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# THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

## I Hope You Can See Things God's Way

SERMON BY REV. SU KIM ■ JUNE 12, 2022

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### Introduction

The Bible says that when we were married, my wife and I became one. Despite being one for more than 17 years, we still see things differently. Sometimes, for certain things we cannot agree on, we have gotten to the point where we say, "I see it differently"—probably followed by an "I hope you can see things my way." Maybe you have been there and said to someone, "I hope you can see things my way." By the end of this sermon, I hope you can see things **God's** way.

Today's text is 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

**T**herefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

### Background

When we see what is going on in the world, it is easy to lose heart. The economy is not in great shape and evil persists around the world. Most people would look at the state of the world today, shake their heads, and say, "How did it get like this?" It is easy to lose heart. Maybe some of you find yourself there this morning. Yet, just as my wife and I can look at the same thing and see things differently, followers of Christ can and should see things in an entirely different way.

First, let us consider for a moment how someone who does not believe God exists looks at what is going on in the world versus how a follower of Christ can see the same things. This is an oversimplification, but a phrase that could describe the reality for someone who doesn't believe God exists might be, "It is what it is." If someone does not believe in a higher power or an afterlife, this life is it. For better or worse, our experiences are what they are. Maybe that has been your worldview. And perhaps the pandemic or recent events has left you discouraged or even hopeless. Perhaps the Holy Spirit is drawing you to belief in Christ. You can experience forgiveness of sins, perfect love, and true hope today by repenting and putting your trust in Jesus. But for the follower of Christ, our text today reminds us that there is more to reality. Much more.

In today's text, Paul repeats the words he used to begin this chapter: "We do not lose heart." He repeats himself because this is important. Christians today are tempted—just as Christians were then—to lose heart. Paul certainly had reasons to lose heart. In this letter, Paul details the physical and emotional suffering he and his fellow workers have endured for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. From outward appearances, Paul and his ministry do not seem to be doing very well. At that time suffering was considered a sign of God's judgment and Paul's situation led some in Corinth to wonder if he truly was an apostle. In addition to the suffering he had to endure, some of the churches he founded were falling into error or were falling away from the faith. But despite all Paul suffered, he did not lose heart because he knew that behind each situation was a greater spiritual reality.

He describes two simultaneous processes: one occurring outwardly and one inwardly. Outwardly, the text says, we are wasting away. Whether we believe in Jesus or not, we know that is absolutely true. I certainly feel it. On some days I feel I am wasting away a little more than on others. A myriad of products try to defy this natural process. Anti-aging products promise to restore, renew, and revitalize;

miracle creams and lotions tout their ability to tighten, tone, and firm up. We have products that remove hair where you do not want it, and add hair when it's not growing where it should. Despite what these products claim, time and our external circumstances make it so that outwardly we are wasting away.

But for the follower of Christ, another process is occurring at the same time! The text says that "inwardly we are being renewed day by day." And what is causing that renewal? Some miracle cream? No, we are being renewed day by day by the Spirit of God that indwells every believer. And unlike those products that fall short of their promises, our God never fails in His promises.

The words Paul used for "outwardly" and "inwardly" don't mean that our bodies are unimportant shells that house an eternal soul. Rather, they present the notion that every human being is getting closer and closer to their earthly end. But for the follower of Christ, there is another reality that, inwardly, the hope that we have (the promise of the resurrection from the dead) is in the making now. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" The outward "old self" is indeed wasting away, but the inward new self is being renewed day by day into the likeness of Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God! You may not feel it, but renewal is happening day by day. The Spirit of God continues to fill you daily! The renowned 19th-century evangelist D. L. Moody was once asked why he had said that a Christian needs to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. His answer: "Because I leak!" I know I certainly do. Circumstances and situations make it so that I "leak" joy, peace, and even hope. But today's text promises that the Spirit of God continues to renew us day by day. It is a gift of grace, not a personal achievement.

As great as this promise is, this daily renewal is a foretaste of the day when we behold Him. In that day, we will no longer leak. Listen to what Revelation 7:16-17 says:

'Never again will they hunger;  
never again will they thirst.  
The sun will not beat down on them,  
nor any scorching heat.  
For the Lamb at the center of the throne  
will be their shepherd;  
'he will lead them to springs of living water.'  
'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

God promises a day when we no longer will need to be renewed!

Paul goes on to describe the troubles we face as "light" and "momentary." To be clear, this is not a Pauline platitude. Sometimes we hear platitudes from other well-meaning believers: "Oh, it's not so bad" ... "God is good!" ... "It could be worse." But that is not what Paul is saying here. Suffering is suffering—as disciples of Christ, we do not minimize that. Instead, rather than emphasizing the troubles we all face, Paul is emphasizing and exalting the glory of God! The text calls it "an eternal glory." Unlike everything else that deteriorates or wastes away with time, God's glory does not diminish; it is eternal. And the eternal glory of God is staggering.

What have been the most glorious moments of your life? Maybe an exceptionally exquisite meal? A particularly majestic sunrise or sunset? Maybe a literal or figurative mountaintop experience? For me, it was when I first laid eyes on Christina as she walked down the aisle on our wedding day. There was not a choir at the service, but I still somehow heard the "Hallelujah" chorus. What was that glorious moment for you? That was just a foretaste of the eternal glory of God.

