these things deeply, and God showed Paul how to not lose heart, how to keep going, and what to stay confident about. God showed him these things, back then, so that God could use this Scripture, today, to encourage us and show us how to hope!

So, let's go through our Scripture, beginning at 4:16.

4:16 God's daily renewal. *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly, we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

Outwardly, our situation is not getting better. So, why do we not lose heart? Because inwardly God renews us every single day. This sounds like Lamentations 3: *Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail, **they are new every morning.***

Paul's version: *inwardly we are being renewed **day by day***. We do not lose heart because God supplies new help every single day. I assume all of us have been very discouraged at least a few times in our life. What if the only reason we met here today to honour God is that he kept renewing our minds and souls, he had a new compassion for each of us every single morning?

4:17 Light short troubles bring heavy eternal glory. *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* We don't lose heart because God renews us every day, that's the first reason we don't quit in despair.

The second one is that light, short, troubles achieve for us heavy, eternal, glory. In Hebrew, the *ka-BODE* can mean "weight, burden," and it also means "splendor, glory." Same word. Paul was writing in Greek, and the Greek word for glory means about same as English, but Paul is thinking in Hebrew. And in Hebrew, glory and splendor are also heavy weights.

We do not lose heart, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Our troubles work for us! They are producing a remarkable glory and splendor for us. Simple faithfulness through troubles produces immense glory waiting for us.

Our troubles always seem long, long, long! How long, Lord, how long? But compared to what's coming, they are short. They also seem nearly unbearable, perhaps they do seem unbearable. But compared to the glory and splendor coming to us, they are light, they are trivial.

God us using our troubles to do this. We don't lose heart because God renews our inner person every single day. And we don't lose heart because God us using our short light troubles to produce eternal astonishing glory for us.

4:18 We stare at what's invisible. *So (we do not lose heart, because) 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.*

Renewing us day by day, that's what God does. Our short light troubles produce great glory for us, that's also what God does. Fixing our eyes on what is unseen and eternal, that's our part. That's actually what the rest of today's Scripture is doing, showing us the unseen and eternal, so we can fix our eyes on it.

"We fix our eyes on what is unseen." That is a paradox, Paul sort of likes to write things like that, because it gets our attention by not making any sense at first. A few verses later, we'll read, *we live by faith, not by sight.* That Scripture is describing the same thing as this. "Fixing our eyes on what is unseen," and "living by faith," those are two ways of saying the same thing.

We can decide what to tell ourselves. We have some choice about what we will actually grab hold of and tell ourselves in discouraging, scary times. I am not saying the discouragement and fear quickly will go away. We will, however, be able to keep serving the Lord.

We need to give the Holy Spirit something to work with. Romans 15: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* But how shall the Holy Spirit's power fill us with hope, if God gives us things to trust in when we are losing heart, and we ignore them?

Every follower of Christ has already **has** fixed their eyes on what is unseen. You can't follow the Lord very long without that. It is not new to believers. Hope requires specifically that we will fix our eyes on the eternal, not the temporary. Easy to describe, hard to do. Fix our eyes on what's eternal, not what's temporary. Give the Spirit that much to work with.

To put it another way, hope is borrowing joy from the future. Borrowing with no interest, and the joy is no less when we get there. We often borrow misery from the troubles of the future. That's what worrying is. With worry, we don't know if the trouble will actually show up, and often it does not. When we borrow joy from the future, we know it's real. That's what hope is.

Seven short lines come out of today's teaching, things we can tell ourselves to help us not lose heart. 1, The compassionate God renews our inner person day by day.
2, Our short light troubles are achieving a great eternal glory for us.

There will be five more by the end. Chapter 5:1-10 divides fairly naturally into two paragraphs of five verses each. And each paragraph explains one of the two pillars of Paul's hope.

There are many sides to hope in the NT, but there are two main ones in Paul. One, the future resurrection body, and two, being with the Lord.

Paul really wanted his resurrection body, he longed for it, and he wanted to be with the Lord forever. Paul speaks only a little about heaven, his hope was not dreaming about heaven. He wanted his raised body, and he wanted to be with the Lord. Five verses of each coming up.

In his first letter to Corinth, the long chapter 15 was all about the resurrection body. So 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 assumes that, and builds on it a bit.

5:1-4 Fixing our eyes on what's unseen and eternal: what it's like to long for our resurrection body.

5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed (outwardly we are wasting away), we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

This begins “For we know.” We don’t lose heart, because we know this. This repeats 4:14 – *We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and will present us with you to himself.* After Jesus died, they buried him.

Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead, changed Jesus’ dead mortal body into a heavenly eternal body, no more body in the tomb. When the Lord returns, the same for us. Our earthly tent is the clay jar, our weak human bodies. Heavenly dwelling = our resurrection body.

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.

This life includes groaning and being burdened. Verses 3-4 are not easy to understand, nakedness and unclothed and so on. The explanation that makes the most sense is that Paul was not satisfied to have his body in the grave and his spirit with the Lord Jesus. That was a big improvement on this life, to be sure, but he wanted his resurrection body.

If he dies before the Lord returns, he will be naked, and this is not his first choice. We are content to have our souls with the Lord and our bodies still in the grave, but not Paul.

What he really wants, and so do we, is that Christ returns before he dies. Then his mortal body will be swallowed up by his new eternal body, life will swallow up death, and he will never be unclothed or naked. That’s clearly best.

- 1, The compassionate God renews our inner person day by day.
- 2, Our short light troubles are achieving a great eternal glory for us.

3, Our eternal body will swallow up our dying body.

5:5a God Made us for That, not for This.

Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God. There is a verse in Jeremiah 29 we like to quote: I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you, etc. God has plans for us, good plans. But God cannot put his plans into action while we have these bodies. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

Our eternal body will swallow up our dying body. We were made for that, not for us. What's God's plan for our lives? It can't really get going while we have our present bodies.

5:5b God gave the Spirit to guarantee our resurrection body.

He has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Three times in Scripture, God tells us that the Holy Spirit is a deposit, or a down-payment. That means that the Spirit really does not belong in this life at all, the Holy Spirit is part of our future eternal inheritance. But God gives his children this part of our inheritance ahead of time, before we come of age, just so we know that he has much to give and that he means to give it.

And in this paragraph, the Spirit is specifically a guarantee of our resurrection body. If you have the Holy Spirit, that means you are lined up for a resurrection body.

- 1, The compassionate God renews our inner person day by day.
- 2, Our short light troubles are achieving a great eternal glory for us.
- 3, Our eternal body will swallow up our dying body.
- 4, God made us for that, not for this.
- 5, God gave us the Spirit to guarantee our resurrection body.

5:1-5 showed us what it was like to fix our eyes on our eternal resurrection body, and now we will see what its like to fix our eyes on being with the Lord forever.

5:6-8 At home in the body means away from the Lord, away from the body means at home with the Lord.

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.

Twice this Scripture mentions “confidence.” Being a clay jar, a weak troubled person, means many things perplex and confuse us. But here's what we know and can be sure of: at home in the

body means away from the Lord, and away from the body means at home with the Lord. It's a different way of looking at our bodies, isn't it.

In order to not lose heart, and to stay confident, Paul grabbed these things and hung on. And of course, if we describe it that way, it's better to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. This much is true whether or not we are found naked.

Even if we die before the Lord returns, if we are not in our present bodies, then we're with the Lord, period. No other places for a follower of Christ to be, either in this body, or with the Lord.

- 1, The compassionate God renews our inner person day by day.
- 2, Our short light troubles are achieving an incredibly great eternal glory for us.
- 3, Our eternal body will swallow up our dying body.
- 4, God made us for that, not for this.
- 5, God gave the Spirit to guarantee our resurrection body.
- 6, At home in the body = away from the Lord; away from the body = at home with the Lord.

Our world wants this body to last as long as possible. There's good in that, but it's not the whole story here. As long as this body lasts, we are away from the Lord.

5:9-10 So we always make it our goal to please the Lord.

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.

This sermon is too long, I will get to the point. We have a great and certain hope about the future. We wait for that, and long for it. But we are not lying around sighing and pining. No, this life matters a great deal, what we do in this life shapes eternity.

So every day we make it our goal to please the Lord. This judgment is not presented as a fearful thing, but the Corinthians still had some real bad stuff going on in that church, and God wants them to know that this matters. This judgement is not about salvation, but it is about reward.

I want to end with how 1 Corinthians ends its explanation of our resurrection bodies: *Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Some unseen eternal things to fix our eyes on:

- 1, The compassionate God renews our inner person day by day.
- 2, Our short light troubles are achieving a great eternal glory for us.
- 3, Our eternal body will swallow up our dying body.

4, God made us for that, not for this.

5, God gave us the Spirit to guarantee our resurrection body.

6, At home in the body = away from the Lord; away from the body = at home with the Lord.

7, So we always make it our goal to please the Lord.

Amen.