

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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[0:00] This morning we'll be picking up where we left off last week, that is we'll be picking up in the 7th chapter, 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Our text this morning will be verses 7 through 18, so that will get us to the end of the 4th chapter.

If you have not been with us, or if you have been with us, and maybe life has happened since then, you know that we are in the middle of kind of a divine interruption of what Paul is writing to the church at Corinth.

And what we refer to as his second letter, more than likely it is the third letter, because there seems to be a letter which is not included in canonical scripture that is absent, maybe a private letter of exchange between the two.

But either way, and what we refer to as 2 Corinthians being the letter that is going to the church at Corinth as he is exhorting them to walk in faithfulness. 1 Corinthians, he's dealing with problems and concerns and things he had heard, matters which were concerning for any pastor, let alone the church planner who had started the church there, and rebuking and correcting those matters. 2 Corinthians is more of encouraging and affirming and really just kind of upbuilding the believers that they would walk in sincere faithfulness. As a part of that, he has tried to, not that he had to, but he has tried to establish his concern for the church.

[1:17] We need to remember why, because in the end of 1 Corinthians, Paul alludes to the fact that he would be coming their direction. He's writing this letter, sending it ahead of them, and he stated that he would be coming and setting these matters in order.

He never went. Therefore, the church kind of thought he was maybe blowing smoke a little bit. He was giving empty threats and was wanting them to respond. This letter deals with why he did not come.

It's not as a lack of concern. It's not as a lack of love. Rather, it was because the church did respond to his first letter. We'll see that when we get to the seventh chapter. But in the middle of that defense of his concern, Paul stops.

He stops near the end of the second chapter, and it goes all the way through the remainder of the second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and even into the seventh chapter, this kind of aside.

And it is this aside which Paul speaks of very personal matters. Now, these are important, because if we don't look at this in context, we think, well, Paul is just describing himself, talking about his own life.

[2:15] Therefore, I can skip over a big portion of this letter and get to the more practical stuff. This is the Word of God, which means it has application. There's a truth, a single truth that is contained within its pages, but there are innumerable applications.

I believe in any passage of Scripture you get to, there is but one truth. That is, we need to find the truth of that passage. It's not that it's going to be true to you, and it'll be true to me, and a different truth, I'll find upon a different truth.

There is but one truth. That's why I say, when I study Scripture, and I'm studying it kind of on my own or by myself, and I'm letting Scripture be the best commentary on Scripture, I believe I come to the point where I'm kind of settled on the truth that it teaches, and then I will consult others who went before me, and if my truth looks different than everybody else's truth, then the problem is not usually with everybody else.

The problem is usually with me. Right? There is but one truth. But there are innumerable applications to that truth. The applications are those things which vary throughout the ages and even in the individual.

That is, what Paul is referring to as his ministry is that truth. But the application of being in the ministry applies to all people in all times and all seasons. So in looking at that, we're not just looking at Paul giving some personal matters.

[3 : 29] Paul is encouraging us what it looks like to live life in ministry. It does not mean vocational ministry, but it does mean ministry. And we base this upon the rest of Scripture, that God calls us and appoints each and every one of us for a specific purpose in our life.

God equips us for that purpose. He's ordained for us the days of our life, as Paul would say when he's speaking on Mars Hill in Athens, that God appoints this location, the time, the season of your birth and even of your death.

I believe it is appointed unto man once to die. There is an appointed date. I don't know how it happens or when it happens or where it happens with me, but I know there's an appointed time. But until that time, there is a ministry assignment in Christ.

And I don't think that that is just unique of me. I believe that's very unique to each and every individual. I believe it is here that we have begun to see, they say the pipeline of ministry, or technically what they're speaking of is pastoral.

The pastoral pipeline has run dry. That we're nowhere near seeing the amount of men being called to the ministry of the pastor as we're seeing men retiring from the ministry of the pastor.

