

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
Taught by Dr. Bruce Bickel
“The Blessings of Affliction”
January 10, 2014

Let's turn in our Bibles please as we continue our study of Triumphant Living and we are looking at 2nd Corinthians 4:16-18. It is in the context of all of Chapter 4, which is the treasure in earthen vessels beginning in verse 7. But let me read verses 16 through 18, which is the end of the chapter. Well, let me backup to keep it in the right context and let me begin at verse 13.

2nd Corinthians 4:13-18 and I'm reading from the New American Standard version. Some of you ask me why I use this archaic version and the reason is because it is archaic; it is known as what we call a verbal equivalent translation of the Bible. Verbal equivalent means it is a word-for-word translation from the original documents of the Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. It is not the best for public reading Bible and that is why people do not like to use it. They like to have something that is more comfortable reading. The reason I like to do it is because it makes me study harder to find out what the words mean. So I like to read and study the New American Standard version. The next version I would use is the English Standard version that is also a verbal equivalent. You get to the NIV, which is known as a concept equivalent; it does not translate word-for-word but takes the concept and says how do we make the concept understandable. There is nothing wrong with that and it is a good devotional Bible, but I do not use it as a study Bible. I study this one.

I'm reading from the New American Standard, 2nd Corinthians 4:13-18. And may the Lord be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold Him.

“But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, ‘I believed, therefore I spoke,’ we also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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.”

This is the Word of the Lord. “Thanks be to God. Amen.

When you are studying the Scripture and you study either prose or poetry, there are six literary forms that allow the author or the writer or the speaker to put together sentence structures. Six literary forms and they are known as comparison, contrast, progressions, cause and effect, summary statements, and repetition. Those are the six literary forms that if you are going to write a poem or write a letter, you use one of those six or many of those six different literary forms to construct your verbiage and your language.

In these particular verses 16-18 we have six comparisons and I want you to see them. There is a series of contrasts here and the degree to how we understand these contrasts will help us to understand how we can apply

the truths of these verses 16 through 18. Let me just show you quickly in summary as introduction of the six contrasts that you will find in these three verses.

First of all, in verse 16, you will see a contrast between what the Scripture calls as the outer man versus the inner man. Now that word “man” there does is not limited strictly to the physical but includes all of the man’s personhood, all the person’s being and also the kind of life they live. So a better understanding of this is that it is a contrast between one’s earthly life, which includes the physical, and one’s spiritual life, which includes the heart. So the first contrast that we will look at is, what does he mean by this earthly life versus our inner life or spiritual life? Also in verse 16 you are going to see what I would call deconstruction versus reconstruction. There is a deconstruction and it is a decay of the outer man versus the renewal of the inner man. In one sense there is a contrast between what is being deconstructed and what is being reconstructed. There is a contrast there. We need to look at all of these six things as we understand this particular passage.

But also in verse 16, you see the renewal of strength, you are being renewed versus or contrasted with losing heart. Why is it that you lose heart and why is it that you are renewed? Those are the questions you ask when you are doing Biblical study. You have to look at these contrasts.

Then you go to verse 17 and you will see the contrast is between light affliction and the weight of glory. What is the difference and why is there a contrast between this weight of glory thought and light afflictions? What does that mean and how does it apply to us? That is what we need to examine.

Then you go to verse 18 and you will see the seen versus the unseen. He is going to teach us about things that are seen versus things that are unseen.

The last contrast is that which is temporary versus that which is eternal.

Now the degree to which you and I understand these six contrasts in those three verses will be the degree to which you and I will understand the truths of these verses and how it applies to us. As we look at this passage, I want us to understand those six contrasts to help us. In your outline you will see the two major themes are: the internal process in verse 16 and then the external product. There is an internal process going on that produces an external product. The degree to which we understand those six contrasts will help us understand those two major themes.

