

Canterbury Bible Conference 2013

Part 2

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[00:00:00] In 2nd Corinthians chapter 4, Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not, but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience and the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world hath blinded the mind of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, [00:01:06] and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

And then, verse 16, for which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding [00:02:04] and eternal weight of glory, 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. The Lord led on my heart to consider few thoughts from this precious portion of the word of God. I think that many of us has many times read this portion, and we have found food for our souls.

And the thing that I am exercised with to speak about, is the expression that Paul twice repeated here.

[00:03:04] He said in the first verse, we faint not.

And then he repeated it in verse 16, for which cause we faint not.

And it is worthy of note that these sayings came in an epistle where Paul is displaying more than any other epistle, his personal circumstances, his personal afflictions, his personal sufferings in the path of ministry. We see Paul in 2nd Corinthians not only as the apostle, the gifted one, the one whom the Lord entrusted [00:04:01] to give the gospel and to minister for the assembly, but we see him in another aspect that we need. We see him as a man who is under sufferings, a man of like passion, like many

of us.

Just going through some verses in this epistle, I wanted to point how he is showing what he went through.

For example, in chapter 1, verse 8, For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, in so much [00:05:01] that we despaired even of life. Maybe it's astonishing to us that a man like Paul reached the point that he experienced how to be despaired even of life, but God intervened and gave him to be out of the sufferings. He said, but we had the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death and doth deliver in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us. And also in our chapter, I didn't read the verses from 8, but he is speaking, I will come later to explain a few thoughts here, when he says, we are [00:06:01] troubled on every side, yet not distressed, perplexed, but not in despair. In chapter 7, he is speaking also about his frailty as an earthen vessel. He says, chapter 7, verse 5, for when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side, without were fighting, within were fears.

These are just few examples to show us that in this epistle, Paul is showing us the human aspect of his life. This is why so many times when we have faced trials and troubles, [00:07:03] this epistle, and especially portions of it like chapter 4, has been of great consolation for our souls.

When we consider this expression, we faint not. Studying the New Testament, we find that it is repeated in connection with four areas of our Christian life, in four different areas. The first one, in connection with prayer. I think all of us remember the verse in Luke 18, 1, where the Lord Jesus said, and he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.

[00:08:01] And we all from our experience know that one of the areas of our lives where we tend to faint is the area and the aspect of prayer. Many times you have prayed, and the answer didn't come. It didn't come in our time, but of course, he has his time. But we faint. I'm sure that most of us have some experiences. Maybe some of us are going through such trial, praying, and praying in the will of the Lord for things that we are sure that are pleasing the Lord, but the answer is not coming. Let us take this to our hearts. Let us continue, as our Lord said, men ought always to pray and not [00:09:04] to faint. The second area where we are prone to faint, and we find the same expression, is in well-doing. We find this in Galatians 6.

Paul is speaking about the material fellowship between the one who is taught in the world and the one who teaches the world. And he says, Galatians 6 verse 9, and let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. We can enlarge the principle and say, whenever the Lord lay on our hearts [00:10:03] the matter of well-doing, let us continue. Many times we are tried. We have done much, but we can't see fruit. No, Paul here says, let us continue, because in due season we shall reap if we faint not. Then the third area where we are prone to faint is facing sufferings.

In Ephesians 3, and in Hebrews 12, I will read first of all Ephesians 3, verse 13. Wherefore I desire [00:11:02] that you faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory. Paul is urging the Ephesians, hearing about his imprisonment when he wrote this epistle. He was in Rome, and he was facing difficulties. He says, don't faint if you hear about the tribulation in which I am. And also in Hebrews 12, verse 3, the writer says, for consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against

himself, lest you be worried and faint in your minds. [00:12:01] Yes, maybe we personally are going through some difficulties, or we hear about others going through tribulation. Let us not faint.

Now here, the fourth area, the first one was the prayer, and then the well-doing, and then the sufferings, and then the fourth area where we are prone to faint is ministry.

And this is the subject of chapter 4 in 2nd Corinthians.

