

Weight of Eternal Glory

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[0 : 0 0] If you will, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I won't take the time to read the entire chapter, so let me briefly explain the context of the passage I will read.

As Paul writes this letter to the church at Corinth, he's offering what is one part personal testimony and one part exhortation to the church.

He's explaining to the church how he has managed to not lose heart despite all of the suffering he's endured, and at the same time he's encouraging these fellow believers by showing them how they may also not lose heart despite their circumstances.

I'll begin reading at verse 18. So, or therefore, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light, momentary affliction, is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

[1 : 1 6] For the things that are seen are transient or temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Now, you'll notice all of the comparisons that are made in this passage.

The outer self versus the inner self. One is wasting away while the other is being renewed day by day. This light, momentary affliction versus an eternal weight of glory.

Things that are seen versus things that are unseen. The transient or temporary versus the eternal. Now, at first glance, Paul may seem awfully insensitive to anyone who is currently suffering.

We may get the impression that he is minimizing our suffering. You know, never mind that your outer self is wasting away. You know, forget your affliction.

It's all rather petty, isn't it, compared to the eternity that awaits us? But that's not exactly what Paul is doing here. First of all, you'll notice that Paul doesn't hesitate to confront his readers with mortality.

[2 : 2 6] He doesn't explicitly mention death here, but death is clearly implied throughout these verses. Our outer self is wasting away. The things that are seen are momentary and transient.

Life as we know it is temporary. It's fleeting. It can't last. He's reminding us of this. And that much is true, but Paul doesn't remind us of death to make light of our suffering.

In fact, we tend to minimize our suffering more than the apostle ever did. For example, let's say we're going through financial difficulties. What do we tend to do?

We like to compare our situation with a worse situation. We might say to ourselves, well, I'm struggling right now, but that's nothing compared to fill in the blank.

You know, I'm struggling to meet my bills this month, but I shouldn't let that bother me because, you know, there are people starving in China. You know, I'm a little strapped for money.

- [3 : 28] We may have to cut back on groceries, but it could be worse. You know, so-and-so down the street has cancer. Paul's not trying to minimize our suffering by comparing it to worse suffering.
- I believe what he's doing here is he's trying to maximize the glory to come, to bring that up. Our afflictions can be deemed light only when compared to this eternal weight of glory.
- He doesn't want us to deny our suffering. He simply wants us to see past the transient, temporary things of this life and focus more on the eternal things to come.
- Bring those things into focus. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth, right? Even so, the contrast here is important, I think.
- What is the appeal of an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison if there's nothing to compare it to, right?
- [4 : 33] If we never suffer affliction, if we never acknowledge that we suffer affliction, what do we care whether this life is only temporary? Paul's not minimizing our suffering.
- He's honest about the fact that we do suffer, and he seems to characterize this life on earth as a time of suffering. Why?
- Well, first of all, that's the reality of living in a fallen world. We suffer. Sometimes we suffer a little, and sometimes we suffer a lot.
- But as it stands, what does Paul say in Romans 8? For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit grown inwardly as we wait, eagerly wait, for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.
- We are a dying people in a dying world, and as we've discussed throughout this study, death wreaks havoc all around us. It wants to destroy everything. Our identities, our pursuits, our accomplishments, our possessions, our families, our health, our independence, and, of course, our very lives.
- [5 : 54] As a result of the curse, life on this earth is characterized as one of suffering. Now, the second reason Paul makes this contrast is because our hope in the eternal glory to come grows out of that groaning described in Romans 8.
- Because we groan inwardly, we wait eagerly, you see. Because we have affliction, although it may be light by comparison, we have affliction, so we look for an eternal weight of glory.
- We anticipate it. Teach us to number our days so that we may get a heart of wisdom. Lord, help me to see that we are a dying people in a dying world so that we'll not only crave the glory of come, but we'll be captivated by it.
- That's the idea. Again, Paul's not minimizing our suffering. He makes these comparisons with an assumption that his readers already know what it's like to suffer.
- And he's reminding us there's another side to the coin. Yes, our outer self is wasting away, but our inner self is renewed day by day. In no small part because of the promises that are articulated here.
- [7 : 21] Yes, we are afflicted, but this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. Yes, the things that are seen are transient, they're fleeting, but they're also unseen, eternal things.
- Interestingly enough, Paul doesn't say the glory to come will come despite our suffering. Instead, he says this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.
- I believe the NIV uses the word achieving. The old King James, if I remember correctly, uses the word worketh. It worketh an eternal weight of glory.