[4 : 37] Now, just to be honest, they say you never retire from pastoral ministry. You may leave a church, but you're going to preach somewhere. You never really retire from pastoral ministry. But with our rate of retirement and our rate of pastors stepping into glory, we don't seem to have the replacements coming up for them.

My interpretation of that is because we have failed to reinvigorate or reaffirm the reality that each and every one of us are called to ministry.

And we have assigned ministry to a vocation, and we have given that vocation to some specialists, quote, unquote. I'm not a specialist, by the way. I'm not a specialist at all.

I say that, you know, I could not be of a more common individual than anybody. I introduce myself most of the time to people who don't know me. I say, my name is Billy Joe. I grew up in Belbuckle and I live in Wartrace. There's not much specialist there, right?

That's who I am. I'm about as southern as you can get. I have to really pay attention when I preach because I know my natural tongue will cause it to slip. So we don't want to reserve it to someone else, but rather we accept our calling that God has called us to ministry.

[5 : 48] Last week, we began to look at how we can endure in that ministry. This week, in our passage of Scripture, I want you to see how there is an abounding ministry of the faithful, that we do so much more than endure in it, but rather we abound in the ministry that God has called us to.

So if you're physically able and desire to do so, I'm asking if you would join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God, found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, starting in verse 7, and going down to the end of the chapter, which gets us down to verse 18.

The Word of God says, But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that their surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing, and persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh, so death works in us, but life in you.

But having the same spirit of faith according to what is written, I believe, 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.

[7 : 08] 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. Let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you so much for this day. God, we're so thankful for your word, and we pray as we have read it, seen it, and heard it. God, now we want to position ourselves before you, that you may speak its truth into our hearts and minds.

Lord, we pray that the word of God would do that which only it can do. It can shape and conform and mold us to your image for your glory and yours alone. And we ask it all in Christ's name.

Amen. You may be seated. Amen. When Jesus is discoursing with his disciples shortly before his betrayal in the Garden of Gethsemane, if you know, it's one of my favorite sections of Scripture because it's one of the most continuous discourses we have of Christ.

[8 : 25] The Sermon on the Mount, many believe, was maybe shared at one setting, but we also think that those truths were being taught sporadically in different bits and pieces during the ministry of Christ.

But there's no denying that by the time we turn to the Gospel of John, and we get into the 13th chapter, and we know that they're there in the night of his betrayal, and we move forward through chapters 14, 15, 16, and 17, then we have one great long discourse.

What Jesus wanted to share with his disciples shortly before his betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, death, and eventually resurrection. It is literally the last words of Christ to his followers.

In the midst of that, as he is speaking of them, of a future home that he's going to prepare for them, of a place that he's calling them to, and how he's going before them, and how they know the way because he is the way and the truth and the life, and all these realities, there's also this encouragement that he is giving them a ministry, and he is going to empower them to do this ministry.

You know, the vine and the branches. Right? Right? Jesus says, I am the vine and you are the branches. He who abides in me will bear, but he says it clearly, much fruit.

[9 : 41] He declares that the ministry that Christ calls us to and empowers us to accomplish will be a ministry of fruitfulness. It will not just be a ministry of existence, that is, enduring.

But during the enduring of that ministry assignment, we also ought to expect fruitfulness from that ministry. That does not mean that all of our fruit will be what we consider in this world extravagant or great.

There are people, Noah was a preacher of righteousness for 120 years and saw no converts.

Right? We understand this. We know that there are those who labor unseen, unknown, unrecognized for years and years and years and years and years, not just in the pulpit ministry, but in the ministry of the pews.

and there are those saints, those saints that we know nothing of that we say, did it really bear fruit? And according to Christ, the promise is yes. There is fruitfulness that is attached to the ministry assignment of the branch as it abides in the vine.

So we ought to expect an abounding ministry in the life of the faithful. The expectation is one which reminds us that if we are not seeing fruitfulness, now I know this is kind of challenging, the problem is not in the vine, the problem is in the branch.