This is why Paul is repeating this word twice, beginning by verse 1, therefore seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not. I would like [00:13:04] just to point from this precious portion of the Word of God, the causes that helped Paul to continue to not to feel discouraged, though all the difficulties. And I think that we all need to consider these things. Why? Why Paul didn't quit? Why Paul didn't lose heart? There are five things in this chapter. First of all, he says in verse 1, therefore seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not. What is this ministry? He is speaking about the ministry [00:14:03] of the new covenant, the ministry of the gospel. And in chapter 3, he has been explaining the ministry. And he gave the ministry three beautiful names or characteristics. First of all, it is a ministry of life that brings life to dead men. In chapter 3, Paul was contrasting ministry of the law with the ministry of the gospel. And he shows us how greater, how far greater is the ministry of the gospel. And this ministry, every one of us have the privilege of having this ministry and of taking on this ministry to others. So what are the characteristics of this ministry? First of all, [00:15:02] it is a ministry of life. Chapter 3, verse 6, he says, who has also has made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter kills, but the spirit gives life. But if the ministration of death written and engraved in stones was glorified, so verse 8, how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? So it is a ministry of life. It brings life to souls. And secondly, it's a ministry of righteousness because the law was a ministry of condemnation. It condemned people. It brings the guilt before their eyes. But the gospel gives righteousness. Verse 9, if the ministration of condemnation be glory, [00:16:02] much more that the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. Third thing, it's a ministry of abiding glory. The old one came through Moses and there was glory in his face, but it is a fading glory, abolishing glory. But now in Christ and when we behold Christ, there is abiding glory. So when we think about these three beautiful things, ministry that brings life, ministry that brings righteousness, and ministry that brings abiding glory. When we think that we have been entrusted with such a glorious ministry, I think we can say we faint not. We shall continue. I remember hearing [00:17:04] a discussion between a young servant of the Lord with an older brother and the young servant was down due to difficulties that he was facing. And then he was asking the advice of the older brother. And the older brother urged him, encouraged him, and told him, you know, the angels would like to take your ministry. They have not this privilege to go to fallen people and to bring the gospel to souls that need it. Do we do we prize this privilege, dear brothers, that we have such a ministry, such a glorious ministry, and then we can say we will continue. We will not lose heart. [00:18:01] And Paul continues, verse 2, and say, but we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by the manifestation of the truth. In our Bible study here, we considered, we studied about the truth. But here we have a very important expression, the manifestation of the truth. So the truth in Paul was not only something in his mind, but he was manifesting the truth. He, what he gave to others was the shining force of what was the shining in him. The truth was in him, and he was manifesting the truth.

[00:19:02] Then we find the second item for his encouragement, verse 7.

He says, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Paul realized that he has a treasure.

This well-known verse, most of us know. What is the treasure?

Just going to the preceding verse, verse 6, we read about God, who in time past commanded the light to shine out of darkness in creation, has shined in our hearts to give the light [00:20:03] or to show forth the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is true Christianity, that we now can behold all the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We have this privilege, dear brothers, that we can look up like Stephen when being full of the Spirit. He looked up and the heavens were open, and he sees the glory of God shining in the face of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a privilege. First of all to see this, and then comes the next point for the shining force.

[00:21:02] It's a great blessing to know that we have this treasure. Every true child of God here has known the glory of God in the face of the Lord Jesus, and he can shine this force to others. Dear brothers, just to show this, I would like to show you something of what is happening outside Christianity with people who have never been exposed to the gospel. I remember a letter received by a Muslim person many years ago who heard the audio teachings through Transworld Radio, and he mentioned in his letter that sentence, I have been born in darkness, [00:22:02] and I live in darkness, and I know that I'm going to darkness. Can you help me? Can we imagine we have now this light knowing Christ, knowing the glory of God shining in the face of Christ? What a blessing. We can say this is our treasure. Our treasure is not material things or positions or degrees in studying, which is very good in its place, but the true treasure is knowing Christ, and not only knowing him, but that this knowledge may shine force to others, and this is why God in his wisdom has put this treasure in earthen vessels, in our bodies, in our mortal [00:23:04] flesh. Why?

Maybe we don't like to be earthen vessels. Maybe we like to be brazen vessels or stony vessels or silver vessels, but God has put this treasure in very weak vessels that are capable of being broken. Why? So that this treasure can be seen outside.

And Paul here, as if he is pointing that he got an understanding, a proper understanding of his sufferings, as if he said, well, if the Lord is allowing me to go through these difficulties, [00:24:01] it is for a purpose, so that the treasure can shine force through this earthen vessel. I think we are reminded of the story of Gideon and his men. When going to the combat, to the war against the Midianites, what were their arms?

Just the trumpets and the torches inside the earthen pitchers, and Gideon told them, you will break these vessels and you will sound, you will blow the trumpet and the sound will come. And this is what we see here. Earthen vessels to be broken, the light is shining force, this is our life, manifestation of the truth [00:25:04] through our lives, and then we blow the trumpet, we preach the gospel. How the vessel is broken? We find many things, Paul mentions many things. These are situations or circumstances that the Lord used to break down this vessel. He says, verse 8, we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Cast down, but not destroyed. How could this go together? In the first clause we find the weakness, our weakness, the earthen vessel, but on the other side we find [00:26:01] the surpassing power in us.

So we are troubled from the human side, but yet we are not distressed. This is the power in us. We are perplexed humanly, but we are not in despair. We are persecuted, but not forsaken. Cast down, but not destroyed. What is this power which is in us? It is the power of the life of Christ in us. And life has its power.

Even life in nature, life in nature has its power. Life in a small plant, in a shoot, coming out from the ground, it can come out even being under blocks, but it comes out. So any life, its nature is [00:27:01] to come out, and this is the life of the risen Christ which is in us.

This was the second cause of his encouragement here, Paul. He says, continues and says in verse 10, always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. Then the third thing, in verse 13, he says, we having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believe and therefore have I spoken, we also believe and therefore speak. Paul here is mentioning or is referring to the experience of the writer of Psalm 116.