We might say our suffering in this world gets us ready for what's to come. Well, that's a study all on its own. At the very least, we should realize that death and its consequences are not to be avoided.

Paul doesn't avoid it. The Bible as a whole doesn't avoid it. Only in confronting the tragedy and horrors of death can we truly see and embrace what God is promising in these wonderful passages of his word.

[8 : 40] We may not be able to fully imagine this eternal glory Paul is talking about, but we do know affliction, right? We know what that feels like.

We know what that's like. We may not be able to fully grasp the concept of eternal, but we all know about transient things, temporary things, fleeting things, and so if we've acknowledged and accepted the one as an undesirable problem, what does that make the alternative?

It becomes something to hope for. It becomes something to want from the depth of our souls. You know, I preach a lot of funerals for non-Christians and these families will often request that I keep the service light, keep it positive.

Translation to me is don't remind us that death has ripped our family apart. Don't remind us of why we're here, why we're having this service in the first place.

Now typically I try to honor their request, but not necessarily in the way they expect. For example, families will often ask me to focus on their many fond memories of the deceased, which stands to reason.

[10 : 04] But there's just one glaring problem that I have discovered. All of those memories necessarily imply the one thing they don't want me to talk about, death.

Which is death. Whether I explicitly say it or not, people are always crying when people, myself or anyone else, shares these memories at a funeral service.

And I believe it's because they realize they have reached the end of making those memories. There are no new memories coming. so avoiding the blatant reality of death is kind of pointless at this particular time and place.

So I don't avoid it. Instead, I actually confront them with it. Why? Well, once death is on the table for all to see, then the gospel actually has some pretty meaningful context.

Let me offer an illustration. Imagine I'm walking down the street and I see another man walking down the street. He's just casually strolling down the sidewalk minding his own business and I shout to him, Sir, I'm here to save you.

[11 : 20] Now chances are he is going to look back at me like I am crazy because he does not see any danger from which he needs to be saved.

He's just walking down the street. But if I shouted the same thing to a man who's hanging over the edge of a cliff, he's likely to reply, yes, please, save me. Quoting Solomon once again, it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting for this is the end of all mankind and the living will lay it to heart.

It is better to go to a funeral than say a birthday party because confrontation with our mortality is like hanging over a cliff in a sense. The danger is much clearer at that moment and our need for salvation is drastically more evident than if we were casually strolling down the sidewalk far from any present danger.

now to illustrate the same point from the Bible, go with me to John chapter 11. You will see why John chapter 11 is such a popular chapter at funerals.

In John 11, Jesus teaches his disciples a profound lesson and death serves as the backdrop of this lesson. I'll begin reading at verse 1.

[12 : 56] Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair whose brother Lazarus was ill.

So the sisters sent to him saying, Lord, he whom you love is ill. But when Jesus heard it, he said, this illness does not lead to death.

It is for the glory of God so that the Son of God may be glorified through it. Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Let's pause right here for a moment because I want to emphasize the fact that Jesus loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus. This family was more to him than mere acquaintances.

They are friends. They have history. He cares about them. He loves them. Even so, Jesus learns that Lazarus is sick, yet he makes an intentional decision to wait.

[14 : 06] He doesn't rush to Lazarus' bedside as one might expect. Instead, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Why?

Well, Jesus says it is for the glory of God. Now let's continue reading. Skip down to verse 11. After saying these things, Jesus said to his disciples, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him.

The disciples said to him, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest and sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there so that you may believe, but let us go to him.

So the picture is made even clearer at this point. Jesus intended for Lazarus to die before he arrived. That was the plan. First he said it is for the glory of God, then he says it is for the sake of his disciples that they may believe.

[15 : 19] Evidently, there is something to be gained through the tragedy of Lazarus' death. Now of course, someone says, Jesus is going to raise Lazarus from the dead.

It stands to reason that God would be glorified through that and that his disciples' faith would be strengthened. I mean, what a spectacular miracle. And that's true, but once again we want to remember that death is the context of this miracle.