We have been studying this passage in the Book of 2nd Corinthians 4 and we have been studying how Paul is teaching us as how to live a life in a hostile environment. We began to pick that up in chapter 3 and all the way to chapter 4 and he is teaching us how to live in a hostile environment. He also recognizes that in the midst of the hostile environment you are likely to get discouraged and that is normal because we have normal feelings. But the issue is not so much are you discouraged but his point is this, what are you thinking about and how are you thinking when you realize that you are discouraged? That is what we need to talk about. The remedy we saw in verses 13-15 is to focus on God’s power. In other words, there are three powers of God that we are to focus on in the midst of the hassles of life where you know that you are discouraged or you are losing heart. So the thing you need to do is focus on three things: the power of your faith, the power of the resurrection, and the power of thanksgiving. That is what you will see in verses 13-15.

When you come to verse 16, you will notice the word “Therefore.” You have heard me say before that every time you see the word “therefore” you want to ask yourself the question, “What is the “therefore” there for? The word “therefore” is to refer you back to the previous verses of the previous thought patterns.

Notice how this works. “Therefore we do not lose heart...” Why is it that you do not lose heart in your discouragement? It is because you are focusing on God’s power, “therefore” you go back to the previous verses. So he says the way that you do not lose heart is to make sure that you are thinking correctly in the midst of your discouragements. You don’t worry about why am I discouraged, you don’t worry about what does it mean to me? What he is saying is that when you recognize there is discouragement in your life, "therefore" you go back to the previous thought, which is to focus on the power of God in three areas: the power of your faith.

You believe, you rely upon, trust upon and adhere to and depend upon the personal work of Christ. Rely upon that, think about that, and be grateful for your faith.

The second thing is to understand the power of the resurrection. When Christ is resurrected again, you were resurrected in His life. You are **in** Christ. Focus on His power of what that resurrected life means to you. You have the power of the resurrection in your life to manage this discouragement.

The third thing is the power of gratitude, the power of being thankful. So Paul is saying, “Look, when you recognize you might be discouraged and in the midst of these hassles of life, focus on the power of God and you won’t lose heart.” When you begin to realize that you are becoming discouraged and losing heart, what do you do? Go back to focusing upon the power of God and not the incident. That is what Paul is teaching us. This expression “lose heart” in verse 16 literally means to be spiritless. In other words, your spirit has just been wiped out, you have no spirit at all; you have nothing that wants you to hang in there. It also means weariness. All of a sudden you just find yourself wearied by the situation in which you find yourself.

Lastly, the word means discouraged. So Paul says in the midst of these hassles do not try to figure out why is this happening to me, what does it mean that it is happening to me, and what is the cause for all of this. He’s saying do not think on those things because those things are the external things of this world that are going to cause you to be more discouraged. What you need to do is go back and think upon the power of God in your life, the power of your faith, the power of the resurrection, and the power of gratitude. By focusing on the power of faith, the power of the resurrection, and the power of gratitude you will not lose heart. You will not lose heart. He’s teaching us how to handle discouragement. The result is that we will not become more discouraged by losing heart. So don’t worry about why this or why that is happening to you, or even what does it mean; we do not need to know those answers because God alone knows the answers of the why and what it means to us.

What we need to do is focus on the power of God to try to understand His focus upon our thinking about His power in our lives and who He is, rather than us trying to understand everything. Normally, the way we handle discouragement is we say, “I don’t understand this and I want to understand it.” Remember Deuteronomy 29:29? “The secret things belong to God, the revealed things are for you and your children for the next generation.” You see Brothers, there is a lot of secret stuff in the midst of the hassles of life that you and I will never, ever understand. Yet our focus humanly, because we are normal human beings, is I want to understand this and so in the midst of our discouragement we try to seek for understanding rather than “therefore” focus on God’s power. See how that works?

That is a critical understanding...that word “therefore.” Whenever you see that don’t stop and just read it but go back to make me understand and the next verses are going to be explained by the previous verses. That is what we see. Paul now says, that he is a realist and he recognized that in his own life that there were physical detriments to his life because of the hassles of life; but he also realized that there was a splendid compensation for the decay in his own physical life. As difficult as they were in reality, these afflictions, Paul teaches, become a blessing.