[11 : 03] The problem is in what is going on in our lives. And we come to that place where we cry out like the psalmist, search me, oh God, help me to know my wicked heart. I have to do that quite often.

I dare say that each and every one of us go through seasons where we're going back. That does not also mean that we will have seasons of just continuous, continuous. Sometimes there are those dormant seasons where God is preparing us for something else and he is going to bring an abundant harvest.

But there is at least an expectation of fruitfulness that abounds. Paul has told us how we can endure in the ministry. We'll walk in faithfulness.

Now he transitions to what it looks like of a fruitful, abounding ministry, those who are faithful. And this is where we have to really compare and contrast it just a little bit because it may not look the way the world thinks fruitfulness and abounding looks like.

It looks completely different in the courtroom of heaven. And we see this even as Paul kind of shares these things, these truths that are there that this is an effective ministry.

[12 : 09] Many people would look at the life of Paul and say, well, it wasn't very fruitful. It wasn't very effective. He ended up being a prisoner in a Roman jail cell. He gets his head cut off later on. You know, he suffers and he's persecuted for his faith.

We can go back to many of the church fathers and we can say, well, that doesn't look like it was very effective. Yet this was the ministry assignment that God gave them in Christ. They were captives of Christ and it bore fruit.

In our own life, we need to say, what does it look like to have this faithful ministry? Do I need to see that it's noses and numbers and we're counting all these people that I'm touching, whatever it is in

my home or in a workplace, or is it the amount of people that I lead to make this decision? Or what does it look like to have a fruitful, abounding ministry of faithfulness? Paul shares some things with us here. Number one, a faithful ministry is one that puts the power of God on display. An abounding ministry is one that the power of God is manifested in. Paul says, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels. The greatest thing about us is the gospel message which we possess. [13:21] Paul did not look at himself. Now, this is the same Paul that says, be imitators of me as I imitate Christ. This is Paul who had the boldness to say that, I wish that you would be more like me.

More than once, he wanted people to live a life like him. He even looked at rulers and leaders who said, I wish that you were like me other than these chains which are now holding me. This is Paul who had the boldness to stand up and say, do what I do.

But Paul also knew that the greatest thing about him wasn't himself, but rather it was that which he possessed. He says, we have this treasure. And he has to say that because it tells us earlier that we have a ministry.

But this ministry is a treasure. It's something that we ought to foster. It's something that we ought to be concerned about. It's something that we ought to cherish. That is, the ministry assignment that each and every one of us have been given in Christ is a glorious treasure of heaven.

Now he goes back and it seems as if he is alluding to what Jesus spoke about when he spoke of the treasures of heaven being like the pearl of great price or the treasure that is hidden in the field that was such a grand treasure that the man went out and sold everything that he had in order that he may purchase the field because it was such a glorious treasure.

[14:34] It wasn't that the field was worth all that much, but it was what was in the field that was worth all that much. It was that which the field possessed that was worth all that much. It was this great price, this great treasure.

And Paul says the reality is we have this treasure in earthen vessels. It is not the vessel that is so grand and so great, but rather it is the treasure that is possessed.

But God is intentional in doing this, right? We ask ourselves, and I know that I do quite often. Paul did it himself when he spoke of the thorn in his flesh.

You say, well, pastor, if I have such a grand and great ministry, then why do I have these problems? And I would say, welcome to the group, right? We can all stand up and say, my name is this, and these are my problems because nobody knows our problems better than we do.

We don't always tell everybody about them. We don't always talk about them. We don't like to promote them because we're always doing great. Every Sunday morning, every Wednesday night, every time we meet each other, we're always doing great, right?

[15:34] A lot of you caught on to that. Now I ask you, and you say, I'm doing well. And I say, yeah, you're listening, right? Because it can be well with your soul, even though it's not great in your life, right? We understand that. And we say, but why, if I have such a grand and precious ministry, why do I have so many cracks in my armor?

Why is it such a hard time? Why is there this struggle? Well, Paul tells us why, right? Why am I so weak? Why do I not do what I want to do?

