

# **Coming to terms with Weaknesses and Mortality**

2 Corinthians 4: 1, 7-10, 16-18

# Living in Eternity's Light

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

(Colossians 3: 1-4)

# Only 2 mindsets

- above / below
- heaven / earth
- Above: Christ is seated at God's right hand
- Below: Satan's territory
- Above: eternal
- Below: temporary

# Heavenly or Earthly focus determines our ...

- **Attitude toward** weaknesses and the inevitability of death

# Accepting our weaknesses & mortality

- Many believers struggle with questions of God's goodness, faithfulness, and love when facing weaknesses and the inevitability of death

## 2 Corinthians 4 and 5: 1-10

- Theme of 2 Corinthians: The Strength of Weakness
- How God uses our weakness (including our death) to achieve His purposes
- 2 Corinthians - written in response to a complicated history between Paul and church at Corinth
- Paul's emotions/feelings come through loud & clear

# AD 49 – 52; Acts 15:36 – 18:22



**PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY**

# Corinthian church: spiritually troubled group of believers

- Multitude of problems symptomatic of 2 root problems – church's leadership and wrong doctrine
- Grossly distorted image of what a servant leader is
- Did not believe in bodily resurrection of the dead (Paul tackled this issue in 1 Corinthians 15 and throughout 2 Corinthians, especially in chs. 4 & 5)



# Paul's leadership challenged / opposed

Paul	“Super”/False Apostles
Appears weak (11: 29-30)	Appear strong
Not eloquent (2 Cor. 10:10)	Eloquent (smooth talking)
Unimpressive(2 Cor. 10:10)	Most impressive; extensive credentials, etc.
Servant attitude	Exploited the believers (2 Cor. 11: 20)
“inadequate” (2 Cor. 2:16)	
“out of his mind” (2 Cor. 11: 23)	

# The Corinthian Letters

- Letter A (lost; see 1 Cor. 5: 9)
- **Letter B (1 Corinthians; written AD 53, 54, 55?)**
- Letter C (lost; “tearful letter” see 2 Cor. 2: 3-4)
- **Letter D (2 Corinthians; written AD 55/56)**

## 2 Crucial Questions for proper interpretation and application

- To whom is Paul referring when he writes “we” and “our”?
- What does Paul mean when he speaks about death and dying?

## Consider this passage ...

17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

3:1 Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. (2 Cor. 2: 17 – 3:2)

- We = Paul, Timothy and Silvanus (2 Cor. 1: 19)
- You = believers at Corinth

## Consider this passage ...

<sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Cor. 4: 11-12)

- We = itinerant evangelists, who like Paul, proclaim the true gospel at great personal risk and expense
- “We” and “our” did not originally include all believers; however, the same truths and principles can apply to all believers generally

## 2 Crucial Questions for proper interpretation and application

- To whom is Paul referring when he writes “we” and “our”?
- What does Paul mean when he speaks about death and dying?

## Consider this passage ...

7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. 8 We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. 9 We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. 10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. (2 Cor. 4: 7-11; NLT)

# What does Paul mean when he speaks about death and dying?

- Context: troubles and persecution (hunted down, knocked down, perplexed; pressed on every side)
- Martyrdom or being persecuted as a way of life?
- “Death of Jesus” (v. 10) - word used is “nekrosis” (dying) rather than “thanatos” (death)
- “we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus” (v. 11; NLT)
- “taking up our cross daily to follow Jesus”



# Outline for 2 Corinthians 4 & 5

- Our “dying” daily produces good for others and brings glory to God (4: 7-15)
- Our “dying” daily produces great good in the present and the future (4: 16-18)
- Our “death” means we exchange our inferior bodies for superior ones (5: 1-10)

# Our “dying” daily produces good for others and brings glory to God

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. . . . <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

(2 Cor. 4: 1, 7-12)

# Hardships reveal God's preserving power

Pressed on every side by trouble	Not crushed
Perplexed	Not driven to despair
Hunted down	Never abandoned by God
Knocked down	Not destroyed

# Our “dying” daily produces good for others and brings glory to God

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# Which comes first - resurrection or death?

<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, <sup>11</sup> so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! (Philippians 3: 10-11; NLT)

“I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels - a plentiful harvest of new lives.” (John 12: 24; NLT)

10 Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies. 11 Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. 12 So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you. 13 But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, “I believed in God, so I spoke.” 14 We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. 15 All of this is for your benefit. And as God’s grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory. (2 Cor. 10-15; NLT)

# Our “dying” daily produces good for others and brings glory to God

- Paul’s response to false apostles: my weakness as an apostle is the very means by which God is made known to the lost
- How about us?

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# Our dying produces great good in the present and the future

<sup>16</sup> That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. <sup>17</sup> For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! <sup>18</sup> So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (2 Cor. 4: 16-18; NLT)

# God uses our weakness and our dying to accomplish His purposes

- restore and refine our character
- use us to reach the lost and bring them into His kingdom
- prepare us for an eternity with Him

# God used weakness and death to accomplish His purposes

- Our salvation was accomplished through the weakness of Christ's death on the cross !

# Reflecting on the suffering of Job ...

■ “The reason for suffering is not rooted in the past, but in the future – it may not be punishment for past sins, but is designed to develop our character. ... God is less interested in answering our questions than in other things: securing our allegiance, establishing our faith, nurturing our desire for holiness.”

(Don Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil*; Baker Academic, 20006)

## Final thoughts ...

- Present troubles help us see ourselves, others, and the world for what they are: imperfect & temporary
- This realization makes us look for the perfect & eternal (permanent)
- The “things that will last forever” are only visible through the eyes of faith
- “We live by what we believe, not by what we can see.” (2 Cor. 5:7; NCV)
- As we fix our eyes on the perfect & eternal, we won’t lose heart or give up

