

The Spirit of Faith 2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

This past two (2) weeks has been particularly stressful because of my secular job. I had attended a meeting at the end of May and learned there was a grant opportunity for serving Veterans from our Armed Forces. President Obama has an initiative to make sure that veterans get good job after faithfully serving this country. It is rare that such money makes its way to Michigan, so we were encouraged to write a proposal to the U.S. Department of Labor for \$750,000 (3/4 of a million dollars) to \$1,250,000 (one and a quarter million dollars). My supervisor initially said we weren't ready, but I convinced her it was worth an attempt. The more research I did the more I understand her point of not being ready; so on Friday we agreed that this is not the right time. However under normal circumstances my supervisor is a wonderful visionary who can see the invisible before her very eyes and put it on paper so that funders can catch the vision and want to become a partner of the life enhancing project that changes people's lives, including their families and communities! In fact, least than an hour after our "we're not going to write that proposal" conversation, we met with a nationally known financial institution whose management team appeared supportive of our interest in Veterans and want to partner with us to make this happen! As you can tell I am impressed with how my supervisor can "see" with the "Spirit of Faith," not as things are, but how they can be.

Our scripture this morning is a passage that I have used for funerals when we have said goodbye to our loved ones. However this time as I studied the passage I realized that it had a great deal to say to us about our living hope and seeing through the Spirit of Faith. The phrase spirit of faith means "attitude or outlook of faith." Paul was not referring to a special gift of faith (1 Cor. 12:9), but rather to

that attitude of faith that ought to belong to every Christian. He saw himself identified with the believer who wrote Psalm 116:10, “I believed, and therefore have I spoken.” The psalmist had referred to “the anguish of the grave” (116:3), but he affirmed his confidence that God would deliver him “from death” (116:8). That same confidence was Paul’s, so with the psalmist he could declare I believed! The second part of the quotation, Therefore I have spoken, is from the psalmist’s words about his own suffering: “Therefore I said, I am greatly afflicted.” Paul could speak of his suffering and death because he was confident that God would deliver him (compare 1:9-10). This confidence was founded on the resurrection of Christ, the Firstfruit and Guarantee of resurrection for all who place their faith for salvation in Him (1 Cor. 15:12-19; 1 Thes. 4:14).

Paul was a true witness for God, based on faith in God. But this faith also comes from God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). So in what was Paul so confident? That he had nothing to fear from life or death! In this letter he had just listed some of the trials that were a part of his life and ministry, and now he was affirming that his faith gave him victory over all of them. Note the assurances that he had because of his faith.

Paul was sure of ultimate victory (v. 14). If Jesus Christ has conquered death, the last enemy, then why fear anything else? Humans do everything they can to penetrate the meaning of death and prepare for it, yet the world has no answer to death. Until a person is prepared to die, he or she is not really prepared to live. The joyful message of the early church was the victory of Christ over death, and we need to return to that victorious emphasis. Note too that Paul saw a future reunion of God’s people when he wrote, “and will bring us with you into his presence.” Death is the great divider, but in Jesus Christ there is assurance that God’s people shall be reunited in God’s presence (1 Thes. 4:13–18).

Paul was sure God would be glorified (v. 15). This verse parallels Romans 8:28 and gives us the assurance that our sufferings are not wasted: God uses them to minister to others and also to bring glory to His name. How is God glorified in our trials? By giving us the “abundant grace,” God’s unmerited goodness and kindness we need to maintain joy and strength when the going gets difficult. Whatever begins with grace, leads to glory (see Ps. 84:11; 1 Peter 5:10).

Paul was sure his trials were working for him, not against him (vv. 16–17). “We faint not” (2 Cor. 4:1) was Paul’s confident testimony. What does it matter if the “outward person” is perishing, so long as the “inward person” is experiencing daily spiritual renewal? Paul was not suggesting that the body is not important, or that we should ignore its warnings and needs. Since our bodies are the temples of God, we must care for them; but we cannot control the natural deterioration of human nature.

As Christians, we must live a day at a time. No person, no matter how wealthy or gifted, can live two days at a time. God provides for us “day by day” as we pray (Luke 11:3). God gives us the strength that we need according to our daily requirements (Deut. 33:25). We must not make the mistake of trying to “store up grace” for future emergencies, because God gives us the grace that we need when we need it (Heb. 4:16). When we learn to live a day at a time, confident of God’s care, it takes a great deal of pressure off of our lives.

Yard by yard, life is hard!

Inch by inch, life’s a cinch!

When we live by faith in Christ, we get the right perspective on suffering. Rather than feeling burdened down Paul sees slight affliction that lead to weight of glory; Paul experiences momentary suffering but sees this leading to eternal glory; what other see working against us, Paul says flip the script and see that what is being done is working for us. Paul was writing with eternity’s values in view. He

was weighing the present trials against the future glory, and he discovered that his trials were actually working for him (see Rom. 8:18).

