

Strength for the Battle

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

You will remember that in our previous studies we underlined the fact that the Christian ministry is not a question for the man in the pulpit only, but because from the moment we receive Christ in our lives as Savior and Lord, life becomes a ministry. No longer is it an aimless existence to satisfy ourselves; it becomes a ministry for the blessing of other people. The church is the only organization in the world, which exists entirely for the sake of those who are not members of it.

Naturally, then, in the sequence of his thoughts, Paul, having exposed to us the real nature of the ministry and what is involved in it, now tells us how he receives strength for the battle; and that is what we all need to know. If the ministry means that Jesus Christ is to be communicated by the power of His Spirit, and if it is to involve us day by day in the principle of the cross and death to ourselves, how do we receive strength for the battle? What is the secret of motivation? Those are the answers that we will try to answer in this study tonight.

It is fascinating to notice how Paul describes this battle, as seen in verse 17, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” This is what he says the ministry is to him. It involves affliction, and the trouble with so many people is that the affliction has seemed so great and the battle so strong that they have fallen by the wayside. There have been casualties, on the mission field, in home ministry, and in Christian testimony. The battle has been too hot; the enemy fire has been too heavy.

But Paul speaks of his struggles as only a “light affliction.” But what is he really saying? Listen to how he describes those “light

afflictions” in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in death oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; if journeyings often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”

Light affliction? Do you notice that nothing on that list is the kind of thing about which we talk and complain that we have to endure? Remember, though, that Paul was not free from such things. He could speak about “a thorn in the flesh,” but this “light affliction,” as he calls it, is a realm of suffering that came to him simply because he was a Christian. **It is the kind of thing that we can expect when we take our stand for the cause of Christ; when we determine to stand for what is right; when we make up our mind to go against the norm, against the flow of tradition; when we, by faith, take on the life and character of Christ and allow our life to be governed in the light of eternity, from that moment that is the possibility of affliction.** This is the kind of thing Paul is talking about. **And yet, all that he went through was not really necessary.** He could have avoided and escaped every bit of it. So can you; so can I; but if he was to be true to his Master, if he was to be real in his Christian profession, inevitably and constantly this much come to him. **And he calls it “light affliction.”**

It sometimes comes to you when in a godless restaurant you bow your head at a meal and ask a blessing; or it sometimes come when you give a word of testimony in the presence of old friends; or it sometimes comes when those you love laugh at you for trying to live “straight” in a “crooked” world. It happens on the job and in

the market place when we determine to let the light and love of Christ shine through us to a lost and hurting world. You see, Paul believed that from the moment you begin to live the “Christ life” the enemy brings against us what Paul calls “light affliction.”

Because we know that some of this is inevitable, some of us have flinched from it at one time or another. What Paul calls “light affliction” perhaps has been too heavy for us. There have been moments when the *affliction* and the *pressure* of it all have been so great that we have given in. We feared the loss of prestige, or the loss of popularity, and because of that some are no longer in the fight as Paul was. They have no heart for battle any more. But this light affliction is purely *trivial*, that is all. Not only is it *trivial*; Paul says in verse 17 it is *temporary*, “...light affliction, which is but for a moment...”

Someone might be thinking, “How long will this so called ‘light affliction’ last?”

The answer to that question is simple: it will last until I see Jesus face to face. You see, I have in the name of the Lord declared myself on His side. That has meant for me the renouncing of sin, the renouncing of a self-seeking existence, and the beginning of life as a ministry. And because of that I am expecting all through my life to know something of the light affliction. There will be no escape, but it is only for a moment. In the light of the truth, as I see it, in the light of eternity, it is not going to last long, perhaps twenty or thirty more years, I really do not know. But how short a time in comparison with eternity. It is only temporary.

Not only that, but it is a transforming affliction. Paul says in verse 17 that it “...works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Notice the contrast: affliction, glory; light affliction, weight of glory; light affliction that is but for a moment, weight of glory that is eternal. I want you to see what Paul is saying right here.