Notice what happens once Jesus arrives in Bethany. Let's skip down to verse 32. Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet saying to him, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled and he said, where have you laid him?

They said to him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. So the Jews said, see how he loved him? But some of them said, could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?

[16 : 36] To answer the Jews' question, yes, Jesus could have kept this man from dying, but he intentionally chose not to. In fact, he delayed his coming to ensure Lazarus would be dead when he arrived.

Now obviously, if Lazarus doesn't die, he can't raise Lazarus from the dead. more to the point though, Jesus is in complete control of the situation.

The timing of things is in his hand. The life of Lazarus is in his hand. Nothing could surprise him here. And as we know, he will soon altogether reverse the tragedy that has taken place.

And yet, he is still deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. When he sees Mary weeping and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he too begins to weep.

Christ is just as disturbed and heartbroken by death and its devastation as anyone. In other words, the internal groaning we feel because of death, that's an honest, appropriate response.

[18 : 01] Death is an offense to everything good and beautiful. It is a tragic aberration of God's perfect design. Grief is not unbelief.

And grief is not sinful. It is honest. It is appropriate. It is even Christ-like as we see here. When I preach funerals, I often make this point.

I want people to understand this. While families may want to avoid the unpleasantness of death, Christ shows us it is actually better to be honest about it. It is better to face it.

Not only is death a reality for us, but it is also the end of all mankind and the living should lay it to heart. We need to lay it to heart.

Again, there is something to be gained by confronting death. Now, notice the lesson Jesus shares with Martha here. As she is undoubtedly distraught over her brother's death, I am actually jumping back to verse 23.

[19 : 07] Christ says to her, your brother will rise again. Now, keep in mind, this is the kind of lesson that I think resonates most effectively when someone is suffering loss.

What could possibly encourage someone to hope for resurrection better or more effectively than the death of a loved one?

Naturally, the utter separation we feel from those we love, it makes us yearn to see them again instantly. I want to speak to them. I want to hold her.

I want to hear his voice again. So do you see what Jesus is doing here? He wants Martha to feel the sting of death. He's providentially orchestrated the event so that Martha would be in this helpless, vulnerable position, and just when he knows death has violated her family by ripping her brother from this world, simultaneously piercing her heart with this unbearable sadness.

He says to her, your brother will rise again. Years ago, I worked as a freelance web designer, and a local jewelry store hired me to build a new website for them, and I almost lost the job because this store owner and I had a slight disagreement over the photography of his jewelry.

[20 : 38] He had it professionally photographed a while before, and I argued that most of those photographs needed to be retaken. All of them had been taken with the jewelry set on a white, light background.

And, well, do you know how to make a light-colored diamond ring really pop in a photograph? Put it in front of a dark background.

Put it in front of black, if you can. That stark contrast will make the diamond seem even brighter. What did Paul say? This light, momentary affliction is light.

Why? Because it is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. I know our affliction may feel anything but light at times, but what happens when you set it next to the eternal glory to come?

It shrinks. As the eternal glory to come proves bigger and brighter than any temporary suffering we may face in this life.

[21 : 46] If you want people to see the beauty of resurrection, hold it up to them, not when everything in life is bright and fair, but when death has made things very, very dark.

The contrast will be stark, and that's the point. this is what Jesus does here in John 11. As Martha is afflicted by the death of her brother, he reminds her of the resurrection saying, your brother will rise again.

Martha, she responds with a theologically correct statement. I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day, but that's not quite good enough.

Not quite. I told you I preach a lot of funerals for non-Christian families. You know, whenever I initially speak with these families, I ask a series of questions, but I always ask the same question.

What do you believe about God and eternity? eternity? I can probably count, on one hand, the number of people who say anything at all about God.

[23 : 02] Never mind Christ Jesus. If they don't acknowledge God, I can't expect them to acknowledge his son, but would you care to guess how many tell me they believe in heaven?

I think that number hovers somewhere around 100%. It's pretty close. In the face of death, it seems almost everyone wants to believe in eternal life, and frankly, I can't blame them.

But they need to understand a couple of fundamental things about eternal life. First of all, non-Christians need to understand that death is not something that just happens.

That's the way we seem to think about it. We seem to talk about it. Death is part of a curse. Death is the direct result of sin.

