

Our Faith Shall Be Sight

Individual Message

By Phillip M. Way

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 2 Corinthians 5:1-11
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TIME in the Word Ministries

PO Box 1495

Marble Falls, Texas 78654

Website: www.timeintheword.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/timeintheword

Take your Bibles and open with me this morning to 2 Corinthians 4 working on the message for Isaiah 50, Israel's hope, a fitting message for this time of year. Of course, we were interrupted this week, God in his plan in calling Martha home for her faith to be sight. The encouragement then for me as a pastor as we gather this morning is not just to continue on as if nothing had happened and I promise you it would have been perfectly fit to preach a message titled "Israel's Hope" to you this morning from Isaiah but really, truly, in praying and seeking the Lord, found this passage, read through 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 and 6 and 7, and thought that's too much to preach in one message so we're going to take a few verses here and a few verses there in a message titled "Our Faith Shall Be Sight." When we end this morning, we'll actually end in 1 Thessalonians, Paul's instruction for what we are to do regarding those who have fallen asleep in Christ before us, and he gives us words to comfort ourselves with.

But as we're looking at the events of this week and of yesterday of losing a member and a friend, a sweet person who knew every hymn plus some, who would go out of her way to do anything anybody needed, that was her heart because she loved Jesus. She loved hearing his word preached. She loved his people. She loved being in the church home here. She was a member here, next month would have been nine years that she was a member here. She came the week before my birthday in January and remembered it because one of her nieces' birthday is the day after mine or before mine, and so made that connection. Loved the preaching of the word of God and her first question to me was, "Do you preach the doctrine of election?" And I said, "I think I was predetermined to." And she said, "Then I'm coming back." Loving to hear the word of God preached, loving to hear the sovereignty of God, loving to hear that our salvation is not based on anything that we can bring to or add to the kingdom. Our salvation is all of grace. It is the work that he has done.

So when we face times that we lose those that we love, as we grieve and as we rejoice, you understand that there will be time for a eulogy for a memorial service to talk more about Martha but this morning I want to do what she is doing, I want to help you look and to see Jesus. He is the reason that we rejoice. He is the reason that she had that confidence that she knew she was going to be with him someday, not knowing the day

but that day has come and what a day. So Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4 starting in verse 16,

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul's instruction for the church at Corinth and for us is that even though we see and we deal with sometimes on a daily basis the outward man that is perishing, we start to die from the moment we are born. We are born to die. This is the wages of sin. This is the penalty. This is the curse. This is why Jesus came, to die in our place to give to us life so that we might live despite death, but we know as we experience life in this fallen flesh, the outward man is perishing but the inward man is being renewed day-by-day. We fight these battles whether it's through illness, whether it's through discouragement, whether it's through sin, whether it's through bad choices and foolishness, we fight the battle of living in this fallen flesh everyday, that battle of the flesh against the Spirit of nevertheless not my will but your will be done, of learning to yield and to surrender and to walk into the Spirit to give him control instead of trying so hard to determine the outcome for ourselves. We know that we have to walk by faith because the outward man is perishing and unless Christ returns, we all one day will be called to be with him and we do not know that day, as we'll see from the text this morning, that day could be today, we have no guarantee of tomorrow, today is the day of salvation.

But the encouragement that we find from Paul is that even though the outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day-by-day so he says therefore we do not lose heart. We don't give up. Now did Paul have reason dealing with the Corinthians to be discouraged? This is the second letter that we have that he wrote to them. We know that he wrote a letter between 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians to them that was a harsh letter because he references it now in 2 Corinthians. He got onto them in 1 Corinthians and he had to get onto them even more to the point that God said, "We're not preserving that one." So now this letter has been inspired, preserved for us and given to us where Paul is absolutely at times at his wit's end with these people at Corinth, at their doubting him, at their being deceived by false teachers, at their infighting, at their indulgences, at their immorality, and yet they're still the church, they're still the called, they're still the beloved, they're still fighting that battle and so he says therefore we do not lose heart. And here's how it is that we can see all that goes wrong and you know story, you know the story, if everything has already gone wrong you're not done yet, there's more that could go wrong, there's always more that could go wrong. Listen, believe me, I am a pessimist. You want a testimony, ask the optimist in our house, I am the pessimist, there is more that can go wrong. Don't believe me, wait a minute.