Why do I seem to fail so much? But Paul tells us why. This is one of the fruit of that ministry, so that their surpassing greatness of the power will be of God. Your ministry has a surpassing great power attached to it.

That is, the assignment that God gives the believer is an assignment from the courtroom of heaven that accomplishes spiritual realities. You ever thought about that?

You can get a great assignment on this earth. In this world, you can have the greatest of leaders of all world powers, the president of the United States or anywhere else, can give you a personal assignment. But that assignment is limited in scope to the things of this world.

[16:44] Because this is their realm and this is their domain. But the assignment we get as followers of Christ is a heavenly assignment. It is a ministry responsibility given from him who puts his feet upon the world as his footstool.

It is a glorious assignment. And it is one that has power attached to it because it is not confined to the realities of the world in which we exist.

Rather, it is confined to the courtroom of heaven. The other night, I know it seems strange, but it was a clear sky night, so we went and took a blanket and we just laid on the hillside behind our house and stared into the heavens.

You say, well, that's kind of corny. It is until you realize that, wow, he who spoke all that into existence and names every one of those stars is the one who called me by name too. Right? Because the Bible tells us the heavens declare the glory of the Lord, but how often do we just walk around with the glory of the Lord being declared above us and we forget to look up? And you can see the expanse of that. And he who is far beyond all of that, and it was such a clear night, you could see things that were just way, way out there in your life. There are things, just unknown things out there. But he who is above all of that is the one who loves you enough to call you to himself and give you a ministry.

[18:02] And if that ministry doesn't come with power, then, my friend, there is nothing that you will ever encounter that comes with power. The Bible says that he calls every star by name and puts them in place.

As it was getting darker, more stars were showing up, right? They were there. And the Bible tells us that seasons exist to declare his glory so that seasons would pass in our lives so that we would know who he is.

And this is the same God who assigns a ministry to us before he laid the foundation of anything created. This is the same God who calls us and he wants to do wonderful, powerful things through us, not so that people would say, wow, look at that individual.

He intentionally puts it in weak individuals so that the power attached to it has to be acknowledged as being from him and not from us, right? That is, he calls us to do things, simple things, mundane things, daily things of faithfulness.

Walking with the love of the Lord your God, with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your might. You know, that's a supernatural thing. To do something supernatural, all you have to do is love God. You say, what's so supernatural about that?

[19:07] Well, when the scripture testifies to the reality that there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none who seeks after the things of God, no, not one. There is none who loves anything but self, no, not one. That's what the law tells us, right? Over and over and over again.

It tells us who we are. If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might, with all your strength, then all of a sudden, my friend, you're doing something out of this world. That is, God has changed your heart of stone and given you a heart of flesh.

And he's called you to love your enemies and to pray for those who persecute you. He's called you to do things, to be a neighbor, to help those around you. Well, who is my neighbor? Whoever's in front of you, right? We understand these things. He's called you to do daily, mundane, routine things according to the world standards, by the way, that when people look at you and say, why are you doing that?

You say, well, on my own, I can't do it. But greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world, right? The power to love or the power to be concerned or the power to help or the power to have a concern or even the power to intercede in prayer for another individual is a supernatural power that is a display not of who you are, but rather of who he is.

This assignment comes, it says, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. It is a reminder that it is not our ministry.

[20:21] It is our assignment, and it's his ministry. Therefore, it is his power that sustains that ministry. It is a reminder that the greatness attached to it is not who we are, right?

We are weak, falling individuals. Man at his best is woefully short of what he ought to be. And our greatest talents, our greatest abilities, our greatest strengths really cannot accomplish anything eternally.

But yet, in the assignment that we're given in Christ, he's called us to make an eternal impact in the lives of others so that that power may come. And it is a sustaining power. You know, Paul goes on and he begins to list very personal things.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not despairing, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always caring about the body of the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus will also be manifested in our body.