Now you cannot understand that unless you understand focusing upon God’s power so that you do not get discouraged. In the midst of your discouragement, you are not going to say, “Thank you for the fact that my basement pipe just broke and my basement is flooded.” We would say that’s an affliction or an inconvenience. I don’t know if we have ever been afflicted, have we? We’ve never been persecuted because of our faith in our country yet. I think the “yet” is coming but yet we have not had that. We have inconveniences. My pipe broke the other day in my basement and my basement is flooded, so I’m going back today to talk to the Disaster Restoration Services and they are meeting me at my house to find out what I need to do. As I was thinking about this, I was saying, “Lord You know here You are telling me, ‘you are blessed in your afflictions’ and I’m thinking, Lord You have a great sense of humor. {LAUGHTER} Because this is what I’m going to teach tomorrow and now I have to deal all day with a broken pipe in my basement? Thanks a lot.” “Therefore” don’t lose heart.” So what did I do? Got to go back to verses 13, 14 and 15...focus on the power of faith.

So I listened to a sermon...something by Charles Spurgeon and it helped me focus on my faith and focus on the power of the resurrection, and focus on the power of gratitude. When the plumber came to rip out the wall on my house because the broken pipe was behind the wall and he had to rip out the drywall, take out the little sink and everything else and throw it away, he just said, “You don’t seem to be very upset about all this.” I said, “If you only knew what I had to do not to lose heart.” {LAUGHTER} He said, “What do you mean?” I just told him what I was doing and gave him my lesson for today and he said, “That is really interesting. This hasn’t really upset you a lot.” And I said, “Well, it did but I learned how to manage it.” That is what Paul is teaching us. You are going to have hassles in life and he is saying in the midst of your discouragement there are ways in which we can handle it and one of the ways is to understand how you look at these afflictions because when you understand the difference in the contrast between the internal process of what is going on and contrast that with the external product of what it is producing, all of a sudden you do not lose heart.

Let’s examine what he means by these two major themes over the internal process in verse 16...

Yes, Ted?

TED: *Can we just explore that for a second because having gone through...having done two funerals recently...so the pipes burst and that entire nuisance, is that affliction a blessing would you say?*

Paul is going to say yes it is.

TED: *OK, now someone gets cancer, as I have just been dealing with my in-law...is that a blessing? [UNCLEAR] I think often we say this and then we go and oh gosh, the child died, the cancer...the son got killed in Afghanistan, this is an awful thing but there is no sense of the blessing part...and I just really wonder if [UNCLEAR] holding those two together...*

Yes, we don't understand the contrast and I hope I can do this well to explain the answer to all those questions, Ted, that you asked and the answer is yes. Cancer is an affliction that can be a blessing. Can be, can be. The issue is how am I thinking, what am I looking at? That is what Paul is going to teach us. So we need to understand the contrast here between the internal process of what is going on by our decay and all these afflictions and contrast that with the external product of what those afflictions are producing in us. That is what Paul is going to teach us here. Stick with me and, hopefully, we can explain this to the point of understanding.

Yes, Sig?

SIG: *Are you talking about an affliction for the sake of the gospel or just the affliction of living our life...*

Affliction of living in our life. Just normalcy, normal things. The afflictions...that is why I'm saying the contrast is between our earthly life and our heavenly life. The word "man" as in the decay of the outer man means more than just the physical body. It means your whole earthly life contrasted with your whole spiritual life, your heavenly life. That is the contrast.

As the outer physical part of the body is weakening, Paul is teaching us, this physical decay and all the afflictions are accompanied by a daily inward renewal of our spiritual life and powers. You will notice that in verse 16. "Therefore we do not lose heart but though our outer man is decaying," He recognizes that; he's saying there is something else going on in the midst of that. He's saying in the midst of this earthly life decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day. He means that these afflictions are causing something, they are producing something, and they are achieving something in us as we will see. We know that all of life is really moving towards death. Life is terminal, cancer is not but life is.

At the first breath of a baby's breath starts the decay process. All of life is terminal and what Paul is saying is, it is how you and I view these afflictions in the midst of our daily lives that will either be blessings for us or they will cause us to lose heart. We know that all of life is moving towards death. Everyone is actually at the moment of birth beginning this decay process that he is referring to. That occurs to the believer as well as the nonbeliever, but there is a difference of what is going on internally in the midst of this decay process. If the person who is not **in** Christ, the decay process leads to permanent death. For the person who is not **in** Christ, all they have is a permanent death. John Calvin describes it this way, "In the unbeliever, the outward man decays but without anything to compensate in it. The decay is a melancholy spectacle for it is the decay of everything."