[00:28:03] It is untitled, we don't know who is the writer, but we have his experience. In Psalm 116, the writer says, we can read together, verse 8, for thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from failing. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living, as if he has the resurrection life before him. I believed, therefore have I spoken. I was greatly afflicted, and he continues. Paul quotes this verse, and he says, we have the same spirit of faith, as if, he wants to say, as the writer of Psalm 116 faced death, but [00:29:04] he cried to the Lord, and the Lord took him out, rescued him, and this is why he says, I have, therefore I believed, therefore I have spoken. Here he says also, I have the same, Paul says, I have the same confidence that there will be the resurrection life and the resurrection world before me. Can we say also that we have the spirit or the attitude of faith? It is not only for Paul, but for every one of us. How important to face daily challenges, either in our personal or family circumstances or in ministry. How important to face all this with a spirit [00:30:01] of faith. We walk by faith and not by sight, and without faith it is impossible to please him.

Abraham had the spirit of faith, and very important verses are written about him in Romans 4. I would like to return to this verse, to these verses in Romans 4, I mean. Romans 4, from verse 17.

As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, before him whom he believed, even God, who quakens the dead, and calls those things [00:31:04] which be not as though they were. This is the God in whom Abraham put his confidence, the God who quakens the dead, and calls those things which be not as though they were. And who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, so shall they see it be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body, now dead, which was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith, giving glory [00:32:01] to God. Very encouraging verses here about Abraham.

A good example for us, that even facing circumstances that seem very difficult, that we ask the Lord to give us the faith and to put all our trust in him, and we can continue by this spirit of faith. This is what Paul says here in 2nd Corinthians 4, so he was not fainting because he was exercising his faith, facing all the difficulties. And he continues and says verse 13, verse 14, knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, by Jesus, and shall present us [00:33:02] with you. For all things are for your sakes. He sees all what is happening. God is using everything for the blessing of the Corinthian believers. Everything and what a look we have, we must have, dear

brothers, to see that the Lord is controlling all things, even difficulties. The Lord is controlling and using all these things for the blessing of our souls and for the blessing even of others. This is why he says, all things are for your sakes. Then we come to the fourth thing. We have considered that we faint not because we have such a glorious ministry, ministry of the gospel, and then [00:34:01] we have a treasure, though in earthen vessels, and we accept all the dealings of God with us to the end of having the treasure shining forth, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. Thirdly, we faint not because we have the spirit of faith, but fourthly, in verse 16, there is a very important principle. For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. What is the outward man? This body. The inward man, the spiritual entity which we have, the spirit and the soul.

And this inner man [00:35:01] is the subject of all God's dealing with us now. Many times we concentrate upon the outward man, but the Lord is working in us, in the inner man.

And how important to think and to have this way of thinking, even if this outward man is perishing, is suffering, but there is renewal, a work of renewal in us by the Holy Spirit. Many times we can admit this, that we concentrate upon the welfare of this outward man, and we give it much importance, and we neglect the inner one. But we need to understand [00:36:01] that God wants the welfare of the inner man. And how this renewal work is done.

Paul says, it is done, it is renewed by the work of the Spirit. What a blessing to exercise and to feel the work of the Spirit in every one of us, especially when we study our Bibles, and when we lean upon the Lord in prayer, and when we pass through the difficulties and get good experiences for our blessing and for others also. This is why Paul says, we faint not, because the inward man is renewed. And then in verse 17, he brings to us [00:37:02] the fifth thing. He is contrasting affliction with glory.

He says, for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. What a verse, what a principle. Contrasting the things which we pass through now with the things which are coming help us. He is contrasting affliction with glory and say, the affliction now is light, but the glory will be weight of glory. The affliction is for a moment compared with the eternal glory.

I like the way the Apostle Paul [00:38:03] looks at things and thinks about things and how he is weighing things in the light of eternity. And if we want also to weigh things in the right way, we have to weigh them in the light of eternity. In Romans 8, we have a parallel verse.

Verse 18, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. He is not saying the glory which we shall [00:39:01] enter in, but the glory which shall be revealed in us. When the Lord Jesus will come in his manifestation before the world, and we will come with him, he shall be glorified in his sense.

And all the earth shall be astonished from his glory shining in us. Do we think about these things? He will come, he will take us, he will change our bodies into glorified bodies, and he will bring us in his appearing, showing his glory through us. And what a time when we shall see how the Lord [00:40:01] has done for us.

And in verse 18, as if he is making a conclusion for this, he says, While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Everything depends upon how we look.

In Peter we have a lesson. He began upon the waters, walking upon the water, because he was looking to the Lord Jesus. But when he saw the waves and the water coming, he was afraid, and he began to sing.

To where we are looking, Paul here says, We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. Why? [00:41:01] For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. And beginning chapter 5, he is bringing to us one of the things which are not seen. He is speaking about if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God. We have a glorified body, a building of God, and house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. There is a glorified body waiting for us. May the Lord give us to reflect upon these simple thoughts that we continue steadfastly, and we faint not though facing things that can make us down.

But now let us continue having our confidence in the Lord, [00:42:04] carrying our testimony, and continuing faithful to the Lord. Amen.