That is, Paul reminds us that God doesn't promise us ministry is going to be easy. He doesn't promise us that ministry is going to be painless. He doesn't promise us that any ministry assignment is going to be pleasant.

[21:26] What he promises us is that his power will be manifested in those things. It's the Romans 8 principle, right? We all know Romans 8, you know, that God, we're secure in the hand of God, but

when we keep reading on past the 28th verse, we get to this reality where he starts speaking of persecution and all the suffering and the trials and everything, and then he has this two little word, this word in, but in all these things, God is faithful.

See, what we want is for God to be faithful by taking us out of all those things. Sometimes, he puts us in them so that our weaknesses may be manifested and his power may be on display because it's in those difficult seasons that the greatest, the greatness of the power seemed to be of God and not of man.

While you're on the mountaintop, it's easy to do wonderful things, but it's down in the valley, the fruitfulness of the valley and those dark seasons where the power of God is manifested.

We see this. An abounding ministry of the faithful has the power of God manifested. Number two, the promises of God are trusted. The promises of God are trusted.

He says in the first 13, but having the same spirit of faith. Now, Paul all of a sudden attaches himself to the Old Testament saints here. As a matter of fact, he's going to quote rather loosely and we shouldn't be surprised when you have loose quotations of the Old Testament and the New Testament because when they quoted these passages, they were looking back at everything that passage speaks of, everything it talks about, everything that resonates within that passage.

[23 : 05] He is doing that here. He's giving a practical interpretation of it. He says, having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, I believe, therefore I spoke.

Quoting Psalm 116, two verses actually there, as I have believed, then I said. So he's uniting himself with the faith of the psalmist. And if you go back and you're reading, if you were here on Wednesday night, you know you've already heard this once.

You would know this was a time of struggle, a time of persecution, a time of really doubt. It's really when most of our psalms and our spiritual songs there that are recorded for us or the worship songs to the nation of Israel were not born in grand seasons but in difficult seasons, right?

And the psalmist here is pinning this hymn of praise and declaring how in the midst of all that when everything seemed to be falling apart, there was something he believed in and he believed in the goodness and the greatness of God.

And therefore, since he believed in it, he prayed, he said, he made a declaration that God would remain faithful and God would still be God and God would be there, that God would not forsake his people and forget about them.

[24 : 12] We understand these things, these realities and he's talking about the promises of God. He says, I believe, therefore I spoke. We also believe, therefore we also speak. What Paul is saying is our belief has dictated our actions.

Now we've said that before and we'll say it again. We'll continue to promote that because true belief always dictates lived out actions. It's a good way of saying is you really believe how you live.

Right? True belief will always dictate actions. We believe, therefore we also speak. Paul has just said all this persecution, all these trials, all these things that come, there is a belief that is settled to the core of my being.

There is something that I am not just convinced of but rather convicted of. A belief is something that has gripped your heart and changed your mind. It is a deep-seated conviction that has now changed your actions.

If I convince you of something, you're like, well that's pretty good. That's a good thought. It's a good opinion. I'll do my research and see what else I can find out on it and I'm sure you'll go find someone more eloquent in speech, someone a little grander in their grammar and maybe they'll write something that will convince you of something otherwise.

[25 : 21] It may change your mind but it'll never change your heart. A belief gets to the very heart of the issue and captures the heart. It convicts the heart and therefore it changes the mind because in scripture the heart is always the seat of emotions.

You say, no, my emotions flow from my mind. No, it's to the very core of your being, right? The seat of your emotions is your heart is settled on this reality and all of a sudden this belief brings about a conviction and convictions force your mind to make a decision.

Something you're convinced of, you can leave it or take it. It doesn't matter. It may or may not be true. We've talked about this thing. There are a lot of things that I'm convinced of. There are a lot of truths out there that I think are right but it doesn't really dictate how I live.