Now if you are not **in** Christ then you have every reason to be discouraged and lose heart in the midst of these afflictions. If you are not **in** Christ you have every reason to be discouraged, to lose heart, to be spiritless, and to be weary because you have nothing to compensate for that. There is nothing to be rebuilding that...there is nothing renewing the internal process. But it is not so for the person who is not **in** Christ. These pressures take their toll physically, yes, and they may remove the beauty of the comfort of life but they are actually creating Paul says, something that is even more beautiful internally and more deeper spiritually inside of us because these afflictions cause something to happen to us renewed day by day.

You and I have a shared life **in** Christ, the treasure in the earthen vessel...the vessel is our life, the treasure is His life; the inside becomes more obvious through these afflictions. There is something going on internally by these afflictions...it becomes more obvious that we are **in** Christ. The treasure in the earthen vessel to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

Look at Psalm 73:26. The Psalmist writes in 73:26, “My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. For, behold those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But as for me, the nearness of my God is my good; I have made the Lord God my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.”

To the non-believer there is every reason to be discouraged and lose heart because there is nothing to compensate for it. This internal process of these afflictions of our being renewed is that our spiritual powers are being developed more fully because of these afflictions if you are **in** Christ. Pressures do not make us bitter, they make us better. These afflictions are designed to make us better, not bitter.

Take a look at John 8:55. Even in the life of Christ, the afflictions that He went through took its toll physically in His humanity, in His human incarnation. They actually thought He looked like He was 50 and He was only 32. Now why is that? Because He was going through this process that Paul is describing.

John 8:55-59. “...and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word; Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.’ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.”

Even in the incarnated life of Jesus Christ, the physical decay of the afflictions of life had its toll on Him physically. It is part of His life and the people of the world thought that He looked about 50 years old when He was only 32. But there was something going on inside of Him, this renewal that made Him more spiritually deep and deepened His character spiritually and spiritual powers that happens to us because you are **in** Christ. That is why these afflictions can be a blessing if we look at them correctly.

The knowledge of this internal process of our being renewed by these afflictions ought to give us some comfort. In the periods of greatest hassles and affliction are the points of our greatest spiritual refinement. God would sooner have us have holy pain than unholy pleasure. He would rather have us have holy pain than unholy pleasure. Because affliction is the school of which great virtues are acquired and in which great Christian character is developed. These trials of life, dearly Beloved, dear men, are designed to make us better not bitter. The Puritan William Dyer says this, “Afflictions are blessings to us when we can bless God for the affliction.” “Afflictions are blessings to us when we can bless God for the affliction.”

Yes, Sir?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Bruce, one of the things [UNCLEAR] saw where God really helped me [UNCLEAR] comfort [UNCLEAR] is Isaiah 45:7 where he says “I form light and darkness, I make well-being and creating calamity; I am the Lord who does all these things.”*

Amen. It is understanding the sovereignty of God. One of the problems, and I want to be careful here, one of the problems we have in our culture and maybe we can discuss this sometime is what I am calling “the feminization of Christianity.” We spent several years ago talking about the 28 Attributes of God, not all of those attributes are soft: love, compassion, mercy; some of those attributes are hard: justice, sovereignty, omnipotence, omnipresence, holiness, righteousness; some of those are hard. What do we do? In the church today we have only talked about the “soft” characteristics and so we have basically said, “The hard

characteristics are masculine traits—holiness, righteousness, justice, omnipotence, sovereignty, the right to rule—those are masculine traits of God. We need to emphasize the feminine traits of God—His love, His mercy, His compassion. Now certainly we teach that because we teach the whole counsel of God. But the church today has just taken a stand that we need to talk about the soft characteristics of God as opposed to the total counsel of God.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *I draw great strength from Philippians 4:8. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue, if there is any virtue, anything praise worthy, meditate on these things”*

Yes, and Paul is going to tell us the same thing here in verse 17...how you look at that.