We die, not because that's just the way things are, but because we are sinners who have sinned. We have broken God's law. God created this world one way, and we twisted it into a distorted, perverse version of what was originally intended.

[24 : 18] death. And the end result of that is death. Death is our surface level problem, if you will. But the real obstacle between us and eternal life is sin.

Second, non-Christians need to understand that heaven is not our default destination. Again, sin stands in our way. We are not born innocent.

And at the end, God does not weigh our good works versus our evil works to determine who is going to get into heaven. We are sinners. James writes, whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it, so much for those good works.

And because we are sinners who have broken God's law, heaven can never be our default destination. for the wages of sin is death, Paul writes.

But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So what's the solution to the problem of death? How does someone overcome the obstacle of sin?

[25 : 32] How does one obtain eternal life? It is only in Christ Jesus our Lord. Period. period. You'll notice Jesus points Martha in the same direction.

He says in verse 25, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

And everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? I think it's great that Martha believes in a resurrection. I think it's great that people want to believe in heaven when they come to a funeral.

But let's not put the cart before the horse, I suppose. The pertinent question is, how does one experience this resurrection? How does one obtain eternal life?

How does one get into heaven? And Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way. Several people have asked me along the way how I'm able to preach the funeral of an unbeliever.

[26 : 48] I've known Christian pastors along the way that won't. They just won't. Now, people correctly assume that I would like to talk about the deceased person being in heaven.

But to be candid, that's not really my priority. That's not necessarily what I'm there to do. Following the example of Christ himself, I'm speaking to the living.

And my priority is to lift up Christ and his gospel in a time of tragedy, like holding up that brilliant diamond in front of a dark backdrop.

God. You want some light in this really dark place? Christ. There's the light. So I begin by confronting them with the terrible reality of death, which is a consequence of sin, and by showing them the only solution we have to this problem.

Whoever believes in Christ, though he die, yet shall he live. And I have found myself many times at a funeral asking, do you believe this?

[28 : 04] I remember speaking with one pastor who told me he doesn't explicitly preach the gospel at funerals. And, well, according to him, it's not the right time or the right place for that.

So I asked him what he does preach, and he says he primarily focuses on the life of the deceased person, and he talks about the glory of heaven. In my experience, however, the crowd already believes in heaven.

The problem is they don't know how to get there. And worse yet, they're not concerned about how to get there because they already assume they and pretty much everyone else will be there one day.

Except maybe Hitler. He seems to be the only exception to this rule. Teach us to number our days.

Teach us to remember death that we may get a heart of wisdom. It is better to go to the house of mourning for the living will lay it to heart.

[29 : 07] Jesus says here, Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad I was not there so that you may believe. Is there a better time and place for the gospel than at a funeral?

or in generally a time of suffering or affliction? The reason death can be such a powerful catalyst for faith in Christ and hope in his promises is because death is perhaps the most vivid manifestation of our problem of sin.

If anything can compel us to seek the Savior, it's confronting death and realizing that basically everything we have in this world is fleeting.

It's a vapor. In 1 Peter 1, the apostle Peter writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, and I love that expression, a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Please notice what Peter highlights about this inheritance in Christ. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. In other words, it is the exact opposite of everything we have now.

[30 : 46] death. So, when someone is able to see just how perishable, and defiled, and fading life is, how death destroys everything, well, that person is in a great position to see the beauty of Christ and his gospel.

But that's the unbeliever. What about the believer? God's love? How does confronting mortality help us?

Aside from helping us in our evangelistic efforts, what do we gain from numbering our days? Well, consider what Peter goes on to write in the same chapter I just read from, 1 Peter 1.

1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1. In this, that is the salvation he's been telling us about, you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[32 : 18] Like Paul, according to Peter, seeing the stark contrast between our dying world and the imperishable glory to come, it changes everything for us.

Let me give you just a few, what I hope will be some very practical examples. How about contentment? Let's talk about contentment.

The struggle to find contentment, I think, is a universal problem. We're discontent, let's say, because our clothes have become old and ragged.

When we finally get some newer clothing, what happens? We become discontent all over again because it doesn't fit perfectly.

And when we finally get clothing that fits better, we're discontent because maybe it's not the latest style. And when we get the latest style of clothing, we're discontent because maybe our neighbor has even nicer clothing.