Now those become self-fulfilling prophecies. We live in a fallen world and there's plenty that can go wrong and that can fall apart so how in the world looking at what Paul is dealing with in Corinth can he say with all that's going on, "Don't lose heart"? Here's where he finds a foundation for that, we don't lose heart because our faith is not in the things of this temporary, fallen, failing world. Our hope is found in the things we cannot see yet except with the eyes of faith, those things that are eternal, that are sure. Now it's easy, it's easy to get distracted by what we see everyday isn't it? And trust me, the news media makes sure of this. They want nothing more than for you to be scared to death, worried and angry at your neighbor even though you don't even know what they believe or who they are. We're going to get you upset, we're going to get you incited, we're going to tell you that the government can fix everything. Woo, scary words, isn't it, knowing that fallen men run the government, God put them there but God can take them out. When we look at life in this fallen world, when we look at the struggles, when we look at the threats, when we look at the dangers, we're looking at what we can see. It's what we can't see that matters. It's the sovereign hand of God at work behind the scenes directing all of that to accomplish his purposes.

When you look at the world of chaos, seemingly of meaninglessness, you understand God is not stopped, he's not being prevented, he's not being thwarted. There are those who tell us, "Oh, don't do that, you'll thwart God, you'll stop." If any of us believe that we have it within ourselves to stop God from accomplishing his will, we have a view so low of God that that's not even God we're looking at. Who are we to think we can interfere with his plans? And while it looks to us like things may be absolutely falling apart, while it looks like it may be the end of the world, you know the world ends every four years in November, you know that, right? We wait for it. We wait for it. Who is the lesser of two evils? Things are going to fall apart. Things are going to go wrong but understand that from God's perspective what can go wrong when he's in control? What can happen in our life that's actually truly genuinely bad if everything we have comes from him and he only gives good gifts? You see, the reason that we don't lose heart is because we understand behind the scenes in that invisible realm, in that realm where we cannot see his purposes, that realm that Job was so unaware of when the things started happening in his life that did and Job sets the example for us, what was his cry? "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And we all would like to think if we were hit with what he was hit with, that we would do the.... No. He was a man who was tried, pointed out to the devil by God himself and by the end of it questioned God and ended up having to sit down and put his hand over his mouth and just let God be God.

His will is going to be accomplished and this is why we don't lose heart. The outward man is perishing but the inward man is being renewed and that inward man is what is going to go on. You understand that by the time we get to glory and to glorification, this body has been remade. We are a new creation in Christ. Everything is passing away. Everything is being made new and one day even this body is going to be fully and completely redeemed, completely rid of any hint of desire toward sin. Again, that's MacArthur's great answer when they said what are you the most excited about, about heaven? And he said, "No more sin. To be done with it, to not even want it."

Well, the sufferings of this life, the hardships of this life, the end of this life are all necessary to fit us for living without sin. We're being remade into the image of Christ and while that outward man is perishing, we find daily renewal from the grace of God. 2 Corinthians 2, Paul writes, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." Do you feel like you're walking in triumph today? There are days I wonder where the triumph went but everyday he leads us in triumph in Christ and through us diffuses the fragrance of his knowledge in every place. This is Paul's polite and poetic way to say, "You smell like Jesus" to the world and to the church, and as you look at that, "For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?" We're here to present Christ and to represent Christ and I love it that Paul says who is sufficient for these things. We can't do this on our own. We can't. We can't be like Christ. We can't smell like Christ. We can't look like Christ. We can't act like his body without the enabling of his Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 6:3-10, Paul writes, "We give no offense in anything, that our ministry may not be blamed. But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God," and listen to his description of ministry, "in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

With the bad comes the good. In the tribulation comes the hope. In the suffering comes the blessing of being able to endure and to persevere, to know, by the way, that Christ does not walk with us through suffering to get us to the end of suffering, he walks with us through suffering to conform us more to his image in the midst of that suffering. God's goal now here in this temporary fallen world is not to rid our life of suffering and anybody who tells you so is lying to you. Those who desire to live and who strive to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

Do you know where your greatest persecution is going to come from, by the way? It's not the world. It's not the government. It's not your family. It's your flesh. It's you. It's that idol that wants to be in control. That's where your greatest persecution comes and yet in the midst of that what are we holding out for, what are we looking for? We're not losing heart because even though our outward man is perishing, the inward man is being renewed day-by-day and Paul refers to it, our light affliction. Now he goes on in chapter 6 and describes all these things: tribulation, need, distress, stripes, imprisonment, toils, labors, sleeplessness, fastings. All of the things that he endured and he says for our light affliction is but for a moment.