Yes, Sir?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *Not only is the church moving in that direction, but let’s think about this country...we are moving in the same direction.*

Absolutely, no question about that. We are feminizing everything.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *The church is following the world. The world is leading the church.*

Yes, exactly right.

Yes Sir?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *[UNCLEAR] I think the secular world kind of picks up on some of the things that are [UNCLEAR] of God and the Christian church and the secular world has an understanding that God is love and I think that we would focus more on the fact that God is also just...the unbeliever in the secular world might have a little more concern for where they are going.*

Yes, that’s a good point.

Yes, Kevin.

KEVIN: *The verse that really helped me out...a little back-story. My freshman year in 48 hours I lost my grandfather and my best friend. My best friend was 19 when he died of a heart attack and so that happened all within a week. The thing that I love is James 1:2-4. I know that is kind of like the “go to” verse, “Count it all joy, Brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness, let steadfastness have its full effect and may you be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” I wonder what the word “joy” meant? I wasn’t happy but I have to say I’ve had joy and it felt like my heart was contained in a bubble...that God took the yoke of that pain off...it forced me to go towards Him...and I don’t know if I really [UNCLEAR] before that but after that I can definitely say I knew what it meant. It was the first*

time I cried during worship or anything like that...I actually felt something, not necessary charismatic but like in the form....

I understand, a deep renewal in your inner man. That is the renewal that occurs day by day when you and I understand the contrast between the outer decay and the inward renewal. That is the contrast. Yes, there is an outer decay that goes on in our life because of the afflictions but at the same time those afflictions, as Paul is going to teach us, are causing or producing something and we will get in to that. What are those things producing? You and I need to understand that these periods of afflictions are at the time of our greatest spiritual renewal.

Another Puritan says this about this verse, “It takes a world with trouble in it to train people for their high calling as children of God and to carve upon the soul of the ligaments of the face of Christ.” In other words, what is it that causes people to see the face of Christ in us? It is these afflictions that we go through because those afflictions are designed to make us better, not designed to make us bitter. That is what Paul is saying. He said there is a contrast. Yes, your outer man, your outer life is decaying, but there is an internal process of your being renewed every day by these afflictions. They are causing something to happen and we will get into that when we take a look at the external product as the result of this.

Yes, Sig.

SIG: *It just dawned on me as Kevin was talking and your following comments[UNCLEAR] expectation at least in the world I grew up in the 60s and 70s that as you got older things got better [LAUGHTER]...you got a job, you made money, you got a house, you got a family but yet...and that is the world's perspective but I hear what you're saying today is, it is really the opposite that is going on but yet we are all are saddened when things don't work because this life is so precious...if we don't succeed in this life, what is there? Our view, because of Christ, is that we have it all wrong.*

Yes, we've got it backwards, we do.

Yes, Thomas?

THOMAS: *[UNCLEAR] The world focuses on the afflictions and Christ wants us to focus on our reactions because that is what glorifies Him, not the afflictions.*

Right. We are going to see our reactions to these afflictions is what really causes our deep spiritual renewal on a day by day basis. Frank and I were talking about just as the condition of the world here...do you remember the great sermon by Jonathon Edwards entitled “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God?” What we have done now is that we have turned it around in the church today and it is God in the hands of angry sinners. We've turned it around. It is now God in the hands of angry sinners. We're angry with God because we don't get what we want. We think we deserve something and so rather than understanding “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” because we feminize Christianity and the message of the gospel, we have really turned it around and now it becomes God in the hands of angry sinners. How indignant is that the personal work of Christ. See, that is what we have done in the church. We have just reversed it and Sig, you're right we have just turned everything around.