This is not just a future reward. The glory of God is not something we will experience when we die and go to heaven. In John 17:22-23, Jesus says, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Just think about that for a moment. The eternal glory of God is in you; it

is in me; it is in us. Indeed, the full glory of God will be revealed at Christ's return, but compared to the eternal glory of God our troubles are light and momentary. Yes, we will have troubles, but they will be "momentary" and will be endured for a comparatively short time. Yes, we will have troubles, but they will be "light," in contrast to the eternal glory of God that "far outweighs them all." They are light just as Jesus said that His burden is light (Matthew 11:30).

Because of our daily renewal by the Holy Spirit and the exceeding, indescribable glory that is ours in Christ, Paul concludes that the eyes of the believer are fixed on what is unseen. Just before today's text, Paul speaks of the suffering that often accompanies authentic ministry and how the treasure of the gospel moves forward in fragile vessels: jars of clay. We "jars of clay" that contain the staggering treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ move forward, fixing our eyes on our Lord and Savior. Brothers and sisters, Jesus is not merely the end; He is everything! Now admittedly, this is not easy; it takes a lot of faith. It is really hard to fix our eyes on Jesus when there are so many problems, challenges, and concerns. But we are each able to fix our gaze on a regular basis.

A common sight these days is of people spending much of their day with their eyes glued to their cell phones or devices. There may be much going on around them, but their gaze is fixed. I thought texting and driving was bad, but lately, I have noticed a lot of texting and biking. If you go to a playground you often hear a chorus of "Mom! Dad! Look at me!" I'm guilty of this myself. That text message or email is important, and Wordle is enthralling, but most, if not all, of us have been "disciplined" by the smartphone to fix our gaze.

That is what today's text is challenging us to do: to fix our gaze—not on a screen, but on what is unseen. This week, if you feel tempted to lose heart or despair, imagine it is like background noise when you are playing Candy Crush. Open your Bible to a favorite psalm—23, 63, and 73 are among my favorites. If you are really despairing and desperately need more than a small dose of the Word, read the

entirety of Psalm 119. Open your Bible to 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. It will not make those troubles go away but it will renew you inwardly and give you hope.

What is Paul talking about when he says to fix our gaze on what is unseen? He is not saying that he has no interest in the visible world. Instead, we as followers of Christ are to fix our eyes on the age to come, when Christ will return and rule and reign. As we affirmed earlier [in the Apostles' Creed] we look forward to "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting." This is not merely a Christian hope but a promise! These promises and blessings are present today but they are not fully realized. They are a foretaste of the surpassing eternal greatness that awaits all believers.

In some ways, the entirety of Scripture can be seen as a foretaste. Can you imagine what the Israelites felt when they had all the chariots of Egypt on one side and the Red Sea on the other and then God parted the sea and they were able to walk across on dry ground?! Can you imagine?! But as wonderful and as glorious as the miracle of the parting of the Red Sea was, it was just a foretaste. Later, One would come Who would not merely part the sea but calm it with His very word and walk on it ... and even cause one of His disciples to walk on the sea!

King David was a great king! He defeated all the enemies of Israel to bring great security, stability, and prosperity during his reign. And yet, it was just a foretaste. Later, the King of Kings would come and not only defeat neighboring enemies but defeat humanity's greatest enemies: sin and death. He would give His people ultimate security and stability and be our source of blessing. As Jesus taught the disciples on the walk to Emmaus, He was truly the fulfillment of the Old Testament. I believe the Old Testament was also a foretaste of the greater glory, the greater Kingdom, that Christ inaugurated.

And yet even this greater Kingdom Christ inaugurated at His baptism has not been fully realized. Some call it the "already" but "not yet." We have had only foretastes, my brothers and sisters. All the

suffering and troubles, the challenges and traumas you have experienced and the comfort of God and fellow believers that accompany them are a foretaste of the day when He will lead you to “springs of living water” (John 7:38) and “wipe away every tear from your eyes” (Revelation 21:4). God can and does use difficulties and defeats in our life for our eternal good. Just think about the cross: What seemed to have been the worst defeat became the greatest victory. What seems today to be a personal setback might be a divine setup that He will work to your eternal good. And the good things we experience in life? They, too, are a foretaste: every good and glorious thing you have experienced; every victory; every healing; every miracle; agape love. All of these are foretastes of the eternal glory that will one day be fully realized! Do not lose heart!

I hope you can see things God’s way. Seeing things from an eternal perspective reminds us that everything we experience is a foretaste of eternal glory. We experience glimpses of it in this life but it will be ours through all eternity. Do not lose heart.

## **Conclusion**

Do not lose heart. All of life is a foretaste of eternal glory. These last three years have been truly glorious for me. The agape love, the mentorship, anthems from the choir that made me feel transported to God’s throne room, and the true family my entire family has experienced here, even amid a global pandemic, have been truly glorious. And yet...and yet...it is just a foretaste. It is a foretaste of eternal glory! And this gives me greater faith. Faith that a Christian community like that which has been built here at First Church can be built in Bangkok. Faith that this church will continue to grow and make an impact across the street and around the world for the least, the last, and the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Faith that until we meet again none of us will lose heart and we will become more like our Lord from glory to glory, for His name and His fame. Do not lose heart. All of life is a foretaste of eternal glory. ■



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