

## The Weight of Glory

Sunday, June 9, 2024 at the First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- **Introduction: the Origin of Sunday Schools**

I remember reading about the start of Sunday Schools in church. If I recall correctly, it started with the Industrial Revolution in the mid-nineteenth century when conditions were tough, and many workers were children. They got up early, 4 or 5 in the morning, and worked long hours in dangerous factory conditions, six days a week. If they were injured or maimed by the machinery, they were left on the corner to beg. If the machinery killed them the factory owners had little trouble finding replacements. The conditions were unhealthy so it was easy to become ill, and the illnesses could become chronic. Those who survived to adulthood often found themselves trapped in the factories because they had no education. Factory work was all they knew. Then someone in a church came up with a brilliant idea, the Sunday School, which was literally a school on Sunday. It didn't start until 8:00 or so, so they could sleep in if they wanted, then they would come to church and people would teach them how to read, write and do basic arithmetic. These were marketable skills back then and people who had them had a chance to find work outside of the factory, assuming they lived to adulthood. It was brilliant, both as a work of social justice and as evangelism. Many people who went through the Sunday Schools stayed with the church after adulthood and it wasn't long before every church had one. Normally I bring this up to talk about Sunday Schools, Bible studies or after school tutoring programs. Today I want to mention the life conditions in the early days of Sunday Schools. They were tough and times of great trials and they give us a context for the vision the Bible places before us in the midst of tough times and encourages us to pray each other through hard times with a vision that goes beyond them.

- **Set the Stage: 2 Corinthians and the weary trials of life**

Our key verses for today come from 2 Corinthians, a letter written by an Apostle Paul who is worn and weary of life. The Paul of 2 Corinthians is the one who has been whipped, beaten and left for dead, bitten by a poisonous snake, shipwrecked for days on end and run out of town, probably more than once. Of all the churches he founded, the one in Corinth gave him the most trouble. At one point he had to defend his ability to provide spiritual leadership to a church that he began. In it all he maintains that he does not lose heart, that the outward man is perishing, he is growing older and weaker, but the inward man is renewed day by day.

### **Verse 17 is the Vision: Affliction vs. Weight**

#### **Affliction**

Here's the vision that sustained Paul, kept him going and has kept countless others going as well.

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

There's a play on words in this verse that strikes me. The first word, "affliction," refers to a "pressing," a burden and can mean persecution or any of the troubles of life. 1 Corinthians 10:13 uses the same word to mean troubles as well as temptations (they tend to go together) when it says, "*No temptation (same word as "affliction") has overtaken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the*

*temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."* Jesus Himself said, (John 16:33) *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.* We all face troubles that can overwhelm us but there is a way of escape. Sometimes it is prayer. Often it is other people used by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes it is Spirit inspired, Bible based vision.

### **Weight**

In that same verse is the other half of that play on words, when we are told that our challenges, the weight of the pressures of troubled times, produce in us an eternal weight of glory. Unlike the pressure of the world the weight in the weight of glory denotes abundance and authority, a weightiness that makes the pressures of the world seem like nothing. Romans 8:18 says *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* Note the Bible does not here speak of the "glory to be revealed to us" but rather the glory to be revealed "in us." C.S. Lewis once wrote that if we saw how we would all look in heaven we would be speechless and tempted to bow to each other in worship. You do not focus on the troubles at hand but rather on the prize before us, and that helps us with the troubles at hand.

- **Application: Pray and imagine**

Verse 18 gives us the application:...*while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* I remember driving my car onto a ferry when I lived in New England. You were allowed to drive it in yourself if you wanted, but you had to back the car in followed by a member of the crew guiding you with hand signals. If you focused on anything other than him, he would make you stop, and he would drive the car the rest of the way. You could let nothing distract you. We must be willing to bring ourselves to focus beyond what we can casually see about us or of what we can infer from the news media. There must be a vision of heaven for us to march through trials, a vision of heaven with us in it. In Revelation 7 speaks of a massive crowd from every nation standing before Christ in white robes holding palm branches. It is a stunning and august vision of the future, made even more powerful when I understood that I was in that crowd. Everyone who loves Christ is there. Pray for a vision of heaven with you in it. What do you see? What do the people look like? What are the streets and buildings like? How did it feel to see the Master face to face finally? Paul saw those things, and it took him through everyone. What can such a vision do for you?

- **Conclusion**

The world is beautiful, but also a fallen and harsh place with many difficulties and tragedies. In this passage in the Bible, we find that a vision of the eternal finds us with Christ with a weight, a gravitas, that no pressure on earth can match. We can be troubled on every side, but that Bible given-Holy Spirit driven vision can move us forward in life and the life beyond.