

2 Corinthians 4:12

Death Works in Us — Life in You — The Eternal Weight of Glory

Scripture Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:12–5:1

“So then, death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I have 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. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 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.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Death Working in Us — The Moral Power

What helps explain verse 12 is the thought of the vessel. The vessels of Gideon’s 300 men were broken and the light shone through. Our bodies do not just suddenly disintegrate — so there is another sense in which death works in us, and that is morally. The moral power of the Lord’s death has to work on the vessel so that the light shines through. And by having the light in the vessel, verses 10, 11, and 12 are all true of the vessels: in that process of death working in us, the

service that is performed works life in those who receive it.

The doctrine of Scripture is that we have died with Christ — we are dead unto sin, dead to the world, and so forth. The practical outworking of those doctrines is that death is working in the vessel. Is that doctrine having power in the life? If it is having power, the life is stamped morally by death working in it. Because we are dead to everything. And only in proportion as that is experimentally true does the light shine out. At the same time, a service conducted in that manner works life in the saints, because life comes through death. Doctrinally true and practically true.

One might have expected a verse to say, “so then, resurrection works in us.” But it does not. It says death works in us. This is not referring to the fact that we carry within us the seeds of physical death imposed governmentally at the fall — that is a different matter. Bearing about the dying of Jesus is the moral power of his death, those things he died to, his being not of this world. We bear that about.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 says: “the day of death is better than the day of one’s birth; it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all man; and the living will lay it to his heart.” God’s way is first cease to do evil, and then learn to do well. A dead man has ceased to do evil. We are to reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin. The apostle said in the very first chapter of this epistle, verse 9, that they had the sentence of death in themselves, that they should not trust in themselves but in God who raises the dead.

A Sweet Savour of Christ

In 2 Corinthians 2:15–16, death working in the believer is connected with being a savour: “We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish — to the one a savour of death unto death, and to the other a savour of life unto life. Who is sufficient for these things?” When death works in a believer, there is something about meeting them, talking with them, seeing

them, that a person will sense. Lost souls on their way to hell get a whiff of that death. Saved souls should sense that there is life there. Not life obtained by contact with us, but Christ himself manifested — for me to live is Christ. Fleshly liveliness is not life. We are looking for the manifestation of Christ in a life; that is what is to shine out.

The Same Spirit of Faith — Psalm 116

Verse 13 begins: “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.” It is a quotation from Psalm 116, verse 10. There is a beautiful continuity of the spirit of faith between the Old Testament saints and the New — the object of that faith may differ according to the revelation God brings out at the time, but the spirit of faith itself is the same for all the saints. And that will be true of those who believe God’s testimony in the millennium also. The content or object before faith varies dispensationally; the faith is the same spirit of faith.

Psalm 116 is a psalm about death — that is almost all it is about. “The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of Sheol got hold upon me.” “Thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.” “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” In the mind of the speaker, it is a psalm of resurrection — a psalm about death, but about walking before the Lord in the land of the living. And the apostle Paul, writing 2 Corinthians 4 and needing to quote a verse from the Psalms, picked a perfect psalm. He quoted just the right amount: I believed, therefore have I spoken. He did not quote “I was greatly afflicted” — for a dead man does not suffer those afflictions. He took what was needed for the subject at hand: faith and testimony.

I believe, therefore have I spoken — the spirit of faith comes first, and therefore testimony flows. When the Lord entered Jerusalem and certain children were

saying, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” and the Pharisees asked the Lord to rebuke them, the Lord answered that if these held their peace, the stones would cry out. There is a connection there with our verse: real faith given by God breaks forth irresistibly into testimony. The apostle says, we also believe, and therefore also we speak — knowing something. He knows, he believes, and therefore he speaks.

Shall Present Us with You

What he believes and speaks is resurrection: knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus shall raise us also with Jesus, and shall present us with you. This is more than the bare fact of resurrection. There is an intimate association implicit in it — we are wrapped up in one bundle of life before God in him. There is a vital connection between himself and us.

And he shall present us with you — not merely individually, but together. All wrapped up in one connection with the Lord Jesus. Ephesians 5:25–27 has a similar presenting: that Christ might present the church to himself — not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. The collective character and the togetherness with the Lord Jesus. God himself will present us before himself, faultless, before the throne of his glory. And eternal security is implicit here: if he raised up the Lord Jesus, he shall raise up us also by Jesus. How is it possible that some should slip through the cracks? He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. The word knowing in the verse is a word that gives assurance, and that assurance is characteristic of those who have been truly brought to know the Lord.

For All Things Are for Your Sakes

For all things are for your sakes — all the things he and his fellow servants were passing through, the long catalogue of afflictions including shipwrecks and

scourgings, the things catalogued in verse 8 and following. They passed through all of these in the course of bringing the gospel to places and bringing ministry to the Lord's people. There is a grace abounding through the many, and thanksgiving rising up to God for his sustaining of those servants, and this redounds to the glory of God. Paul knew that the saints were praying for them. There is sustainment in service through the prayers of the saints.

The Inward Man Renewed Day by Day

Wherefore we faint not: though the outward man is consumed, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. In Romans 7 there is something called the inner man — even the man of Romans 7, not yet set free, had divine life operative in his soul. If you have no inner man, there is nothing to renew day by day. There is an inward that can be renewed while the outer perishes. And the context is very much about service — this concept is about serving the Lord. We are all the Lord's, and he has something for each one of us to do. It does not have to be a large, noisy thing. Among the gifts listed is helps. Every Christian ought to be helping in some way, yet there is a gift of helping as with the gift of giving. Many a one thinks they cannot do very much and therefore does nothing — there is a great deal of help that goes ungiven because it seems unglamorous. But that is not God's thought.

A Momentary and Light Affliction — An Eternal Weight of Glory

Our momentary and light affliction works for us in surpassing measure an eternal weight of glory. How long life seems depends on which end of it you are standing. But the judgment of the Spirit of God through the pen of the apostle is: it is momentary. That is true whether one is at one end of life or the other or somewhere in between. The more we grasp the momentariness of it, the more we want to use what little we have for the Lord Jesus, for his glory. If we use it for self, it is gone — momentarily spent on nothing. This was how the apostle

counted all the severe things he and the others went through: a momentary and light affliction. It takes a great deal of grace to look at things that way. Grace was powerfully operative in these servants of the Lord.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen — that “while” is not exactly a note of time. It is more an account of how he is enabled to count afflictions the way he does: I am not looking at the things that are seen; I am looking at the things that are not seen. W.T. Turpin wrote a paper called “The Ensnaring Effects of the Visible.” The visible ensnares us. If we do our calculations of things by what can be observed, we come to certain conclusions. But when spiritual sight is fixed on what is not seen, we come to different conclusions. His eye was fixed on the invisible — and therefore he was enabled to say, I believe, therefore have I spoken. He saw the visible things in accordance with the things that are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:1 takes up the same subject: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” We know. That is one thing that has for a long time characterized the testimony of those truly gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus: a note of knowing, of assurance of salvation. And there is a beautiful word surpassing running through this chapter — surpassing power, surpassing measure, surpassing glory. It is a Christian word, a word for the blessedness we have been brought into. Everything in connection with it surpasses everything else.

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.