

Motivations to Endure: *Treasuring Christ when we are tempted to lose heart*
2 Corinthians 4:1-6; 16-18

"So we do not lose heart. Though the outer man is wasting away, the inner man is being renewed day by day."

Introduction:

Now that summer (at least summer break) is coming to an end, it's helpful to reflect back as we look ahead to a new school year. One of the things that I was freed up to do this summer was meet with some folks in our church that I don't often get an opportunity to. In meeting with people in our church, there is one resounding similarity with everyone's story: **life is hard**. Can you relate? There are reasons that life is so difficult:

We have unfulfilled expectations - Expectations can kill. Expectations can desire good things, but elevate those good things to the level of entitlement, and when they are not delivered in the manner and time we thought, all kinds of negative streams flood our lives. We subtly believe life is supposed to be easy, or comfortable, or that we are not asking too much to have a good marriage, job, family, house, financial security, and good health. When any one of these things goes away or lags in our timing, *thanksgiving* goes away, *complaining* is unleashed, and *doubt* sets in.

We live life in a broken world - We try with all our might to slow the pace of the breakdown of our bodies, but it's inevitable that we will face a downward spiral of physical incapacities and limitations. Our outer man continues to die in a relentless pace.

We face opposition - We are not living on a neutral playing field. In other words, we are going to face more and more opposition if we live life to the glory of God. Opposition will be overt and subtle, from people and systems run by satanic wisdom. We will face it in our jobs, at our schools, in our communities, and in your families.

We live up to the call of the gospel - We can easily get lulled into thinking that the cost of the gospel is minimal, that following Christ will allow us to keep the status quo, or that we can have the benefits of the gospel without any pain or sorrow in this life.

Here is how each of these aspects coalesce in our life. We live a life that seeks to avoid suffering and maximize comfort while desiring to live a life to the glory of God. Then, with a desire to refine our faith which is so precious to Him (1 Pet. 1:7), He turns up the heat in our life through **trials, suffering, waiting, pain, persecution, and disappointment** when our expectations are failed to be met. With our expectations dashed, we respond in **fear, doubt, depression, joylessness, and a downed countenance**, which leads us to having **no motivation, giving into fear, and losing courage**. Our hearts are melted without strength or hardened in thinking that God is mean, unfeeling, uncaring, or has simply stopped listening.

This pattern is repeated often in each of our lives. This is why I begin to laugh when churches will give rah-rah speeches about the future of the church - selling us on the idea that somehow the "awesome" parts of life are easy, exciting, and without pain. **That is definitely not our experience here**. God shows us His goodness and glory in spite of all the hard. In fact, He uses the hard to accomplish His purposes in and through us. **Scripture does not separate our mission from our pain, the confidence in the gospel with the cost of it, the hope we have in what God is doing while trusting Him in the midst of grief and pain**.

That is what we want to examine this morning. **How do we garner confidence and motivation when life is hard?** Is there hard in your life this morning? You are welcome and united here with others who are facing similar yet unique challenges. We are going to look at a passage in 2 Corinthians 4 where Paul deals with our motivation for endurance as he brackets it with the phrase "**we do not lose heart**".

Paul was a perfect model and example to address this idea. He came to Corinth preaching a gospel that was foolish to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews. He determined to shun cultural pressure and preach only Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor. 2:1-5). This not only was revolutionary and effective to make dead men live, it spurned on all kinds of opposition and pain. He faced **affliction, was utterly burdened beyond strength, and despaired of life**, believing to have received a sentence of death (2 Cor. 1:8-9). He faced opposition in His message of salvation in Christ alone by peddlers of God's Word (2 Cor. 2:17), those who preached a different gospel (2 Cor. 11:4), and false apostles who disguised themselves as true apostles (11:13) and sought to discredit Paul, besmirching his character and calling into question his message and motives.