It doesn't change how I'm going to behave. I'm convinced of the reality that normally when you bungee jump that cord will bring you back up. I've never strapped a rubber band to my ankles and jumped off of something high because that thing that I'm convinced of has not become a conviction. That is, I'm not going to live my life according to that reality but when it comes to scripture, I am convicted of the reality that it is absolutely true and since it is absolutely true, my life has to change because of the truth that it contains.

[26 : 25] It is not something I'm just convinced that yes, it says some truth. I am convicted to that very heart of my being that what the word that God declares is absolutely emphatically true beyond a shadow of a doubt.

Therefore, if it is true, my life should look different. It will always dictate my actions. I believe, therefore I speak. Paul says, we are counting on and trusting the promises of God.

We're not looking around us. A ministry that abounds is one that has the promises of God as their trust and as their foundation. He goes on to say, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.

He says, let them kill me. Someone once said that Paul had to be the hardest individual to ever deal with. Right? You persecute Paul, he says, I bear in my body the brand marks of Jesus Christ and I suffer for the name of Jesus.

You kill Paul and he says, to die is gain. You let Paul, let Paul live, he says, and to remain is fruitful. Right? It's good for your benefit. You leave him alone and he goes and plants churches.

[27 : 32] You persecute him, he says, I'm suffering for Jesus. You kill him, he says, I'm going to Jesus. Why? Because the promises of God were his foundation. He trusted in the reality of the resurrection and the hope of that and he knew the ministry scope that God had given him was not limited to the days confined to his earthly existence.

Understand that in an abounding ministry, the promises of God are trusted. You want to change your actions, then you need to settle your convictions. This is what I believe.

I wonder how many of us have done that. I know I've encouraged you to do it before, but I wonder how many of you have done it. Taken a piece of paper, put it at the top of that piece of paper. This is what I believe.

And begin writing out your belief statements. It takes some time to work through. I think it took me six months to write through mine. And it's not that long. But before I wrote down what I believed, I wanted to know what I believed.

You need to know what you believe and believe what you know. Right? Because then, actions follow. Paul said, these things I believe and therefore I will speak.

[28 : 45] An abounding ministry puts the power of God on display. It manifests. An abounding ministry trusts the promises of God. An abounding ministry here is one that's not just numerical, but here we get to a numerical reality, but it's not really about us.

It's not even what the world sees. It is that the praise of God may be exalted. That the praise of God may be exalted. Look at what it says. Verse 15, for all things are for your sakes.

Paul here says, I've given myself completely to the ministry. All things are for your sakes. See, a concern in ministry is never for self. It's always for the sake of others.

He says, all things are for your sakes. Why? You say, well, Paul, a lot of these people, they were failing you. I mean, you go back to the letter of 1 Corinthians. That's why you can't separate these two. You need to take them in context.

And I know we kind of spend a lot of time introducing them this way, but Paul has just declared that everything he is doing is doing for the sake of others. And the same people that he has given his life to, go back to the first letter, they have failed miserably.

[29 : 54] We've said, there's probably not a more wicked church that you'll ever find than a church which existed in Corinth when Paul wrote to him in 1 Corinthians, but yet he called them the saints which were at Corinth. Right? He referred to them as the saints which were at Corinth.

And yet they were letting him down. They were upsetting him. He was getting, he was miserable over the condition that he was in. He was really encouraging them there. He says, all things are for your sakes. Why would Paul, how could Paul really not only endure, but how did he see it as abounding?

How did he see it as being fruitful? If all I do is give myself to people who will let me down, if all I do is give myself to people who are who are failing and falling and it just doesn't seem to make sense

because success in Paul's ministry really wasn't existent by the world standard.

There were other people who were doing so much more. I mean, we'll look at Paul. How does it abound? And look at what it says. For all things are for your sakes so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people. So Paul realized that through his faithfulness, the grace of God was spreading to more and more people.

People's desperate needs were being met and that was the need for salvation. The grace of God was spreading to more and more people so that this grace may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

[31 : 04] What is Paul saying? Paul says, I count it a success when more thanks are given to the glory of God. Not when people come to me and say, you did a good job, Paul.

