

The Weight of Glory

Easter Sunday

2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10

Pastor Josh Black

The Implications of the Resurrection

He is risen! He is risen indeed! We've spent this morning celebrating the resurrection in songs, in prayers, and in baptism. Now, as we turn to the preaching of God's Word, we're going to spend time thinking about the implications of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. How does Christ's resurrection affect our daily lives?

How many of you here are in a season of life where you're on the verge of losing heart? How many are discouraged? Maybe you or someone you love is sick or ridden with disease. Maybe you or someone you love is facing death. Maybe you're grieving the loss of a loved one who's represented in one of these Easter lilies on the platform. Maybe your ministry is bearing little to no fruit, and you're ready to give up. Our text this morning speaks to all of these issues. You don't have to lose heart. You can be of good courage because of the resurrection of Jesus. In this passage Paul tells us how the resurrection should affect the way we view all of these things. It teaches us that we don't have to lose heart. We can be of good courage.

2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10¹

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹³Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as 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.

^{5:1}For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened--not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰For we must all appear

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Jars of Clay

The basic argument of this text is laid out in verses 7-15. Paul explains that gospel ministry involves suffering. We have the treasure of the gospel. But we have it in weak, fragile, and breakable bodies—in jars of clay (v. 7). As we engage in gospel ministry, we'll be afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and even possibly struck down. We are weak, but the gospel is strong. Because of the gospel, we're not crushed, not driven to despair, and not destroyed (vv. 8-9). Why is this true? Well, the gospel announces that Jesus suffered in his ministry, to the point of death, even death on a cross. But God raised him in glory (v. 14). Those who give their lives to gospel ministry will also suffer; maybe even to the point of death. But if we're in Christ, we'll also be raised in glory one day. If we believe this, we should continue to suffer for the gospel, so that it can spread to more and more people, so that they too can move from death to life (vv. 12, 15). In other words, suffering for the gospel is worth it. That's my sermon in a sentence. Why is suffering for the gospel worth it? Verse 17 tells us that the weight of glory makes suffering for the gospel worth it. But why is the glory that awaits us so weighty? Or maybe an even more basic question: What *is* this glory that's so weighty? I'd like to spend the rest of my time answering these two questions.

THE WEIGHT

First of all, why does Paul call glory weighty? Paul seems to be saying that whatever our afflictions are in this life, they're nothing compared to the glory that awaits us if we're in Christ. In fact, Paul calls the afflictions he's going through light compared to the weight of glory. Now I want to give you some perspective on this. What exactly are the afflictions that Paul calls "light"? We're told in 2 Corinthians 11:23-27. They include:

- Imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death.
- Five times he received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.
- Three times he was beaten with rods.
- Once he was stoned.
- Three times he was shipwrecked.
- For a night and day he was adrift at sea.
- On frequent journeys he was in danger from robbers, in danger from his own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the wilderness, in danger at sea, in danger from false brothers.
- He was in toil and hardship and experienced many sleepless nights.
- He was hungry and thirsty, often without food.
- He slept in the cold, exposed to the elements.

I don't know about you, but these afflictions don't seem light to me! These are certainly worse than anything I've ever faced. So often we think suffering involves going without cable TV or WiFi. Or maybe having to eat a steak burger from Freddy's, when they forgot to "hold the pickles." Paul's afflictions were quite heavy. But not in comparison to the weight of glory. Picture a scale if you will. From a human perspective, Paul's sufferings are like an anvil on the scales. From a human perspective, they're quite heavy. But the glory of the resurrection is like a ton of bricks. The weight

of glory tips the scales. In fact, it breaks the scales! His afflictions were light and momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory.

What prevents you from engaging in gospel ministry? What keeps you from boldly sharing the good news that Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead? Is it fear of rejection? That someone will think you're a Bible thumper or a fanatic. Is it your fear of being uncomfortable? Heaven forbid you have to go without some of your creature comforts. Is it a fear of being unsafe? Maybe you don't want to live in a sketchy neighborhood, or even drive through one! There are some people in this church who come from a different country. Their faithfulness to the gospel, or their baptism, may actually threaten their safety or the safety of their family. But most of us rarely face anything like this for Jesus. But regardless of what you face, it's all light and momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory. Do you believe this? Do you feel the weight of glory?

GLORY

Well to answer that question, we have to answer our second question. What is the glory that Paul's speaking of? And what makes it so heavy that it could propel us toward greater faithfulness with the gospel? In our culture, when we think of glory we think of two things.² We think of a person or a thing looking glorious. Maybe it's a man or a woman who is a physical specimen to behold. Or maybe it's a glorious display of architecture. Or a glorious landscape. Regardless, physical glory is something we're familiar with. We're also familiar with the glory of fame. When we think of a person "in all of their glory," we think of famous people. There's a sense in which these are the right categories to think in. Paul addresses both physical glory and the glory of fame. But his picture of glory looks very different from the glory of the world. And the world's idea of glory doesn't hold the "weight" that Paul is talking about. Nevertheless, I'm going to use these two categories to describe what Paul means when he talks about the weight of glory.