We must ask ourselves two questions as we look at this because these afflictions are designed to make us better, not bitter. I would ask a couple of questions. Who can wonder why people of this world who are not **in** Christ are discouraged? Who can wonder why worldly people get discouraged? I would say that artificial stimulus can only sustain for a little bit. People are just looking for the artificial stimulant to help them deal with that affliction. Such stimulants might be status, success, achievements, drugs, booze, and pleasure. For a time they are all going to hide the realities of life but sooner or later each person awakens to the fact of his own dilutions about their worldly stimulants. Notice this, medical science, according to one researcher, S. I. McMillen, recognizes that emotions such as fear, sorrow, envy, resentment and hatred are responsible for the majority of our diseases of up to 60%. Notice this: fear, sorrow, envy, resentment, and hatred are responsible for 60% of our diseases. It is because we don't understand the internal process of...yes, I'm decaying outwardly and I'm going through these afflictions physically. What is happening on the inside as a believer in Christ...one who is **in** Christ has a treasure in an earthen vessel...there is something going on inside of me that is spiritually renewing me day by day and the contrast is the outer decay of my outer life vs. the inward development of my spiritual life...there is a huge contrast.

Second question: Who can supply what Christ provides in the midst of affliction? No one. We have no records in all of history of the such vast quality of consolation and encouragement in the pressures of life, including impending death, other than in the Word of God. Where are you going to find it? We are going to find it in the Scriptures. Many of you have given verses that were encouragement to you because it helps you not lose heart.

Look at verse 16. "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." When we focus on this internal process...not the external events...amidst all the hassles, trials and afflictions we see that our outward decay in our life is producing a life of spiritual power and it happens day by day. And that is why Paul says we do not lose heart.

Look at verses 17 and 18. That is the internal process. It is because of Paul's focus on the internal process of this renewal that he can even make such a statement as in verse 17. "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison..." Paul is looking beyond the afflictions of a hostile environment not for what they are but for what they are producing...what they are actually achieving. Now Paul is saying it is not he himself who is producing, nor is it he himself who is achieving, nor is it us who are achieving anything. He is saying these afflictions are producing and they achieve and produce an eternal glory that outweighs everything else. He is saying this, when we compare the afflictions with the external product we do not get discouraged. What does he mean by this external product? Stick with me with this.

To fully understand this idea of the external product as a result of the internal process we need to understand two key words in this passage. They are the words "glory" and the word "weight." They both come from the same root word and literally mean "glory in the weight." Glory in the weight. Weight denotes putting pressure on resources to create responsibilities. That is what the word means. To create pressure on resources to create responsibilities. What are these eternal responsibilities that are producing in us by these afflictions? That is the external product. The internal process is the outward decay of our lifestyle versus the inward renewal spiritually and those afflictions are actually producing an external product. What are those external products? What are these responsibilities? That is what the word means. It means there is a process where we are being created for greater responsibilities that outweighs the afflictions because it brings glory to God. What are those responsibilities?

According to 1st Corinthians 6 we will judge angels, we will judge the world, and we will rule cities. Paul is saying that it is through these light and momentary afflictions that we are learning the responsibilities that you and I will exercise in heaven. You are being equipped. That is what this is about. This internal process of the afflictions creating spiritual responsibilities in you now that you and I will exercise when the Lord returns in all of His glory and we are being made responsible to fulfill our ministerial responsibilities in eternity. All of life, Brothers, is preparation for future ministry. Those are the responsibilities. What does the word “responsibility” mean? It means able to respond. You will be able to respond to your assignments. The word “responsibility” means to know and do what is expected of you. A person who is responsible is “response able” and what Paul is saying is that the external product of this internal process is that you are being equipped every day, day by day you are being renewed to fulfill your future responsibilities of judging angels, judging the world, and ruling cities because that will be your ministerial responsibilities for which this life is equipping you to do so you will be responsible in eternity. “Therefore,” you do not lose heart. Do you understand that?

There is this internal process that creates an external product and that external product is that you and I are being equipped to be responsible for ministry in eternity.

Yes?

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANT: *One thing here...he is referring to life afflictions I guess. Is that an accurate adjective or is that just him using that adjective to say that all these afflictions are, in fact, light because of your relationship to God? He is not just saying a hangnail....*

No. He is saying whatever you go through is light...contrast...compare to the weight of glory. It is a contrast, that is why you have to understand the contrast. Light affliction could be cancer, it could be anything. It could be anything you go through in your life. But he is saying that light affliction is outweighed by understanding the glory that awaits you because you are being made responsible. It is producing something in us. So these light and momentary afflictions are teaching us the responsibilities that you and I will exercise in eternity.

Look at Psalm 119:67. “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I obey Your word.”