Or not when people come to me and say, Paul, thank you. It's that the praise of God is exalted. That there are more and more people because of the grace that is spreading to more people. That the grace that is going out further and further and further that more people will be gathered around the throne room of heaven casting their crowns down and joining in the song of the saints saying, worthy is the lamb that was slain.

Right? Paul says, it is considered a success when God gets more and more and more praise. When people not, he says, they don't have to praise me. It is successful and it is fruitful when God gets more glory and God gets more abounding glory and more thanks are ascending to the throne room of heaven that more and more people are praising God for his grace.

Paul says, they don't even have to mention me by name. I count it as a successful, fruitful ministry when more praise is ascending. Why? Because we don't need to be praised. We don't even deserve to be praised but God is worthy of our praise and God is worthy of all praise.

[32 : 17] So the more praise that ascends to the throne room of heaven, it puts God in his rightful position among more and more people. It's not that God is off that throne, it's just that more people are seated or more people's eyes are open to the reality that he's on the throne, right?

The greater the praise that God gets, the better it is and we want God to get more and more praise. I wonder if our ministry is jealous for the praise of God or if we're really more concerned about the popularity of man.

See, people don't have to like you, people don't have to like me. I want them to. By nature, believe it or not, I'm a people pleaser. I know sometimes when I preach it doesn't sound that way.

I really want people to like me, but they don't have to. The great desire of our being ought to be that God gets the praise.

Too often, I get sidetracked by this reality that God, I want a little recognition or I'm just being honest with you, Lord, I'd like to have a little appreciation there or I'd like to, not saying that you don't, I'm saying my personal, I have this, I don't know about you, but I have this enemy of my soul who likes to whisper in my ear every now and then and tell me about all the things that I don't have, right, and all the things that I wish I had and all the things that I fall short on and this stuff and he likes to sit up here and remind me of all the things I miss.

[33 : 41] It's kind of like, you know, what he's always been doing since the garden. They had everything there but the only thing that he highlighted she said, you know what, he did say we can't eat from that tree because what we do when we begin to murmur and complain and be a little upset and I'm preaching to the preacher for just a minute so give me a minute, I'm probably not preaching to you, right, you probably don't need to hear this but I need to hear this but when I get upset and when I lack contentment and when I'm really falling short and I'm having these poor pitiful me parties really what's going on, Billy Joe, is that you're forgetting about everything that the good God has given you and you're just focusing on the one thing that that good God has withheld from you at that particular moment and if we believe, Billy Joe, if you believe that God has created everything for a purpose and intentional and if that good God has all things that flow from his hand and he has your well-being in mind then whatever that good God has withheld from you is for your good at that moment so Billy Joe, get over it.

You didn't need to hear that but I did because it's about his praise not our comfort, not our position or not about really how we see things.

It is the praise of God being exalted and we want to lift that on high because if not then we'll really begin to think it's all about us but we got to go back to those earthen vessels, right?

We're not really fit. So we have the power of God manifested, the promises of God trusted, the praise of God exalted. Now let's get to this last one. The perspective of man shifted. The

perspective of man shifted.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Friend, listen to me. Don't lose heart in the ministry. Therefore we do not lose heart. Why? Though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

[35 : 42] Probably one of the greatest defenses for the separation of soul and body here by the way. Great apologetic for this reality. That your soul is an eternal being. God has created an eternal soul and placed it inside that really limited body.

Your body can decay but the soul of man is being renewed day by day. I remember when I was very young in the faith and I was very young in the faith. I remember I was like 21 years of age. I was a new believer. I was so excited about it.

I was fellowshiping with the church for the first time. There was a saint of the church there. He and I kind of got to know each other. We hung out a little bit. We were playing volleyball. He's stepped on in glory now.

It kind of tells you how long ago it was. But I remember talking with him. We were playing volleyball and I was kind of, I was 21. You know what you're like, man. 21, right? Some of you are there now. I got some news for you. Stay with me, okay? Stay with the rest of the story.

