

"Overcoming Depression" - 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

This morning I'd like to draw your attention to 2 Corinthians 4. And we'd like to take a look at Verses 16-18 as we now come to that place where Paul is going to give us some incredible insight of how he overcame discouragement, despondency and depression. And it's a wonderful thing that God outlines in His word, how that we can be victorious within our life. You remember in Chapter 3 it tells us that these things were the glory of God. In other words, these things we see and look into the very image of Christ. And now in Chapter 4 these are light afflictions. And so he goes from it seems to heaven all the way back down to the earth where he now begins to suffer.

And so we pick up in 4:16 **"For which cause we faint not;** (underline that) **but though our outward man perishes, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us** (and that's a key it worketh for us) **a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal;** (things around the earth) **but the things which are not seen** (heaven and the spirit) **are eternal."** And so who among us has not gone through difficult times within our life? Or thought about quitting, or are tempted to give up or to give in? Or even have thought about ending their life? Often times we go through these incredible moments within our life. And we really don't know how to deal with them or what to do with them or how we're to walk in the realm of the Spirit. And so we look to other people and often times they don't have an answer. But Paul gives us an answer here. We are not to lose heart. We are never to give up. We are never to give in, and we are never to be overwhelmed at the things that are taking place.

The reason why is Paul says they are “a light affliction.” And the key is because they work in us that weight of eternal glory. So Paul is seeking for us to get that “eternal perspective.” And Paul tells us from the very beginning in 2 Corinthians 3:18: (that we are to behold the glory of God) **“But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”** And so Paul tells us this is how we change as we look into the face of Jesus Christ. Then he jumps down to 4:17 (our text this morning, *To Behold the Light Affliction*) **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”** So Paul opens his heart. He begins to share with us how to have victory over discouragement; how to overcome that despondency; how not to allow despair or disappointment to begin to overwhelm your life. And he says they are light afflictions within our life.

I want to read a few verses to you and you can just sit back and listen, but it gives you a little bit of the history in this book what he went through and what he calls light affliction. What I call light affliction is that the coffee didn't come out right when my wife made it. Or Starbucks didn't have the stuff I needed. Or someone didn't say hi to me at church. That's about all it takes for some of us to be taken out. But when Paul talks about light affliction it's interesting in 1:8: **“For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life. We were pressed down, pressed out of measure. We were stretched to the breaking point even to the point of death.”** Then in 2:4: **“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”** And so he uses the words anguish, affliction even the tears that he begins to weep day and night.

And then in 4:8-10, my favorite verses in this chapter: **"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed** (in other words we have no idea about the future) **but not in despair; Persecuted** (beaten down) **but not forsaken; cast down** (because of the things happening in our life) **but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."** So, Lord, take my body use it for the glory of God. We are troubled but we are not distressed. We are perplexed but not despaired. We're persecuted not forsaken. Cast down but not destroyed.

Then in 6:4: **"But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of the Gospel in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings;** (in Verse 8) **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 not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."** And then in 7:5: **"For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears."** So outwardly we were fighting, inwardly fears were gripping our hearts. And one last one in 11:24: **"Of the Jews five times I was whipped** (In other words, five times I was beaten with a whip saved one, so 39 times) **Three times I have been beaten with a rod, once was I stoned** (that would be in Lystra) **three times I suffered shipwreck** (you would not want to travel with Paul on his missionary journeys) **a night and a day I have been in the deep.** (that would be the Mediterranean) **In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in**

fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” In 12:7: **“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh.”** So when I speak about these light afflictions, they are overwhelming to realize that any one of these would take us out. But when you look at his life and you see that he’s committed, that he was a man that had a tremendous conviction concerning the “coming of Christ”. And he was a man that had tremendous courage when it came to the work of God. That they could stone him in Lystra; he would get back up and go back in and finish the message where they interrupted him. And he was also a tremendous man of the calling of God. He knew that God had called him to do a work. And then we find very simply his character was outstanding. He was committed. He was loyal. He was never going to give up.

