

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 19th January 2025 am
TITLE: "Faith to see the unseen" TEXT: 2 Corinthians 4:13-15 & Psalm 116
Scripture references from the ESV

Psalm 116

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² *Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.*

³ *The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.*

⁴ *Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!"*

⁵ *Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.*

⁶ *The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.*

⁷ *Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.*

⁸ *For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;*

⁹ *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*

¹⁰ *I believed, even when I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted";*

¹¹ *I said in my alarm, "All mankind are liars."*

¹² *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?*

¹³ *I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,*

¹⁴ *I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.*

¹⁵ *Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*

¹⁶ *O Lord, I am your servant; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant. You have loosed my bonds.*

¹⁷ *I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord.*

¹⁸ *I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people,*

¹⁹ *in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem.*

Praise the Lord!

2 Cor 4:13-15: Since 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, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ For 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.

Without the anticipation of something good, hope dies. If we are not going to lose heart, we need the anticipation of something better. To have that anticipation, we are exhorted by Paul

to look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen (2Cor 4:18)

This look is the look of faith. There is a reality that is more real than our own physical being, and that is the reality of the existence of God, without whom we would not exist. By faith, we look to spiritual, eternal realities, and as we do, we are kept from losing heart. The look of faith is a look in two different directions.

1. **Faith looks to the past.** In 2 Cor 4:13, Paul quotes a verse from Psalm 116 (v10 above) and points us to look at the whole psalm. The Psalmist was facing death (v3), and in the midst of this great affliction, he does what so many of us do when we are facing hard circumstances. He calls out to the only one who can help him (v4).

He cries out to God

The only one who is stronger than his affliction

The only one who has the power to deliver him

He discovers that God is gracious and merciful and comes to his aid to deliver him (vv8-9). He follows this with words (v10) that show that his cry to God for help was not a lack of faith, but rather a cry of faith. When we, as God's people call out to God in our great distress, with the assurance that only he can help us, then that cry for help is likely to come because of faith, rather than because of the lack of it.

The Psalmist believed God had delivered him and so spoke about it. Paul does the same (2 Cor 4:13 above). There are other parallels between **Psalm 116** and **2 Corinthians 4**. The Psalmist listed his afflictions, and so does Paul. Paul speaks about the way God strengthened him, just as the Psalmist does. The Psalmist speaks about his faith and so does Paul.

- Paul is looking back over his own life in faith and recognising that the reason his afflictions did not overwhelm him was not because of anything he did, but because God was with him in the affliction.
- He looks back even further to other faithful sufferers like the Psalmist, who was afflicted but trusted God, and also experienced God's deliverance.

Faith looks back at God's past deliverances

- In faith we look back at where we have been delivered and acknowledge that it was not coincidence, human ability or strength.

It was God.

Faith looks back at what God has done for other faithful sufferers of the past, and it trusts that what God has done for them, he will do for us. In the Old Testament, God reveals himself to us, not in some abstract way, but in the nitty gritty of the every day lives of real people who lived here on earth and experienced God's deliverance in their afflictions.

The writer to the Hebrews gives us a list of Old Testament saints (Ch11), and shows how they trusted God and were delivered and strengthened in their affliction. He goes on: **Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:1-2)**

We are in the long line of faithful sufferers who trusted God in their affliction, called out to him and experienced him delivering them.

Their history is our history.

Faith looks to the past.

- 2. Faith looks to the future.** What happens when we have set our own agenda and deliverance does not come in the way we expected God to act? Paul's faith allows him to look at two future unseen realities (vv13b-15 above)
- The unseen reality of the resurrection and the unseen reality of doxology, as God is gloried in the thanksgiving of those he has redeemed.

**Central to the gospel message is not just that Jesus died,
but that Jesus now lives in a resurrection body.**

Paul writes: **Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:1-4)**

For Paul, the truth of Jesus being resurrected was not just some theological fact to be stored in the head. It was a truth that shaped the way he lived his life and changed the way he thought about his afflictions.

Paul tells us that faith leads to **knowing (2 Cor 4:13)**. There is certainty that faith has laid hold of and is willing to speak about. What is that he knows and is so certain of? We read this in v14: **knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.** Faith speaks with certainty here and for Paul this certainty is life changing. It enables him to endure his afflictions and to give his life for Jesus and for those who Jesus is saving.

Paul makes an amazing statement: **For 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. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2Cor 4:11-12).** He is content that death is at work in him for the sake of others being able to have life. He is not trying to escape the hard place of suffering in ministry. He knows that, even after his body has been laid in a grave, it will be raised to life.