And I was beside this guy and he looked at me and he said, you know what? In my mind, I'm still 18 but my body just can't keep up with my mind. And I had no idea what he was talking about. I'm rapidly getting up on that age that he was at that time and I know exactly what he's talking about.

[36 : 43] In my mind, I'm still 18. My body reminds me quite often, I'm not 18. Why? Because the soul of man doesn't age. It is renewed day by day.

Though our outer man is decaying, our inner man. But God has created eternal. He has said eternity in the heart of every man so that our longing can be for something. God built us together, built us that way intentionally, right?

He testifies within the very core of our being. He reminds us this isn't it. And he does it over and over again.

Why? Look at how Paul says, verse 17, everything Paul has just laid out, everything he's going through, you know Paul has been more honest in the New Testament about his sufferings than any other believer.

He's talking about being shipwrecked. He's talking about being hungry. He's talking about being thrown to wild beasts. He's talking about bearing in his body the brand marks of Christ being beaten with stripes and all these things. And look how, really, if you go to the original language, Paul was having a hard time describing it and he used really the greatest extent of the original language to describe how little those things were.

[37 : 53] Right? He was going to great measures to talk about the smallness of his suffering for momentary light affliction. In the moment, they don't seem too light, right?

Momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory. He's contrasting. What is glory going to hold in store compared to what the temporal has done for us?

What does eternity compare to what we're dealing with here in the temporal? Right? He says this is momentary. This is light. This is nothing.

Why? Because his perspective is being shifted looking somewhere else. He's not focusing on the problems. He's not focusing on the pain. He's not focusing on all the affliction.

Those matters, hey, they're real. He doesn't discount them. He doesn't say it doesn't exist. He said these things happen to us. But they don't compare. It really fails in comparison.

[38 : 56] We can't even put them up against the weight of glory. Friend, listen to me. Fruitfulness in ministry is not always about success and position in this life. It's really about the weight of glory that waits for us on the other side of this life.

It's about the promises of the Savior who looks at us. And just like I said, the very first Sunday morning I ever preached here is my view, preaching in view of a call. Some of you were here. I said it and I'll say it then.

I want the biggest crown I can have when I step in glory because I know what we do with those crowns is we cast them at the feet of Jesus. Believe my exact words were, I want a big honking crown to throw at the feet of my Savior.

I do. I don't want it so that I can walk around heaven and everybody can say, oh, look at that man's crown because my crown is going to be just where your crown is and we're casting our crowns at

the feet of Jesus Christ. But my Savior is worthy of all that I can throw at His feet.

And I want that crown, not so my own glory, so that the weight of glory can be there. And He gets greater praise. He gets more glory. He gets more recognition. Right? What does this compare to what we have waiting over there?

[39 : 59] It is all about how we're shifting. But oh, how the enemy calls our attention to look at the temporal. Oh, how he goes to great lengths to cause us to look at the things that are today.

because this is all He's got. This is all He's got. This is the limit of His abilities to us in Christ. He says, while we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. There's a show I like to watch. It puts everybody else in the family asleep.

It's called Mysteries of the Abandoned. These grand superstructures all around the world at one time were magnificent, some of them engineering marvels.

And today they're sitting in ruins. Because no matter how much man spends on it or how much attention man gives to it or how much labor is invested in it, it's just temporal.

[41 : 07] It doesn't last. When left alone, I don't know if you've noticed it, if you've ever seen that or maybe in your own house you've noticed it, God's creation has a way of taking back whatever man puts on it.

These things are temporal. But that is eternal. And what our focus is on will always dictate the fruitfulness of our ministry.

Let's pray. God, we thank you so much for this day. So thankful we've had the opportunity to gather around your word. Oh God, thankful for your grace and your mercy which is displayed to us on a daily basis.

We pray now that we would take the truth of scripture. We'd apply it to our lives for your glory and honor in the days ahead. We ask it all in Christ's name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.