1st Peter 6:7. “In this you greatly rejoice, although now for a little while you may have to suffer grief of all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine, and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

You see friends, this hostile environment of these afflictions is the means by which God is equipping us to become responsible in eternity to fulfill our ministerial responsibilities. All of life is preparation for future ministry. And that may occur during this lifetime as well as the next. It is those afflictions that cause that to happen.

Now this understanding is by no means automatic and easy. It all depends upon where you are focused. Where are you looking? Look at verse 18. “...while we look not at the things which are seen, but the things that are not seen; or the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.” There you see two more contrasts. The word “fix” or the word “look” means to concentrate one’s attention on. In other words, he is saying, as Dale just read in Philippians, what are you thinking about? In the midst of these afflictions where does your mind go? Remember the question we asked several weeks ago? What do I think

about when I have nothing to think about? Where does your mind go? Paul says “fix” your mind, “look” attentively. That word “look” or “fix” means to concentrate one’s attention on something. He is saying that a concentrated attention and a steadfast look are needed to make the unseen things of God visible. It takes a concentrated look or fixing your focus upon the things of God if you want to see the things of God; you’ll take a look at the unseen things and all of a sudden you will see the visible things of God. What do you think about? Where does your mind go?

If you look at it practically speaking, that is why a trained lookout on a ship...when he goes up on the crow’s nest to fulfill his duties as a lookout...will shade his eyes over the cross-glaring beams of light because science will tell us this, that too much light will stimulate the optic nerve to a degree that it distracts the attention. In other words, a lookout will go up and he will do this...to shade away the glaring cross lights so that he can focus directly on that. That is a great illustration for us. Sometimes, Brothers, you and I need to shade our eyes of the glaring cross lights of this world’s system so that we can focus attentively upon the unseen things of God because if we let the glaringness of the world’s system overcome us, we are not going to see things clearly and you will never discover the unseen things because you will be concentrating on the visible. See how that works? We have to focus our mind on the right things and the glaring cross lights of this world’s system often have the effect of distracting the attention from the unseen things that are eternal.

Another Puritan writer says, “We have to alter the focus of our eyes...” meaning what are you thinking... “shading them from the glamorous things of this world’s system if we are to see the things of God. Unless we shut out the trappings to this world, we will never see the things of eternity.” And then he defines that...the things of eternity... “the responsibilities of the inheritance that awaits us.”

Brothers, you and I have an inheritance that is full of responsibilities; and the afflictions we go through are the means by which God is equipping us to be prepared to be responsible in eternity to fulfill our responsibilities ministerially with the Lord Jesus, we will be co-regents with Him.

A friend of mine does a wonderful job of refinishing furniture and I was with her recently. There was this piece of furniture that she looked at and she said, “Oh, that is really beautiful.” I looked at it and said, “Oh, that’s a piece of junk.” {LAUGHTER} The difference was she was looking at the unseen, finished product that came through a lot of work and a lot of effort. I was focused on the immediate, visible. She said, “Oh, that is so beautiful.” “That is a piece of junk.” See, Paul is saying this: where is your mind and what is it focused upon? When you understand the contrast in these particular verses...the contrast is between the afflictions of our life which are really equipping us for our ministerially responsibilities in heaven because it is producing an external product of responsibility that far outweighs the immediacy of the affliction that we are going through. It is just that you and I need to look at that. When we look at that, we do not lose heart. When you lose heart and you realize you are discouraged, what do you do? Focus upon the power of God. You do not look at the affliction but look upon the power of God, the power of faith, the power of the resurrection, and the power of gratitude.

As we fix our eyes upon faith, on the internal process of being renewed day by day by these afflictions because they are causing, they are producing...you do not produce this...the afflictions produce it because of God’s sovereign grace. When we fix our eyes upon this internal process and we see the unseen external product of our being equipped for responsible ministry in eternity...notice the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace. Turn your eyes upon Jesus for He is the window to the external unseen things of God.

May God be pleased to give us the grace to realize that our blessings are and can be afflictions, because the afflictions are causing something, an eternal product equipping us for future ministry. May it be so for Jesus' sake and all the Brave Men said, "Amen."