And this is the type of a life that I desire. How to overcome depression; how to overcome discouragement and despair. Very few of us will ever not be able to go through those because we know that Satan is seeking to destroy our lives. But I’d like to give you five things I believe with all my heart were the answers of why Paul did so well with this area of discouragement and despondency. Very simply, five things that he understood without a shadow of a doubt. And maybe by the end of the study, you will be able to also begin to face your afflictions in a brand new way. That they will be light. They will not be magnified and overwhelmed and blown out of proportion. That you will be able to deal with that relationship. Or be able to handle the hurt that is going on in your life. Or maybe even the rejection that is happening or maybe the barrenness that you feel from the Lord. God is willing to work in and through your life. And the very first thing I realize is that Paul had a “new start.” Notice it says in 4:1: **“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.”** Let me read that again to you. In 2 Corinthians 4:1: **“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.”**

I think the very first reason why Paul was able to overcome whatever was taking place in his life was because he believed that God gave him a new start. You remember that he was that one who killed so many Christians. He made havoc with the church. He brought tremendous persecution. And he did tremendous damage to the work of God. And it was on that Damascus Road that God got a hold of his life and God began to speak to him in a very powerful way. And it was there that he cried out and said, "Lord, what would you have me to do"? And it was there that God said I'm going to show you all the things that you're going to suffer. But the thing that stands out to me more than ever is that God gave him a second chance. That God took a failure and God made a trophy of grace. God forgave him for what he did. And it says here in our text in 4:1: **"...that he had received mercy."** And then it declares that he had received "a ministry." So there is no doubt in my mind that Paul knew that God gave him this ministry, and that it was a gift of mercy. Nothing that he did, nothing that he deserved simply God gave him a "second chance." Now I believe that when you understand that God has given you a second chance, that He has come into your life and filled you with His Holy Spirit, that He has called you, He has ordained you. He has taken your feet out of that horrible pit. He's placed your feet upon the rock, and then you will begin to realize that anything that God has given to you has been given to you out of the grace of God and because of the mercy of God. And if God is willing to entrust you, then once again you are able to rejoice because these will be light afflictions within your life. So today, if I believe that God has given me a second chance, if I believe that God is entrusting this ministry to my life, if I believe that this ministry is given to me because of the mercy of God, then no matter what I face or how difficult things become "I realize that God is the center and the preeminent one within my life." In other words, God has given Steve Mays a second chance. So I'm not going to quit. I'm not going to give up. I'm not going to be torn apart. I might be cast down, but I won't be destroyed. I might be persecuted, but I'm not going to give in. I might be totally perplexed, but I'm going to hang in there to the very end. And so I see that he had a brand new start.

The second thing I see, not only with a new start, God gave him a "new strength." Notice in 4:16: **"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perishes, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day."** I think the very second thing we see here is that he was being renewed day by day. You see him beaten. You see the things that he went through. But every day, God was with him. And every day, God spoke to him. And every day, God guided him. And every day, he received a refreshing and a fresh strength of the Spirit of God. And the Bible says in Deuteronomy 33:25 **"...as my day is so shall my strength be."** In other words, no matter what I'm going through God is willing to strengthen my life. But the key is being renewed day-by-day, not week by week, month by month. God desires to give you strength for today. And God desires to give you the ability to overcome any discouragement or despondency today because "you are connected into the life of God." And you are hearing things from God. And you are learning things about God. And you are beginning to see the glory and the power of the One who loves you and died for you. And so when you look at the afflictions going on in your life, they are very, very light. They are only for a moment. They are like a vapor. Oh they might last 20 years, but once again what is that Paul is saying, to that eternal weight of glory? And Paul declares that they are working in you and for you so you would be able to have start in the mercy of God. And you would be able to be strengthened. And the Bible declares: **"... it's not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit sayeth the Lord."** (Zechariah 4:6) So God wants me to come to the end of myself. God desires that he would be glorified in my weakness. He said that we have this sentence of death in ourselves, "That we would not trust in ourselves." And that is the message that Paul came to understand. Because God was his strength, Paul didn't need resources. Nor did Paul need to figure anything out. When Paul went through it, God was there. When Paul was in prison, the angel came and ministered to his heart. When Paul was going down in the ship, God was there to encourage him. When Paul was discouraged, the angel of the Lord was there. Every day in Paul's life, God was a reality. And when that becomes

part of my life, I'm able to look at things and deal with things in a whole different way. The "dunamis power" of God: the strength and knowledge of God himself, the fullness of God within my life. And so I find that God desired Paul to have a new start. And secondly, God desired Paul to have a new strength.