The word “weight” here has to do with heaviness. But it also has to do with the weights that are placed on a scale. And Paul is saying this light affliction, those things that you experience in life because you have decided to serve God more than the world, those constant attacks from without and from within, all ultimately coming from the enemy, are simply working for me, as it were, putting on weights that will ultimately balance the scales in my favor at the Judgment Seat of Christ. **That is not to say that we are saved by our work or because of the attacks of Satan.** No, we are saved by simple child-like faith in the finished work of Christ. But, remember, at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we are going to be judged for our *works*, not our *salvation*.

That is Paul’s description of the affliction. That is how he describes the battle: trivial, temporary, transforming. In other words, heaven was so real to his that no amount of problems and heartache could steal away his joy and excitement.

But if this is how Paul describes the battle, look more closely at how he finds the secret of deliverance in it. From where does he get his strength? What is it that makes him feel it is so worthwhile to be on the Lord’s side even though it bring affliction on him every day? **The kind of suffering about which the unbeliever knows nothing about is something that Paul says is working for him.** And he says it is worth every minute of it, and he is thankful for it. **So, how does a believer get the strength to go on when it seems much easier to turn back?**

Paul would tell us he found it because he looked somewhere! Look at what he says in verse 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.” **The Greek word translated “look” in this verse does not mean a casual glance; it is the word you would use if you were to pick up a telescope and try to bring something far away into view, into focus.** It is a word that suggests an intense examination, a constant scrutiny, and a steady gaze. So Paul is saying that his focus is not on

the things that are going on around him because they are only temporary. His focus is on those things that are unseen, eternal, the things that will matter when he stands face to face with the One who saved him by His blood.

Now Paul says, because I have looked and understood, because I have taken the time not just to glance casually at spiritual things, but sat down and thought them through and examined them with my mind and my heart until they came into clear focus, something tremendous has happened in my life. Because I looked so intensely, that look brought conviction. What sort of conviction? We are told in verses 13-14, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.”

In effect, Paul is saying, “I have looked long into the face of my Lord. I have looked beyond this earthly life. As I have gazed, I have thought about heaven, and because of this I have a faith like they had in Old Testament times. As they believed, so I believe, and therefore speak. I have been gripped by this same spirit of faith, and have been convicted that the same God who raised Jesus from the dead is going to raise me also together with you. And one day we are going to meet again in heaven, and stand beside each other as we have ministered to each other here on this earth. We are going to stand together before the Judgment Seat of Christ to give an account of the things done in our bodies. Because I believe this, I can never be the same again. No longer can I hold trust as a mere theory; no longer can I simply discuss the correctness of doctrine. I have been gripped by the reality that one day I am going to meet God face to face. I am going to stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and you will stand there too.”

Child of God, it may be tomorrow, or it may be twenty years, I do not know. But this much I do know, one day pastor and people will stand together before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is a very

solemn thought to me as I look back over my years of ministry. **How have I acted?** Have I been kind, have I been loving, have I been gracious, have I been Christ-like? **Have I loved in a way worthy of a servant of God?** **Have I prayed over my ministry, as I should have?** Would that have been more people saved if I have been the man I should have been? These things I ask myself as my soul has been gripped by this verse.

But, let me ask you – How have you reacted and what has been your response to the message through the many years that you may have sat under the ministry of some servant of God? What has been your conservation outside the church concerning the preacher and the leadership? **How have you received the ministry?** **Have you been kind, Christ-like, and gracious?** God who rose up Jesus shall also raise me up together with you, and we shall stand and look into His face. And that conviction should cause each of us to live our life in the light of eternity.

Now look at verse 16, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” **Paul is sharing something that each of us know, that is, the outward man is perishing.** And because of that, it is hard sometimes to keep going and maintain the pace while the outward shell in which we live is decaying.

But he doesn’t stop there, he continues, “...yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” Surely this is what we have been told in Isaiah 40:31, “...they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

Although it is true that the years are passing and I am growing older, it is also true that I am receiving strength for the battle, strength to bear affliction. For this cause I never faint because day-by-day I am finding an abundance of grace to meet my every need.

Are you in the battle? Or are you so foolish that you have only looked at the things that are seen? Are you completely given over to the things that are temporal, to the making of money, and to the prosperity of business, or the collection of things? Are you in the fight or have you given up?