Sometimes when we do suffer, we believe it's the end of the world, we believe we cannot take anymore, and so some people have gone to posting and telling others God will never put on you more than you can handle. Yeah, that's lie number 2. God absolutely will and already has put on you more than you can handle. He's put on you the demand to be perfectly holy and represent his Son to the world without flaw. It's not that God will not put on you more than you can handle, God will not put on you more than he can handle and as you are yielded and surrendered to him, you will overcome. You will walk in this triumph and this victory for our light affliction which is but a moment is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

When we stand before him and we look at what he's done and what he's made of us, and when we see that we have laid up in heaven gold and silver and precious stones that are refined by that fire at the judgment seat of Christ that we can throw back as his feet, we're going to marvel at the fact that there's anything to throw at all, and yet he works in us this far more exceedingly and eternal weight of glory. While we do not look at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporary but the things which are not seen are eternal, as we see the inner man being renewed, we're told in Colossians 3, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." And this is the great news about the gospel: it does not matter where you come from, it does not matter ethnicity, it does not matter social status, it does not matter financial status, it does not matter educational status or intelligence, it doesn't even matter if you're good looking or not. In Christ we are all one. There's nothing that makes us distinct. He takes us all as completely unworthy and unacceptable sinners and makes us accepted in the Beloved.

So any human distinction that we can draw a line between us and another person, Jesus erased it at the cross. It's gone and he says, "Now you're all my people, a holy nation, a distinct, separate, new ethnicity, all that's in your history, all that's in your culture, all that's in your society." Can you imagine what it's going to sound like to hear all those people from every tribe, from every tongue, from every nation, gathered around the throne singing in unison the praises of God? And we've all come from different places and through different processes and we've all sinned, some more than others, some less than others, all absolutely guilty of nothing but sin and deserving of nothing but death and judgment forever, and we're going to stand there redeemed and we are all going to proclaim and I'll be honest, I don't know when we sing this song if we're all singing one language or all the language we came from. I really don't know but either way we're all going to stand around and sing in unison, "Worthy is the Lamb," and he's going to find that praise acceptable.

What a moment to take every distinction, most of which, by the way, are drawn because of our own sinfulness, and it's been erased. We're being renewed in him by the knowledge of him being transformed into his image. Paul says in Ephesians 4, "But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him,

as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." How often do we need to put this new man on? How often do we need to be renewed? Every day. Every day. You understand that the lost need to hear the gospel but do you know who needs to hear the gospel even more? Apathetic complacent saints who forget that they were sinners when Jesus saved them, right? We need the gospel every day, to know that it's all of grace, it's all of his work, it's his finished work, it's what he's come to do in us, to equip us to overcome sin and to represent him to the world.

And you understand we have already talked about the other verse that says we are the aroma to the world of death. They don't want to hear about Jesus, they don't care, but here's the good news: as long as we're faithful to tell them, it's not up to us to persuade them. The Spirit does that. The Spirit gives life and as he does, you find people who are absolute rebels, who hated him, who were running from him, who were repressing the knowledge from him, or who were trying to work their own way to him thinking, "My good is going to outweigh my bad when it comes down to it," not realizing we don't have anything good to put on the scale and when God brings that word and applies that word and gives us that new heart and when we believe, when we're converted, when we're declared right with him, look at what he has done. Well, we do forget and why we do need the gospel every day is because that's where we were before we were saved and, trust me, there's not a one of us here in this room that was saved because we were smart enough to choose Jesus or because we decided we wanted to choose Jesus, or because we pursued Jesus, or because we sought Jesus. The word of God says, "There is none who seek Me." Who is the one who seeks? It's Jesus, the one who was sent to seek and save that which is lost, to come to us and to give to us new life so that while this outward man is perishing, the inward man is renewed day after day after day until finally one day we will be perfectly redeemed and glorified.