But thirdly, I find that God desired Paul to have a "new spirit." Notice in 5:5-6 **"Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of His Spirit.** (The word earnest can be the same word as comfort of the Spirit) **Therefore we are always confident,** (underline the word confident, always confident) **knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord."** And what he is saying here is so profound. He is saying that if we are here in this body living on this earth, we are longing for the day that we will go to be with the Lord. If I was to die, I'd be absent and I'd be with the Lord, but I'm here now. And the reason why this is so important is because God said that He will be the "Comfort within your life." There's a great that says: **"Now that God of comfort who was able to comfort those who are cast down."** (2 Corinthians 7:6-7) The word comfort is a Greek word that means two words: One means to come along side and the second is a word that means to be a pillar of strength. The reason why Paul was able to stand so strong was because he trusted the work of the Holy Spirit. He had a relationship with the personal work of God Himself. And he knew that when he was cast down, God was going to comfort him. And the Spirit of God would take him and the Spirit of God would breathe into him new life. He would be quickened by God Himself; and God would restore his life. So when I look at discouragement, when I look at my life falling apart, when I see my marriage is going haywire, when I look at business falling apart, what am I going to do with life? I'm going to try and take it and get through it and use my wisdom and my human knowledge to do that? Or will I say to myself, you know I need a new start. And God is going to get me through this because He's called me and because of His mercy, He's going to do a work. And not only that, He's going to give me a new strength. I'm not going to

have to fight this thing in my own flesh. But He has brought me to a point of weakness because His strength wants to be glorified in my weakness. And God is going to do the work. And thirdly, God is going to bring His Spirit Who is going to comfort the loneliness. Who's going to take away the sadness. Who's going to come by my side and be a pillar of strength. Who's going to come by my side and comfort my heart. I'm not going to have to fake this Christian walk. I'm not going to have to say I'm happy when inside I'm dead. I'm going to be able to say that He gave me life. He quickened me, made a purpose for me to live. And so I find very simply, that He came to bring His Spirit.

But number four; I find very simply that Paul had a "new sight". Notice in 5:7-8: **"For we walk by faith, not by sight: We are confident (underline that) **I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.**"** Now I want you to notice in 5:6: always confident. And I told you to underline that "always confident". Then notice in 5:8: **"We are confident"**. Now that is the key to his life: And the key very simply is because he had sight; He understood that the life that he was living was being lived for the "Glory of God". That life would be a vapor. It would be over in a moment. That the heavens are going to be rolled up. That the earth is going to vanish, but the Word of God is going to last forever. So Paul put his life, his conviction, everything about him was based on those eternal perspectives within his life. He saw the pain, the suffering, the bruises, the bleeding, but he saw the Glory of God. He saw the agony, the rejection, the despite, the shame, but he saw the Glory. In other words, he saw the thorn and the pain and the suffering that he had to go through, and by the way, the word "thorn" in the Greek is a word that means a "tent post". Not just a little thorn, but a tent post was driven through his flesh. He agonized and was overwhelmed, but he saw heaven. And when you see heaven, and you see the Glory of God, and you understand what life is all about: That whether you live, you live into Christ. Or whether you die, you die into Christ. Whether you live or whether you die, you are the Lord's. You can say to anybody, if you keep me alive, I'm going to talk about

Jesus Christ. If you kill me, I'm going to be with Jesus Christ. That's the "philosophy of my life". And when you have that philosophy: That God is going to start something brand new, and God is going to strengthen you, and God is going to send His Spirit, and God is going to open your eyes into heaven. You begin to realize this is just for a moment, and I need this in my life; God give me a perspective, help me to understand what I'm going through.

And then lastly, he declares Paul had a "new season". And you don't need to turn here but in (Galatians 6:9): **"And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap."** And what I thought about very simply is that we're laboring, we're giving, but we don't see any rewards. Let me remind you, when you get to heaven and you stand before God, God is going to say, "well done thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord". And God is going to reward you there at the "Bema Seat of Christ". So though people don't recognize what I'm doing, or though people don't give me the credit that is due to our names, or though people might steal my reputation, it doesn't make a difference. Because I stand before God, and God knows the truth. It would be like all of a sudden Paul the apostle would show up, come to church on a Monday and he would be the ugliest guy you had ever seen in your life. To be beaten five times with a whip, around the face, around the body. To be beaten three times with a stick. To go down in a shipwreck three different times. His eyes, they say, had malaria. And he had drooping eyes that were constantly dripping and he was very difficult to look at; he was extremely ugly and beaten in a horrible way. If he said Pastor Steve, I want to take you out to Starbucks. And I say, well, who's downstairs? It's Paul the apostle. So I'd hustle down there and see this little tiny guy, we'd hop in my car and go down and he would look at me. And he would say, how you been doing? Well, you know, Paul, it's been hard. Been tough. I'm thinking about quitting. I'm thinking about giving up. And he would look at me with those beady eyes, with that double shot in his hand, no doubt he drank double shots to be that way. He would look at me dead eye and he would say: My son, do you not know? Do you not have