He knows that resurrection life awaits him and that changes everything for Paul.

It makes suffering in the service of Jesus worthwhile.

There is another strand that also works to make suffering worthwhile. It is that God is glorified in the lives of those who have come to faith through Paul's ministry (**2 Cor 4:15**). Ministry has taken Paul into many afflictions but that has resulted in more and more people hearing the gospel and experiencing God's grace. One day that will result in God being glorified in the eternal doxology of thanksgiving, and so Paul is content to offer up his life everyday for the sake of the gospel.

Our resurrection is as sure as Jesus' resurrection

- Do you believe that as surely and certainly as Paul did, so that it changes the way you view your current afflictions?

Most of us know that the anticipation of something good in the future will keep us from losing hope, but, in our comfortable 21st century western culture, we tend to only look to short term gains. We think of the next holiday, major purchase, family gatherings, a better medical diagnosis or retirement. These are good things that God has given us,

but he has not promised them to us and none of them are certain. We need to look further ahead because

He has promised us something much better, which is absolutely certain and will last forever

- He has promised us resurrection life in his presence and a place in the eternal doxology of thanksgiving to him for his amazing grace.

The look of faith is not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen

We are to look back at how God has delivered us in the past and forward to the promised certain resurrection life of praise to God. Contrast two lives to see what difference this outlook makes:

- The great Russian author, Leo Tolstoy, had it all – success, money, good health and a devoted family. Yet he seriously considered hanging himself. To him, death meant that he would lose everything and lie forgotten in a grave. He based his life on rational knowledge, and wrote: *Rational knowledge had led me to recognise that life is meaningless. My life came to a halt and I wanted to kill myself.*
- The missionary John Paton was advised against going to Vanuatu. A Mr Dickson told him: *You will be eaten by cannibals!* This was quite a likely outcome, as it had happened before. Paton's response was: *"Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honouring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.* He lived through many afflictions but, in all the suffering, he was sustained by the assurance of resurrection life and the eternal doxology of thanksgiving to God by those saved.

The resurrection assures us that what we lose in death now, we get back but better! Ultimately, we cannot lose.

i. How can we be sure the resurrection is true?

Other faiths have versions of life after death which inspire their followers to do extraordinary things. Christianity is different because the one our faith is founded upon, the Lord Jesus Christ, was himself resurrected to life in an eternal body. The

founders of other religions all died and are still dead. To follow them is to follow them into the grave.

- Jesus not only went into the grave but came out of it alive in a real body that was resurrected and fit for eternity

He declared that he is the resurrection and the life and those who believe in him would live after they had died. What Jesus declared, he experienced and secured for those who would believe in him.

To follow Jesus is to follow him, not into the grave, but into resurrection life.

We know he lived because his resurrection was witnessed by the apostles, the women who followed him and, on one occasion, by over 500 believers. Their lives were transformed by seeing Jesus alive, and they were willing to suffer and die to defend the truth of the resurrection. Paul was one of those who saw Jesus alive after he had died, and when he declares the truth of the resurrection, he is telling us what he has actually seen. He was willing to be mocked, beaten and put to death for defending this truth.

ii. How can we grow this faith in the resurrection?

Faith comes from God's word and is a gift from God, we need to do two things.

a) Meditate on the word of God. Take time to prayerfully meditate on the resurrection accounts in the Bible.

- What will it mean for you and your loved ones to be resurrected on that day when Jesus returns?
- What will it mean to have a body that will never again suffer the effects of age and sin?

Take something you struggle with now, and think about what it will be like for that struggle to be over. It might be:

- Physical pain or emotional trauma
- A besetting sin
- A limitation that stops you doing what you want to do

As you think about it, press through past retirement and the grave, and on into resurrection life.

b) **Be honest with God about your struggles to believe in those things you cannot see.** Jesus did not rebuke the man who said 'help me in my unbelief'. Instead, he worked in his affliction in a way that strengthened his faith.

This truth of the resurrection becomes real to us as we bring it to bear upon our current afflictions and ask God to give us the eyes of faith to see what is unseen. It is like that, because we are called into fellowship with Jesus Christ. The way we fellowship with him is by his word and his Spirit, taking what he says, pressing through and speaking to him about it.

**As we do this, so the life of Christ is grown in us by his Spirit
and we begin to have the assurance of seeing the things that are unseen.**

**So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being
renewed day by day.**

**For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond
all comparison,**

as 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.