On top of this Paul suffered from the hands of others: beatings, shipwrecks, danger, stonings, sleeplessness, hunger, cold, exposure, whipped, and often near death (2 Cor. 11:23-30). All of this was unwarranted, unfair, and uncalled for. *On top of this*, he not only had the daily pressure of being anxious for the churches he couldn't be with, but God also gave Him a **thorn in the flesh**, a messenger from Satan that dogged him, harassing and tormenting Him (12:7). What??!!! Could've done without that!!! He pleaded with the Lord to take it away, which God absolutely could have, and yet He didn't. Is God sadistic? But Paul understood what was going on in his life. God was "**to make us rely not on ourselves but on God** (1:9)", so that "**on Him we have set our hope**", "**to keep me from being too elated**", and to show "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.**" Paul could confidently say "*Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*" (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Wow!!! How in the world could he say that? How could he have that perspective and hope? How did he keep going in joy, hope, contentment, and thankfulness? The answer is found in a power packed chapter in the middle of all of this.

We Have a Better Ministry (1)

2 Corinthians 4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, **we do not lose heart.**

Ministers of a New Covenant

What gave Paul hope in the midst of hard? He took comfort in the fact that he was given access to a **New Covenant**, something different and more glorious than anything he had tasted before. In **Philippians 3:4-11** Paul speaks to the fact that in his pre-conversion years he tried to find his righteousness in his own works, his keeping of the Law. The Mosaic Covenant, which contained the 10 commandments was thought by some to be a way of salvation. Keep these laws perfectly and your righteousness would be enough to be accepted. In Paul's day in Corinth this is exactly what the false teachers were teaching: faith was not enough, but one had to keep the ancient Law to truly be saved. The Law of Moses was designed to show us the character of God, His holiness, and our absolute inability to live up to His standards on our own, which would drive us to our face and call out in faith for a substitute.

The New Covenant 1) gave life, 2) produced righteousness, 3) is permanent, 4) focused on the internal, 5) is personal, 6) is centered on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, 7) is energized by the Holy Spirit, 8) and is transforming (for reading on the **New Covenant**, see Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:6-13; 2 Cor. 3) The New Covenant was ratified through the blood of Christ on the cross, meaning that through His once for all sacrifice (Heb. 9:11-15) we can have Christ's righteousness accounted to us through FAITH. This means that we have a radical new ministry that calls for repentance of sins by faith alone, knowing that there is nothing we can do to make ourselves acceptable to God apart from Jesus.

Ministers with Full Sufficiency

Not only do we have this ministry that is powerful, effective, and can make dead people live, but **WE** have been made sufficient to give it! God has made us **sufficient to be competent to be ministers of the New Covenant** (2 Cor. 3:4-6). *Have you ever struggled with these two words? **Sufficient and Competent to do ministry?*** This kind of confidence is not bred out of *personality, training, or verbal judo skills*. It is the kind of confidence that comes from knowing we have a relationship with the God of this universe through Christ.

Ministers with Undeserved Mercy

Paul was quick to deflect any part of Himself from New Covenant ministry. Ministry is the product of God's mercy, or **not receiving what we deserved**. All of our works and righteousness made us adequate for Hell, nothing more. God withheld judgment and instead gave us life in His son. I love when athletes or celebrities give speeches after winning awards and their response is "I don't know how I got here...I'm just a boy from _____" That is the understanding of mercy. We are who we are because God did not give us what we did deserve to gift us something we did not. That makes our ministry truly a **mercy mission**, giving lost people the same map that was given to us to move us out of our lostness.

We Have Confidence Despite the Long Odds (2-5)

2 Corinthians 4:2-5 But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to **tamper with God's word**, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to **everyone's conscience** in the sight of God.³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.⁴ In their case the **god of this world has blinded the minds** of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, **but Jesus Christ as Lord**, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

We are not looking to be fancy

Giving the gospel to others sometimes seems like losing venture. In the last month we have heard stories from Japan and Vietnam where hearts are hard and minds clouded toward God, sin, and Jesus. Sometimes we hear of scores of people making decisions for Jesus or being baptized, but those stories are hard to come by and not a daily experience. The reason: the god of this world is **actively blinding the minds of people, hindering them** from seeing their sin clearly, seeing God clearly, and seeing Jesus. Rather than giving a foolish message like the gospel, there were some who began to use underhanded ways, cunning, or tampering with God's Word to make it more palatable. That makes sense, right. Just give people what they want, lessen the requirements, and make it all about them, and people will follow. In fact, that is exactly what the god of this world would want! Trust yourself! Follow your heart! Don't let anyone stifle your individualism! Craft a gospel message around those values, and people will flock. So what what's Paul's confidence?

