

## 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

An outside observer of the apostle Paul at this stage in his ministry might well think that he had every reason to be dispirited and losing heart.

He had recently left a ministry in Ephesus where he and his team “were so utterly, unbearably crushed that they despaired of life itself” and they “felt that they had received the sentence of death” (2 Cor 1:8-9). Nor were the tough times of short duration. In an earlier letter from Ephesus he had written that he had “died every day” and “humanly speaking, had fought with wild beasts” (1 Cor 15:31-32).

Nor was his present ministry to the church at Corinth exactly an encouraging time! He had had to implore them to end their unhelpful divisions, to deal with a sexual immorality case which they allowed in their church community and which even the pagans would not tolerate, and to reason with them to maintain his apostolic authority over them. He could well be excused for losing heart!

But did he lose heart? No, not at all! And he lays out two reasons why losing heart is the furthest thing from his mind.

**Firstly he kept going because of the message of hope that he preached. 4:13-15**

Like the Psalmist he believed it and he spoke it. He knew God had raised the Lord Jesus from the dead. He had seen him on the way to Damascus and had had further revelations from him. One at least was while he was ministering in Corinth. The Lord spoke to him one night in a vision and said to him, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be

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silent; for I am with you, and no man shall attack and harm you; for I have many people in this city.”

Admittedly this treasured message that he preached was in an earthly vessel but what a treasure it was! It was about Christ's death for sins according to God's Holy Scriptures and eternal life for the believer according to the Holy Scriptures. It promised a verdict of righteousness, holiness and forgiveness at the judgement. It promised God's Holy Spirit and adoption as God's children now as well as an eternal life with Christ for eternity.

In fact, that such a treasure was in such weak vessels displayed the transcendent power of God in the message. The deliverers of that message were “afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; always carrying in their body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might be manifested in their bodies.” The message so possessed them that the death of Jesus was manifested in their mortal flesh so that Christ's life might be manifested in them and that life might work in the hearer.

Moreover this expression and receiving of God's grace evoked thanksgiving to God in the believer. The more that people received this grace, the more the thanksgiving arose from their heart to God and the more God was glorified.

Was the apostle then losing heart? Not at all! The more God was praised the more he was encouraged.

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**Secondly he kept going because of the promise in the hope he had for his own resurrection 4:16-5:1**

The life he lived was a life of hope. His faith was set not on the transient but the eternal. Like all of us the earthly body he inhabited was wasting away more and more each day. The bones creaked and the breath got shorter and more effort was required to do the normal things of life. Parts did not work as well as they used to. The mind did not think as well as it used to perform. Memory was not as good and eyes and ears did not function as well. No doubt he conferred more often with his good friend Luke the doctor but this was all transient.

But added to the normal wear and tear of life, was the damage from his apostolic labours. Later in the letter he would recall imprisonments, countless beatings, being near death often, five times he had received thirty nine lashes from the Jews, three times he had been beaten with the Roman rods, once he was stoned and left for dead, three times he had been shipwrecked, he had been adrift at sea for a day and night, often he experienced sleepless nights, often he went without food, often he found himself in cold and exposure and apart from that there was the anxiety and pressure of his churches welfare (2 Cor11:23-29).

But this was all transient stuff. This was only for a few short years, for fifty or sixty years or so. Compared with eternity this was but a “slight momentary” affliction. This was only a little weight to bear when compared with the eternal weight of glory. His hope was in the eternal realm. A glory with which you could not even begin to compare with the shortness and lightness of the affliction he was now enduring. He had written in an earlier letter, “What no eye had seen, nor ear heard, nor the

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heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

But could this just be wishful thinking? NO! NO! NO! Paul knew that Jesus has been raised from death. The risen Jesus had at least appeared to Peter, to the Twelve, to more than five hundred believers, to James and then to all the apostles. And if that wasn't enough he had also appeared to Paul himself.(1 Cor 15:4-8). No, Jesus had been raised and seen by many witnesses over a forty day period showing himself alive by many infallible proofs.

This same Jesus would also raise Paul and the Corinthians and bring them all into his resurrected glory. Both they and he had houses not made with hands, eternal in the heavens prepared for them when their earthly and transient tents were destroyed. The same can be claimed for us. By faith in the risen Jesus we too can be assured that like Paul and the believers in Corinth, we too will be raised by the Lord Jesus and share his glory forever. We too have houses not made with hands, eternal in the heavens prepared for us when our transient tents are destroyed. Take heart. Do not be discouraged. Live for the Risen Christ.