Resurrection Bodies

He begins by talking about physical glory. More specifically he talks about our physical, resurrection bodies. The weight of glory includes our resurrection bodies. One of the reasons a Christian may lose heart is the presence of physical ailments, or the threat of physical harm, or even death. But Paul says there's no reason to worry about our physical bodies being broken like clay pots or our bodies withering away. Because, eventually, we'll be like Jesus. We'll be given a resurrection body that will last forever. Paul develops this in chapter 5. In verse 1, he says our bodies are like tents. As you know, tents aren't intended for permanent residence. They're temporary. I don't know about you, but even one night in a tent causes me to groan. You sweat or you're cold. You toss and turn all night. Water and bugs always seem to find their way into the tent. You wake up sore all over. There's no shower. You get the point. Tent camping is not all it's cracked up to be. I think that's why the RV market does so well. Some of you here have been living in a tent for a long time. And you groan. If you're over 30 or 40, you have aches and pains. You spend more time with the doctor than a nurse does. You're taking more drugs than a dope fiend. And you're acutely aware that the wind and the rain may blow your tent down at any moment. The possibility of death is more noticeable the longer you live in the tent of your earthly body. It's easy to lose heart or to be discouraged. Others have actually lost a loved one to death. And you grieve. The death of our friends and family can also cause us to lose heart or to be discouraged. But if we realize that we're

² These are both adapted from Lewis, Clive S. "The Weight of Glory" in *The Weight of Glory: and Other Addresses*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1949, p. 8.

tent camping and it's only temporary, that will help us to not lose heart, and to be of good courage. One day we will move into a permanent residence, much better than a tent, and even better than an RV! When this earthly body is destroyed, we'll have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. We'll be like Christ. Our resurrection bodies will last forever. They'll not be subject to decay or death. They'll be eternal, because they'll be built by God, not with human hands. This is an amazing reality.

So many people think that when we die, we'll simply be disembodied spirits. But that's not the picture we have in Scripture. In verse 4, Paul says he doesn't want to be unclothed (he doesn't want to simply have a disembodied spirit). He wants to be further clothed. He wants his mortal body be swallowed up by life. He looks forward to his resurrection body. We won't go from having shabby clothes to being naked. We'll put on the most glorious clothes you can imagine. If we're living in tents now, we'll be living in the Taj Mahal then. We groan now, longing for the day when we won't experience physical pain or threat of physical death. And that longing is legitimate. In fact, it's guaranteed for those who are in Christ. We'll go the way he went. Verse 5 tells us that God has prepared us for our resurrection bodies. And the Spirit is a guarantee that it'll happen. This is an amazing promise. And an even more amazing promise is the promise that when we die we will be with the LORD. Verse 8 tells us that when we're away from the body, we'll be at home with the Lord. We will behold his glory for eternity. That in itself is a weighty truth! Do you believe this? Do you feel the weight of glory? Don't lose heart. Be of good courage.

Well done...

Let's look now at the second aspect of the glory that awaits those who believe in Christ. This has to do with what our culture calls fame, or being thought well of by someone. Hollywood and professional sports are full of people our culture calls glorious. In C.S. Lewis' sermon, "The Weight of Glory," he says that some people want to be thought of as better than other people. This is the world's version of fame. This is a competitive passion that will land you in hell, not in heaven.³ This is a desire that's fueled by pride. But that's not what's being spoken of in 2 Corinthians. 2 Corinthians speaks of receiving God's approval, not man's praise. The weight of glory includes Christ's approval of us.

The desire to be famous can be a godly and heavenly motivation. And it can hold a weight that enables us to be faithful to Christ. If it's a desire for fame, that's not conferred by our fellow creatures but rather by a desire for "fame" with God, then it's good. The desire to gain God's approval is a desire to be famous in God's eyes. It's similar to the desire to stand before God and have him say of us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."⁴ This is a major paradigm shift in our culture. But the desire for this type of glory is godly, and it's quite weighty. It's the type of desire that enables us to not lose heart and to be of good courage. Lewis encourages us to frame this desire within the truth that we can't enter the kingdom of God unless we become like little children. Not like a conceited child, mind you; but like a good child. Listen to Lewis in his own words.

I suddenly remembered that no one can enter heaven except as a child; and nothing is so obvious in a child as his great and undisguised pleasure in being praised. Apparently what I had mistaken for humility had, all these years, prevented me from understanding what is in fact the humblest, the most

³ Lewis, p. 8.

⁴ Lewis, pp. 8-9.

*childlike, the most creaturely of pleasures—nay, the specific pleasure of the inferior: the pleasure of a beast before men, a child before its father, a pupil before his teacher, a creature before its Creator.*⁵

In verse 9, Paul says it this way. “So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.” He goes on in verse 10. “We will all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” We were created to please God. This is one of the most basic things about us. And his promise of our glorious resurrection enables us to seek to please him even in the face of suffering and opposition. That glory has weight. But the glory of Christ’s approval itself also has weight. The prospect of having Jesus say to us in the end, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” should motivate our faithfulness to him. That day, when we receive the glory that comes from God and not man, should carry so much weight that it affects the way we live this day. Do you believe this? Do you feel the weight of glory? Do not lose heart. Be of good courage.

Conclusion

Lewis says that all of our legitimate longings have a real fulfillment. Take our desire for food for example. The presence of hunger proves that food exists. But just because food exists doesn’t mean that we will actually find any bread. Some people do in fact die of hunger. In the same way, our longing for a resurrection body and the desire to be approved by Jesus on the last day prove that resurrection bodies exist and the approval of Jesus is available. But simply having these desires doesn’t guarantee you’ll have them met.⁶ What must you do to ensure that these desires will be met? Paul goes on to tell us in 5:20 that we must be reconciled to God. And in order to be reconciled to God, we must believe that Jesus paid the penalty for our sins through his death on the cross. “For our sake God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We must look on the cross of Christ for forgiveness. And we must believe that Jesus’ resurrection paves the way to eternal life. We must look to Jesus in faith if we want to go the way that Jesus went. Jesus died and was raised. If we want to be raised when we die, we have to trust him for our salvation. Then and only then will we receive his approval on the last day. The weight of our resurrection bodies and the weight of Christ’s approval are the weight of glory. They’re the implications of Christ’s resurrection. And they should help us to not lose heart. They should give us courage.

⁵ Lewis, p. 9.

⁶ Lewis, p. 6.