We believe the gospel speaks to the conscience

How do we broach hard hearts and blinded minds? We unleash truth. Every person who's ever lived knows that there is a God who created the universe (Romans 1:18-23). The problem is they have suppressed that information (through culture, teaching, upbringing, false religion, or desire for self rule). Every person also has the law written on their hearts (Rom. 2:15) and their conscience bears witness of this. In other words, every person has built into their very DNA the necessary information to KNOW there is a God, they are not Him, and they have broken His Law. When Scripture is the instrument over our own cunning, it activates these pieces of information and convicts, opens eyes and softens hearts.

This process means that we are dependent on the Spirit moving in the heart and mind before we will see results.

We just met with our friend Matt Higby who told us a story of an student from Japan who came to know Christ when she was convinced her whole life that there had to be something greater to pray to and ask for help, but did not know His name. She had dreamed of drowning in dark water without being able to cry out to this one she did not know. She moved to Long Beach where she interacted with a believing community there, and finally asked, "who is this God that you serve?" God prepared her heart through the Spirit and prepared her for salvation through the Word.

We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord

What is the test for how we know if we are preaching a full gospel? The answer is are we preaching Christ Jesus as Lord. This means that when someone repents and turns to God, they receive a NEW MASTER and are switched from slaves of sin to slaves of Christ (Rom. 6:20-22). It is the work of the Holy Spirit that frees us to say "Jesus Christ is Lord." (1 Cor. 12:3). Not only does this change how we are **motivated** (worshipping Christ not myself), but now recognizes that whatever happens to us is done through and for Him. That means if we have to wait, suffer, endure pain, or face disappointment, we know that our Master knows, sees, and understands.

But there is more comfort and motivation still...

We Have Received Transforming Light (6)

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Light of the gospel changed our heart

How do blind see, and how does a stone heart become flesh? The answer is that God had to illuminate, shine, and awaken our dead mind and heart. Think of what it would take to make a rock in your yard to be made into a lump of Play-doh. Impossible except for something miraculous. That is why salvation is NOT simply a change of mind, like changing someone's view of politics or sports teams, but a radical reorientation of the heart, meaning our **affections, appetites, and object of worship changes**. We no longer **run away from God and His glory, we run TO IT**. We seek to glorify God with our whole life, whether that means we have physical, mental, or even emotional capacity to do so.

Light of the gospel came in the face of Christ

How does this happen? We see Christ for the first time truly. How do we finally see God, how do we find satisfaction for our souls, rest from our burdens, and true acceptance for the first time? It is by gazing in the **face of Christ!** That means we are totally dependent on Christ for salvation, but also now gloriously **happy in Him because we cannot lose Him, or to say it better, HE WILL NOT LOSE US!** I cannot emphasize this enough. Salvation is all about God, reconciling worshippers to Himself through the work of His Son. Our means to do this is to treasure, love, and gaze at Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2). This is why we continue to bang the drum during trials that we stop looking at circumstances alone and recklessly look at Christ. The veil that used to darken our eyes has been lifted, so we draw closer and closer to Him as the heat of life boils.

Strength to endure trails comes from the unveiled look into the face of Jesus, made possible under the New Covenant

We Have a New Nature (16)

2 Corinthians 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our **outer nature is wasting away**, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

But why do we have to go through such hard things? Why doesn't God just smooth the road, heal our bodies, or give us what He's going to anyway right now???! The answer is the **transformation** that God is working out in us that He began when we were saved and will complete until He returns (Phil. 1:6). We are being transformed into the conformity of Christ, to new glory (2 Cor. 3:18). That means what goes on in your heart, how your faith is grown, and your hidden person are *very precious in God's sight* (1 Peter 1:7, 3:4). **Who you are is MORE IMPORTANT than what you do for God.** We are wasting away. We are being depleted of strength and ability each day, but our INNER MAN is being renewed each day.