We do need to see with those eyes of faith, to look at those things which are invisible but eternal and not be overwhelmed with those things that we do see that are just temporary. This is why we rejoice because as we talk about those who have passed away before us, those in Christ, we know what they have seen. We know the promise is fulfilled to them and we envy them, let's admit it. We envy them to be there face-to-face with Jesus. People often wonder, "Well, what would they say if they could come back?" First off, they have absolutely no desire to come and talk to us. They're looking at Jesus. If they did, here's what they'd say, "Flee to Jesus! Flee to Jesus!"

Our confidence is found, then going on into chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians,

1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not

because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences.

This then is our confidence. We find confidence in the midst of a burden, the burden is this body. This body of death, this outward man that is perishing, this body can become a burden. If you don't believe me, you're not 50 years old yet, right? And the closer you get, the more sound effects get built into the morning. Did you know, I did not know this, used to, used to, I played football, I ran track and I'd pull a muscle and I'd be active jumping a hurdle and pull something and it would hurt and it would take a while to get over. Do you know, do you know I can pull muscles sleeping now. You've done it, you've woken up and it's like, "Oh, what did I do?" This outward man is perishing. This body as a fallen body is deteriorating to the point that life cannot be sustained in it. We are built to fall apart, some of us more quickly than others. This body is a burden. We know if our earthly house, this tent is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens for in this we groan earnestly, desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven. Who wouldn't take your heavenly body if it was offered right now? Okay, who over 18 right now would not take it? Right. Right. When we live in this world knowing that we're living and that every day we are dying, when we live in the reality of the effects of sin, what is our hope? It's that this is how God designed it. It's for a purpose and he's preparing a new body for us.

When we look at the Scripture, Peter knew he was going to die, his death was near, he said, "For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it's right as long as I'm in this tent to stir you up by reminding you knowing that shortly I must put off my tent just as the Lord Jesus Christ showed me, moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease." He says, "I know I'm going to go." Jesus told him he was going to go. He told him in the manner in which he was going to go. This tent was going to be removed.

Paul talks about it when he talks about the thorn in the flesh, "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded of the Lord three times that it might depart from me and he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness.'" I want you to hear this because there's all sorts of speculation about what Paul's thorn in the flesh was. Was it his

eyesight? Was it his health? Was it some other factor? We don't know and I'm glad we don't know. I'm glad we don't know because then people with the same thorn would say, "Ha, ha, I've got Paul's thorn. You didn't." He doesn't tell us. What he tells us is, "I have a thorn in the flesh. It is a weakness. It is an infirmity."

Now there are several clues because Paul tells us and other people write about how people perceived him when he came. He wasn't a tall man. He didn't have good eyesight. He could barely see enough to write his name legibly, that's why he dictated what he did to those who his amanuenses, his secretaries would write the letters that he sent. We know that he had physical issues. We know that he was nothing to look at. I promise you, if Paul was alive today, he would not be a televangelist. Nobody would want to look at him. And yet God used him to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Because of him, you and I have the gospel today and he might not have been much to look at but this is what he said, "Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me." And the answer was not God took it, the answer was, "He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient.'" What are your infirmities? What's holding you back? What's keeping you from doing what you need to do? His grace is sufficient. He's given us more than we need.

I did hear somebody say this week that yesterday's grace is not good enough for today and I thought about that, I went back and I listened to it again, that yesterday's grace is not good for today. Don't depend on yesterday's grace. Brothers and sisters, it's the grace of God, one drop is enough for eternity. Yesterday's grace is sufficient because it's the grace of God that always accomplishes its purposes. And yet God doesn't just give us one drop. It's just like his mercy, he keeps pouring it and pouring it and pouring it and we think we've got enough and then we realize, no, we might not have enough. We have enough but do you know what he does anyway? He gives us even more. Can you imagine a dose of mercy that he gave you fresh this morning will last you forever and he's going to give you a new dose tomorrow? We need a lot of mercy, don't we, but we'll never outspend it, we'll never use it all up. "My grace is sufficient," and here's why, "because My strength is made perfect in weakness." Let me tell you what we need, church: we need to understand it's not when we are strong that we show grace, it's when we are weak and can't do it and he does it through us in spite of us that he gets the glory. He does not call us because we are qualified and he does not use us because he has given us natural talents, gifts and abilities that make everybody say, "Oh, he's special." No, he uses the people who can't talk, like Moses, the people who can't see, like Paul, the people who would rather run and go jump in the lake, Jonah, than go where God is calling him. That's who he uses because he says, "My grace is sufficient and My strength is going to be proven in your weakness." Because here is the truth: without Christ we are absolutely incapable of being pleasing to God, and in Christ we are just as incapable if it's not by his grace and his Spirit and his power. He gives us what we need to be pleasing to him. He fits us for heaven. He puts in us that love and that wanting to see Jesus, to cry out maranatha, and to know that this world is temporary, and that those that we have lost are so blessed, their faith has become sight.