any conception of what God is doing in your life? That He has given you a "brand new start"? You were once on drugs and you were once in trouble but God pulled you out of that pit. And He put you in that pulpit, and He has turned your life around by the mercy of God. How dare you want to quit? After all that God has done. After all that God is doing. Steven, you cannot quit. And I would look at Paul with those beady eyes and he would say God has started a work in your life. Let Him finish that work. Don't be discouraged. Don't be despondent. Don't be overwhelmed. You hang in there and let God finish what He started. He would turn to me again and he would say: Are you walking in the strength? And I would say, Paul, I really want to but I'm tired. I'm exhausted. He would say you need to be strengthened every day with Jesus Christ. You need to hear the word of God. You need to know which way you have to walk. You need to have the knowledge of God in your life. You need to be strengthened with the power from on high because this is a "supernatural work". And I imagine he would probably drink the Starbucks at that time. This is a supernatural work and you cannot be a pastor or be a Christian in your own strength. Steven, **"It's not by might nor by power, but it's by My Spirit"**. (Zechariah 4:6) working through a broken instrument. And then Paul would look at me a third time, and he would say: You need a new spirit. You're bitter, you have an attitude. You're ready to quit. You want to chuck it all in. But the Comforter is by your side, but you're not looking to Him. You're not drawing strength from Him. You're not crying out to Him. You're not asking Him for help. And so you're going through this trial by yourself. And He wants to be a friend in your life. And He'll stick closer than a brother. And you need to understand, Steven, very real in your life that there was someone to take away the loneliness. Someone to take away the pain. And He's called the person and work of the Holy Spirit. And then he would look at me no doubt with those beady eyes and that hooknose and he would look in my eyes and he said: Have you seen heaven? Have you been in heaven lately? Have you been looking at the throne? Have you seen the streets of gold? Do you realize you're on your way? Have you had a sight of Jesus? Or what are you seeing? South Bay? The church? The problems? The

neighborhood? The house? The car? The kids? The job? What are you looking at? And I would say the job, the house, the car, and the women. You know, my wife. All these things I am going through. And he would say take your eyes off that and put your eyes on heaven. Gaze into heaven. Behold heaven. Understand that heaven is a whole different place. And it's almost here. And it's almost over and you can make it through.

And lastly, Paul would look at me, pat me on the shoulder and say: Listen, I want to tell you a secret. In my life, I was thrashed. In my life, things did not come out the way I thought, but, I have received His Glory and a crown is waiting for me because I did this thing for God. In other words very simply, not only a new start, a new strength, a new spirit, a new sight but, Steven, there's going to be a "new season" when you will stand before Jesus Christ and I'll stand with you. And God will say to you, "Well done thou good and faithful servant". So, Steve, do you think that you could just knock off the whining, and the crying, and the murmuring? And do you think for a moment that if you look to God and see God and hear God and know God and are heading towards God, that's enough to get you through the remaining years of your life. I think it is. How do you overcome depression? You see Jesus. How do you overcome discouragement? Man, you get a new start.

Closing Prayer: Well, Father, we thank You. That You are the one that we love. And how we need to be reminded. And how it's good to begin to understand how that we are to overcome the obstacles within our lives. It's easy just to quote scripture. But, Lord, when we see something working, Lord, when I see that You gave me a new start. What more do I want? And that God, that Your strength is ready for me to take. And that it will never be my resources. And Your Spirit is willing to comfort and take away the pain. And that God, today You are willing to open our eyes to heaven. That we would see what life is all about. And Father, that we would understand that the things that happen in us, are happening to work

inside of us. That Lord, things might happen through us. And the season is about over and we will be standing face to face.

So, God, would You give this church strength? Would you give its leaders that ability to see You that we might see the invisible? That we might trust You with all of our hearts and that we might understand that You are the God that comforts those who are cast down? I thank You, Lord, so much. That God, that you can teach us how to deal with the difficulties in our lives. Father, while our heads are bowed and our eyes are closed, maybe some of you today need a brand new start. Maybe life has been difficult, or maybe you have walked away from the Lord. And you have felt the tug in your heart and God is crying out to you. If you will come, I'll give you a brand new start. I will entrust you, empower you, endue you with My Spirit.

As your heads are bowed, if you'd like to ask Christ into your heart or rededicate your life, God is willing to give you a brand new start. Father, we thank You. That God, it's never too late with You. It's never too late for You to take a life and turn it around for the Glory of Christ. In Jesus' name. Amen.