[33 : 26] So when we get the same name brand as our neighbor, we're discontent because eventually even the name brand clothing gets old, out of style, and ragged.

Generally speaking, we're discontent because our baseline expectation of the world is comfort, it's convenience, and it's control.

That's what we expect. The trouble is, death destroys our comfort, it destroys our convenience, and it destroys our control. So in turn, we're unhappy because things aren't the way we expected or what we wanted.

Awareness of death moves our baseline. Doesn't it? When we acknowledge what death is doing in this world, we can't be surprised and we shouldn't be troubled because we knew it was coming.

We knew death was going to take things away. Furthermore, we won't rely on fleeting things to support our satisfaction. Why would we?

[34 : 35] We know it's fleeting. Instead, our eyes will remain fixed on Christ and his promises and we will look for our satisfaction in him. How about envy?

That's another universal struggle. We tend to covet what other people have, but confronting mortality, that tends to change our perspective a little bit. So imagine you and a friend are taking a trip together and once you arrive at the airport, you find out the plane is overbooked, so your friend gets to move up to first class where he's got all kinds of leg room and they're going to serve him a nice meal and he's going to sit the whole flight in a very comfortable seat.

You, however, have to move to the back of the plane right next to the smelly bathroom between two rather large gentlemen and you might be lucky to get a small bag of peanuts.

I'd say in that position you're, there's a pretty good chance you're going to envy your friend just a little bit. But imagine how things would change if the engines on that plane suddenly failed and that plane started to take a direct nosedive toward the ground.

I think this sudden acute awareness of death would instantly eliminate all feelings of envy. anxiety. How about anxiety?

[36 : 03] How does numbering our days help us overcome anxiety? Dietrich Bonhoeffer offers this insight into the root of our anxiety. He says, worry is always directed toward tomorrow.

Or the future, you might say. We worry because we have certain expectations about the future and at the same time, we don't know what the future holds for us.

So that makes us anxious and it worries us. As Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount, we are basically adding trouble to the present over worry about trouble that may not even come in the future.

Jesus said, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. We get anxious because tomorrow may not be what we want it to be, but death reminds us it won't matter anyhow.

It won't matter. John Payton, a 19th century missionary, he felt led to go to this very remote island to preach the gospel to a group of cannibals.

[37 : 20] He knew that the first missionaries who had attempted to go to the church and they were killed. They were killed and they were eaten. So one of his older friends pleaded with him.

Don't go, he said. You'll be killed. Payton's friend, of course, was just thinking about what this young man could lose. He had his whole life ahead of him.

Listen to how Payton responded. You are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms.

I confess to you that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by cannibals or by worms.

And in the great day, my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer. It's true.

[38 : 25] Payton knew. He didn't know what tomorrow would bring. Would it be worms or would it be cannibals? He didn't know whether he'd be killed or live to an old age, but he also knew that it doesn't ultimately matter.

Death will get us sooner or later. So never mind how much time we have, how do we spend our time?

Whatever amount we have. That's what's relevant when, number one, we learn to number our days and number two, we keep our focus on the eternal weight of glory, which is beyond all comparison.

Now, throughout this series, I've tried to make the case that confronting our mortality is spiritually beneficial.

And I'll bring this series to an end by citing 1 Corinthians 15, 22, where Paul says, According to Paul, our solidarity with Adam in death is the necessary context to seeing and rejoicing over our solidarity with Christ in resurrected life.

[39 : 52] whatever disappointments, whatever griefs, whatever losses we face, until we ultimately breathe our last breath, we can take solace in the fact that Christ went before us in every way, but especially in death.

He already died and he rose again victorious. Paul says, In Christ shall all be made alive, but each in his own order.

Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming, those who belong to Christ. Death may still torment us for now, but we do not have to grieve as others who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4, 13. We're simply waiting for our turn to rise victorious, just like Christ. And when we do, we will enter into the dwelling place of God.

Revelation 21. God will dwell with us and we will be his people and God himself will be with us as our God. No more separation.

[41 : 08] He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And death? Death shall be no more.

I'm excited about that. I can't hardly fathom it, but I'm excited about that. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

I will be out of a job, and I will never have been more thankful. We're dismissed.