"My strength is made perfect in weakness." What is God's requirement for you to be pleasing to him? That you be absolutely broken. He's not looking for people who have it all together. I hate to burst your bubble, if you think you've got it all together, you're deceived. That all together part is not coming until glorification. We are weak. We without him are useless and powerless therefore he says, "Most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

Do you realize that there are only two things in all of the Scripture that we're told to boast about? Only two things that we're given scriptural permission to brag on? The cross of Jesus Christ and our infirmities. Well, we don't talk about those things. We'll talk about the cross, I understand that, we're not going to talk about infirmities. Then I'm admitting I'm weak and I'm needy and I need you and you need to help me and I need to help you and I need to help bearing these burdens because I can't... "Oh, I got this. I got this." Next time somebody asks you if you need help, you say, "I got this," just slap your other cheek, all right? We don't got this. We need one another and the things that we're to be boasting about are those infirmities because when you see how incapable we actually are, you see how glorious and how strong and how powerful our God is, that he will take sinners like us and make us look like and represent his Son in the world.

Paul says, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities and reproaches, in needs, and persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake for when I am weak then I am strong." This is our confidence. He's preparing for us too, we're told there, a heavenly habitation. We read about it in 1 Corinthians 15. Someone will say, "How are the dead raised up and with what body do they come? Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain--perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall

be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." I don't need to add anything to that, do I? Just let Paul preach. There it is and this is repeated, Old Testament and New. We read it in the book of Isaiah, "O death where is your sting? O grave here is your victory? Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

So we walk by faith and not by sight. Now we don't see. There are things that are invisible to us. We don't know all the details of that heavenly body. We don't know all the details of that heavenly life, of that new heavens and that new earth. We can't even agree on what's going to happen when Jesus comes back, right? But he promises that he will. He promises that he is and so we walk by faith not by sight. We take him at his word. Can we take him at his word? There's our confidence, isn't it? If God said it, that settles it. It's true and he will do it.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known." When that dimly lit mirror, when that veil is lifted, we strive so hard to see it now and to make sense of it now and he says, "Don't walk by sight. Walk by faith. Trust Me." Understand, I do want to say something here, though. True, biblical, saving faith, sanctifying faith, it's not blind faith, it's faith in the word of God. It's to see what he has written, to believe it, to take it to heart, to memorize it, to meditate on it, to sing it, to read it, to preach it, to pray it. It is to live and to breathe the word of God, the written word representing for us and revealing to us the living word.

But we still struggle because we see in a mirror dimly. We're not exactly sure. We still wonder what did Martha experience yesterday? I really do, I really do believe I can phrase it this way. If you know Martha, you know how she talks, you know what she talked about, I really expect that when the angel showed up to escort her to glory, that they said what angels always say when they show up, "Don't be afraid." And I can hear her say immediately, "Oh, I'm not afraid. What are we waiting for? Let's go see Jesus." To be ushered into his presence, for all this dimness to be pulled away, to see him face-to-face. I promise you you see him face-to-face and it's not going to be but an instant that you're going to be on your face worshiping him who gave himself for you. To realize that faith as sight, to see him face-to-face, to now only know in part but then to know just as I am also known. Do you know what we're really going to be amazed about when we see him face-to-face and when we know as we are known, do you realize what that means? That means then we know everything he died to forgive us of because you and I both know that we go at times and we confess and we're glad that as we confess he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleans us from all unrighteousness which includes all those other things we did we didn't even know we did that we need to confess that we don't confess because we're not even aware of it, and when we stand before him, we're going to know just what he paid for us and he paid it in full out of his love and then

comes the Father's welcome. "Well done, good and faithful servant." If we have any sense at that point, not that we would ever say that God was a liar but we're going to say, "Who, me? Well done, me, good and faithful?" But then stop and remember, just stop and remember for just a minute what's he looking at? He's looking at what Christ did for us and to us and through us and with us. "Well done, good and faithful servant."