There are two joyous yet hard to swallow realities as we counsel our own heart through Scripture in this wasting away: 1) We always are examining our heart to comprehend what God is revealing about His nature and our need to change - this means that there is great MEANING IN SUFFERING 2) We treasure Christ, looking to Him for happiness, joy, and satisfaction in the bleakest of situations to the point that people count us fools and seemingly sadistic if the gospel is not real and change is not possible. God wanted your heart so much that He not only sent His Son to suffer and die to get it, but He's also willing to make your life **hard to drive you to Him, where the greatest joy and meaning is actually found.**

We Are Preparing for an Unseen, Weighty Future (17-18)

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For **this slight 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.

Momentary affliction vs. eternal weight of glory

What is God doing? Why is He so slow? Is He listening? We don't have the answer to these questions in the temporal or in the midst of hurt, and it is better to leave these questions **unanswered rather than answering wrongly.** But we DO KNOW what God is doing in the long term. Notice two things Paul says about our pain and hard now:

1) He **undersells** the pain he faces - **Sheesh!** At first glance this may not be helpful, but note the point he's making. He suffered MORE than we do or will, but he realized that **in comparison** for what was awaiting, it was both slight and temporary. He did not say it was not real! It caused pain and anxiety, pressure and fear. But he also knew that it would not last. This is the true **deferred compensation** we are after: willing to endure now for what is offered in the future.

2) The **meaning** of his affliction was that IT WAS ACTUALLY PREPARING HIM FOR WHAT WAS TO COME! God is not distant, unfeeling, or uncaring, but He is faithfully, graciously, and uniquely putting us through trial to make us more and more dependent on Him, to see that this world cannot satisfy, and that our greatest joy in relationship is Christ, no one else. That is why we take courage and confidence to keep going.

One of the hard things of my job is that you are privileged to hear the stories of pain from people who are looking for answers, knowing that you are geared to try to fix things. Often I wish I could just fix the circumstance and restore comfort from the pain faced. But that is like never teaching your child to ride a bike because you want to avoid them falling and hurting themselves, keeping them from the joy and freedom of riding with the wind in their face and speed in their eyes. Even pain prepares us for something greater.

Unseen things vs. Seen things

Life is hard, but faith is harder. We have to retrain our minds and by God's grace, open our hearts to see the world differently. Instead of looking to things we can see and touch to fix or find hope, we focus on the unseen, that which cannot be grasped by our senses. We believe and put our faith in Christ because without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). This does not mean we have to **comprehend it all, or have all of our questions answered, or even feel better about it.** It means we trust in a Jesus we cannot see because we will live eternally with Him when we can.

So when we are faced with no answers at the doctors, when we are told to wait, when the pain won't go away, when the fears creep in, when the prayers have not been answered yet, when the opposition won't cease, when it seems like we cannot endure one more thing....and then something else happens, we fix our gaze on Jesus who will not let us go and is creating us into something beautiful for the future.

I've taken comfort in Psalm 56 in the midst of unanswered questions and propensity to fear. "***When I am afraid, I put my trust in you, in God whose word I praise. In God I put my trust, what can flesh do to me?...You have kept count of my tossings (wanderings) put my tears in your bottle, are they not in your book?***

Sometimes we are left with tossing and crying, and even those God takes account of. One day all tears will be wiped away by Jesus (Rev. 21:4), but until then, He keeps all of our tears. He sees them, knows them, and understands. So we cry out through tears in faith, as we seek to draw closer and closer to Him, even when circumstances will not budge.

In C.S. Lewis's *The Magicians Nephew*, the main character, a boy named Digory, asks Aslan to heal his dying mother. To his surprise, Aslan does not say "yes" or "no". But when Digory pleads with him again, through his tears, he gets a shock:

"But please, please---won't you--cant you give me something that will cure my mother?" Up till then he had been looking at the Lions great feet and huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and (wonder of wonders) great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his mother than he was himself.'

When we experience and face suffering, trials, and unanswered questions, we may never know what the answer is, but we know for sure what it *isn't*. When we look in the face of Jesus, we are reminded that He loves us, that He cares for us (more deeply than we care for ourselves), and sympathetic to our weakness, because He is preparing to spend an eternity with us.