We must not misunderstand this principle and think that a Christian can live any way we please and expect everything to turn into glory in the end. Paul was writing about trials experienced in the will of God as he was doing the work of God. God can and does turn suffering into glory, but He does not turn sin into glory. There are sins of abuse and “isms” (racism, sexism, ageism, etc.) that will be judged, and there is no glory in sin.

Now Paul turns to tell us about our spiritual renewal as children of God. Although, of itself, suffering will not make us holier men and women, when we surrender to God, turn to the Holy Bible, and trust the work of the Holy Spirit, our suffering can make mature Christians. All of us have met Christians who have grown critical and bitter, and go from bad to worse instead of “from glory to glory,” because they have tried to deal with suffering through their own strength and power. We need that “spirit of faith” that helps us to see God’s future plans.

Paul was sure the invisible world was real (v. 18). Dr. A.W. Tozer, twentieth center American pastor, lecturer and writer, used to remind his audiences that the invisible world described in the Bible was the only “real world.” If we would only see the visible world the way God wants us to see it, we would never be attracted by what it offers (1 John 2:15–17). The great men and women of faith, mentioned in Hebrews 11, achieved what they did because they “saw the invisible” (Heb. 11:10, 13–14, 27). They saw through the “spirit of faith.”

The things of this world seem so real because we can see them and feel them; but they are all destined to pass away. Only the eternal things of the spiritual life will last. Now, we must not think that “material” and “spiritual” oppose each other. When we use the material in God’s will, God transforms it into the spiritual. We

value the material because it can be used to promote the spiritual, and not for what it is in itself.

On Thursday I got a visit from one of my former staff that was laid off all most two (2) years ago. She stopped by to say that she was moving to Tennessee to live with her brother and his wife until get could get a part-time job and afford her own place. What she said next was quit revealing. She said “I don’t want to work for an organization that is not mission and people driven. I see Goodwill as I see the church because both genuinely care about people and their lives.” This is an example for me of using the material to promote the spiritual. People need to value of what they can contribute and see themselves as valuable and beloved by God.

We need the spirit of faith to look at things that are invisible. By faith, when we read the Word of God we see the invisible. We have never seen Christ or heaven, but we know they are real because the Word of God tells us so, when we read with the spirit of faith. Faith is “the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). It was the spirit of faith that helped Abraham, the Father of the Faithful and Friend of God, look for the heavenly city, he separated himself from the things that the world had to offer and devoted himself to following God’s ways, he walked by faith and not by sight (Gen. 13; Heb. 11:10).

Of course, the world around us thinks we are odd—perhaps even crazy—because we insist on the reality of the invisible world of spiritual blessing. But we are content to govern our lives by eternal values, through the spirit of faith.

Paul reminds us that we have a future hope. “We have this ministry.... We have this treasure.... We [have] the same spirit of faith.... We have a building of God” (2 Cor. 4:1, 7, 13; 5:1). What a testimony Paul gave to the reality of the Christian faith!

Paul tells his readers that “we know” (v. 1). How do we know? Because we trust the Word of God. No Christian has to consult a fortune-teller, a Ouija board, a spiritist, or a deck of cards to find out what the future holds or what lies on the other side of death. God has told us all that we need to know in the pages of God’s Word. Paul’s “we know” connects us to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that He is alive; therefore, we know that death cannot claim us. Jesus said: “Because I live, you shall live also” (John 14:19).

True, Paul’s earthly mortality was increasingly evident; outwardly he was wasting away (2 Cor. 1:8-9; 4:8-12). But his heavenly destiny was also increasingly evident (vv. 17-18). While physically he grew weaker, spiritually he experienced the renewing (cf. Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:10) work of the Holy Spirit day by day. He was becoming increasingly like Christ (2 Cor. 3:18), a prelude to what will be (cf. Rom. 8:23; 1 John 3:2).

Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:1–3) and here he used a tent as a picture of our present earthly bodies. A tent is a weak, temporary structure, without much beauty; but the glorified body we shall receive will be eternal, beautiful, and never show signs of weakness or decay (see Phil. 3:20–21). Paul saw the human body as an earthen vessel (2 Cor. 4:7) and a temporary tent; but he knew that Christians will one day receive a wonderful glorified body, suited to the glorious environment of heaven.¹

Paul reminds us in this ministry there will be suffering, but in the same way that my supervisor can envision services that will change people’s lives, so we must see through the spirit of faith what God is doing to and through us. This ministry is given to us by God and God has plans for how we are to live and serve others, how

vv. verses

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. 2 Co 4:13

one day we will be servants of our community, how one day men and women and boys and girls will come asking what must I do to be saved, and we will introduce them to Jesus. Whatever we are experiencing right now is not to be compared to the glory that will be revealed.² For this very reason, a person's eyes must be fixed, not on the things that are seen, but on the things that are unseen. The things that are seen, the things of this world, have their day and cease to be; the things that are unseen, the things of God, last forever.³ Thanks to God!

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:564

³ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letters to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 197