The promise there is that if we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. The description in the Scriptures is that we sleep but understand that's just looking at it from the outside. It looks like the body is sleeping and no such doctrine as soul sleep, don't even go there, you can't justify that with Scripture at all. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Paul says it and it's true and he says we'd rather go right now but we know it's useful to stay so we're not going yet but eventually we're going to go and if we're absent here, we're present there. No hang time, no waiting, one or the other. For this mortality to be swallowed up in life, and he says not that we want to put this off and put on another, we want what we have to be absolutely swallowed up, covered and immersed in this new life that's living directly in his presence without this veil of the flesh. To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul writes, "For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward." All that we've done. Gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay and stubble, it's all put on the altar before Christ. The holy fire of God falls upon it. Everything that we've done on our own and for ourselves, wood, hay and stubble, it's burned up and it's gone. That's the good news. Everything that we've done to disqualify ourselves, to run from him, to disobey him, to sin against him in his body, all of that, all of that, it's burned up and it's gone. Why? Because Jesus paid for it at the cross.

The gold, silver, precious stones still needs purifying. Why? Because while that represents the work of Christ in us, it was still done through us and we're inferior vessels. For us to touch it is to corrupt it and so he purifies it to make it acceptable to himself and we take that purified gold, silver and precious stones and what do we do with it? Throw it back at his feet. Do you think you can pay him back for what he paid for you? Not in a million eternities but, oh, to be able to show that gratitude. I promise you, there are going to be those who stand there who have very little gold, silver or precious stones. They're going to be just as grateful as you and I are that we're there in the first place because we realize it's not about hoarding treasures in heaven to put in our room, not about trophies, it's about us being given by the Son to the Father and the Father to the Son. Linda said it this morning, "God is the biggest regifter." He bought us for his Son, by his Son, so that his Son could present us to the Father, and then in John 17 what happens? Jesus says, "I'm going to the cross to make the payment here." You see, we were just layaway up

until that point. "I'm going to the cross to make the payment now so, Father, You hold them so I don't lose them so that when I come back, You can give them back to Me so that then I can give them to You and You can be glorified." That's you and me. There we are and God gives us to his Son, the Son gives us back to the Father, the Father gives to the Son. We're being sanctified by the Spirit and the whole process we're being glorified and that's the point, that's what we don't realize, heaven is not all about us, it's about the glory of God and the good news is God somehow is glorified by saving sinners like us. Look at us being given. Did you ever think that you were the gift? You're the gift from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the Father. This is what he's accomplishing for his own glory. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

We read last week in Isaiah 49 a verse that is quoted here now in 2 Corinthians, if you turn with me over to chapter 6. In 2 Corinthians 6:1-3, "We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.' Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." That from Isaiah 49:8, today is the day of salvation.

As we look at the work of Christ, as we look at what he has come to accomplish, as we look at him saving us despite ourselves, giving us good gifts, sanctifying us, giving us the Spirit to comfort us, someone wrote in a prayer journal this week and I thought it was so fitting, there was today's date and they were going to put notes for their prayer journal and there were no notes but you could see the stain of teardrops on that page. But you know God heard that prayer. If it's tears, if it's groans, if it's sighs, if it's things that we don't even know how to put into words, the Spirit knows and makes intercession for us. That's not some intelligible prayer, that's simply the point that sometimes in going to God and needing comfort and peace, sometimes there's just nothing we can say but he knows. He hears that prayer and he answers that prayer.

The reminder for us, then, "In an acceptable time I have heard you and in the day of salvation I have helped you," and I love it that Paul then interprets that for us, "Behold, now is the accepted time. Behold, now is the day of salvation." What we know from the book of James, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit'; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." The only guarantee we have is that we have no guarantee of tomorrow. That's why today is the day of salvation. Today is the day to turn, to repent, to believe. If you have not initially, to believe that gospel, to respond to that command and that invitation from Christ, to leave everything and follow him, to believe him, to take him at his word, to repent of your sin, and to confess your faith in him as the one God has raised from the dead so that you might be made fit to live in his presence.

Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow. I preach this, I preach this and I preach this because the word of God drills this into us and we're still shocked and surprised when for some there's no tomorrow. None of us knew when we gathered last Sunday that by the time we came back one of us would have been promoted to heaven. We did not know.

We do not know. It's rare that you do. If you're blessed to know that day is coming, to be prepared, and I always like that, they say be prepared. Christ took care of your preparation for that day on the cross and at the resurrection. Your hope is not getting ready to meet him, it's not as if though you've got to get dressed up so you can impress him when you get there. When he looks at you what he sees is his Son and his righteousness and his blood.

Are you clinging to Christ? Today is the day of salvation, not tomorrow. When we look, then, what do we do about those who have fallen asleep, those who have been called home to be with him while we are still waiting for the return of Christ? Paul tells us, "I don't want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep lest you sorrow as others who have no hope for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep for the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord, therefore comfort one another with these words."

What is our hope in the face of death? It is the salvation that Christ has secured for us by his finished work and the promise that he is coming back. And when he comes back, the first to be raised are those who have already gone on to be with him and they're going to be glorified with us. You realize that's why he's saying somebody is not going to beat the other one. They've already seen Jesus face-to-face, we envy them for that, but nobody is going to reach that state of glorification apart from one another. You realize what he's going to do? Jesus comes back, all of the saints from all time who have died in Christ, in faith, are all going to be resurrected in that moment and as they are glorified, we who are alive and remain are transformed so that the entire body of God's elect from all time are brought into their final salvation and glorification at one instant worldwide. Jesus is going to say, "It's done. You're all now finally and completely saved."

Can you imagine the shout of glory? Not only to be reunited, listen, heaven is not nearly about as much as being reunited but here is the good news: we're going to be reunited. We're going to know one another. We're going to love one another and we're going to have eternity to spend with one another in a glorified body enjoying a new heavens and a new earth to the glory of God seeing Jesus face-to-face who is the light, no need of the sun. He is the light everyday, everyday, everyday for eternity. That's why we can say that this light affliction is but for a moment. This life is but a vapor, it's here and gone. But this is simply preparing us for forever when we would look back and if we could even contemplate what we have endured in the time that God has given us here in this fallen world, it would by no means even enter our minds to compare that, not even worth a thought compared to that one moment in eternity glorified in the presence of Jesus Christ.

All of this life, everything that drives us so crazy, the suffering, the frustration, all of this, it won't matter. It won't amount to something even to consider or to think about so here's

where our faith becomes sight now. If that's true on the eternal scale, what is stopping us from living like that now? Why should the things bother us so much that bother us so much if we find our confidence and we learn not to lose heart because of the work of Christ? Because of what he's done, because of what's he promised, because of what he's provided? This is the promise, Paul goes on in 1 Thessalonians 5, "For God did not appoint us to wrath." That's worth an amen, isn't it? "God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing." What is our comfort in life and in death? It's that we have not been appointed to wrath but to obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

People ask what is this life about? Some will say it's about learning lessons. Not so much. If it was about learning lessons, we wouldn't have to learn the same lesson over and over and over and over and over again. What is this life about? It's about knowing, loving and obeying Jesus Christ, living today as if it was forever knowing he's coming back for us and however bad it seems, he's sovereign, he's in control, he's promised to work it out for our good and for his glory so walk by faith and not by sight because here's the promise of the word of God: one day maybe sooner than we think, that faith will be sight. We will see Jesus face-to-face and, brothers and sisters, it will be more than worth it.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for Your word this morning, for the comfort and the confidence that we have in Jesus Christ our Savior, for the work that He has come to do, to give to us eternal life and comfort and peace and good works that we might walk in them, to give to us repentance and faith, grace upon grace and new mercy every day. Father, we thank You for Your word that reveals these things to us, demonstrating for us who You are and giving us instruction that if we are to boast, let us boast in our infirmities because when we're weak, that's when Your strength is shown. Father, we confess and You know that we are grieving. We thank You for Your word and Your promise that tells us precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints. We thank You that there is no doubt or question that Martha now is with You because we know that she knows You and that she loves You. We thank You for her gospel testimony, for her faithfulness to the end to finish the course and to keep the faith. As we continue, remind us, none of us, none of us have a guarantee of tomorrow. Today is the day of salvation. We thank You for giving us a salvation that is sufficient for each day. We pray these things in Christ's precious name. Amen.