

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

Dear Friends in Christ,

When I think of the Apostle Paul and his ministry I sometimes think of the energizer bunny. Paul never seems to lose heart. He just keeps going and going and going in spite of opposition that would have caused any of us to throw up our hands and say, "I'm done. I quit. I can't take this anymore."

Within days of coming to faith and being baptized Paul started preaching the gospel in Damascus. When he learned that people were plotting to kill him he escaped by being let down from a window in the wall in a basket. Then he went to Jerusalem to meet with Peter and the other Apostles. After preaching the gospel in Jerusalem another plot against his life was discovered and he was sent to Tarsus. As he carried out his missionary journeys, traveling through Turkey and Macedonia and Greece and Italy on foot he was often arrested, put in prison, and sometimes beaten or stoned. He had some of his co-workers desert him and turn against him. He suffered some permanent physical ailment he called his "thorn in the flesh." Some people today would say, "I think maybe God is telling me something. Maybe it's time to slow down, to retire, to change my approach?" But, Paul didn't think that way. He didn't lose heart. Like the energizer bunny, he just kept going and going and going.

In the words before us this morning he explains how he was able to keep on going and going and going without losing heart. He reminds us that Easter keeps us from losing heart.

Paul starts by reminding the Corinthians and us that faith speaks. He was thinking of the Psalmist who, despite his troubles, couldn't help but speak God's praises. We might think of Peter and John, who when threatened by the Sanhedrin and warned not to speak about Jesus and his resurrection or else, declared, "**we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.**" When we hear these things we usually think of an example of someone who is excited about something. We think of the young woman who just got engaged and just has to tell all her friends and show off her new ring. Or we think of the fan whose team just pulled off miraculous last-second victory and who can't help but tell everyone he sees all about it. We are excited about what God has done for us in Jesus, but Paul mentions another reason that faith speaks. It's because in faith we know what's at stake.

Paul says, **we ... believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.**

Easter means that there is a resurrection of the dead. It's a resurrection of all the dead, both believers and unbelievers. As Jesus made clear in his own words, believers will be taken to his right hand and unbelievers to his left. There is nothing in the middle. Paul speaks. Paul preaches the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus alone, because that's the way that God has chosen to create faith in people's hearts. And he wants these Corinthians, and us, and as many as possible to be raised and then presented as redeemed, as cleansed, **as a part of his radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless,** heirs of eternal life.

Paul believes. He knows that faith comes from hearing the message, but how can people hear if no one is preaching to them? He knows the eternal welfare of souls is at stake. So he does not get discouraged, he does not lose heart. He continues to preach the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, **so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.** His desire is to reach as many people as

possible with the gospel so that as many as possible are brought to faith in Jesus. His goal is not to make a name for himself, but the more people that are brought to faith in Jesus, the more people there will be giving thanks and praise to God and the result will be that God is glorified.

When we are tempted to lose heart; when we are tempted to be quiet about our faith because it's just easier that way, it causes less trouble or controversy, Easter keeps us from losing heart. It reminds us of what's at stake. It reminds us that there is a resurrection. It reminds us that only believers will be presented as the bride of Christ, holy and blameless. It reminds us that God has determined that faith comes from hearing the message about salvation in the crucified and risen Jesus alone. Therefore, like Paul, we keep on going and going and going, doing all that we can to spread the good news of the gospel so that **God's grace can reach more and more people and cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God** both now and forever.

Easter keeps us from losing heart by reminding us that there is a resurrection of all flesh and that where people will spend eternity is at stake. Easter keeps us from losing heart by changing our view of troubles.

As I mentioned, Paul faced more than his share of trouble because he refused to be silent about Jesus and his resurrection. Earlier in this chapter he talked about being **hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down**. It seems that there was always someone plotting to kill him. Sometimes his enemies followed him from city to city stirring up riots against him. He was dependent on congregations he had founded for support for his mission work but sometimes that support didn't arrive in a timely manner. He didn't look at his work as a means to financial gain. Sometimes he was well off, other times he was in need. Just imagine the aches and pains he must have felt after experiencing so many beatings and stonings. But these things didn't cause him to lose heart. Easter had changed his view of troubles, and of life in general.

He says, **we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

Outwardly we are wasting away. Our bodies age. We have aches and pains. We can't do as much as we used to do. We know that these things are signs that our bodies will one day wear out and we will face death. But Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, renews us inwardly. It reminds us that death is not the end for us. It reminds us that God will raise our bodies and glorify them. It reminds us that those glorified bodies will not be subject to aches or pains or aging. They will be bodies that will be in perfect health forever. The aging process helps us to let go of the things that are seen, the things that are temporary, and to long to be with Christ which is better by far.

None of us would consider the things that Paul suffered to be light. It's not a light thing to know that people are constantly plotting to kill you. Nor would any of us consider what Paul suffered to be momentary. The trouble and persecution he faced was almost constant and lasted probably 30 years. But Easter led Paul to view these things as light and momentary. Thirty years when compared with the innumerable years of eternity does seem like just a moment. And, if you put all the things that Paul suffered on one side of a scale and the glory of heaven on the other side, those troubles would seem as light as a feather. In fact, in his letter

to the Romans Paul said **our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.**

As you face trials and troubles in life, as you experience aging and aches and pains, let Easter change the way you look at those things. Let Easter remind you that by comparison to the eternal glory that awaits you with Jesus, any suffering, no matter how intense or how long it lasts is light and momentary. The things that we see and feel on this earth are temporary. When our resurrected Lord comes again in glory all these seen things will be gone, either destroyed or purified. But the unseen things, heaven and the glory of God, those things endure for ever and ever. Easter reminds us to keep our focus on these unseen things through the eyes of faith.

Sometimes we think that things couldn't get much worse on this earth. Sometimes we think that it doesn't do any good to talk to people about Jesus, about salvation by grace alone through faith, about the fact that the crucified and risen Jesus is the only way of salvation. Sometimes we get tired of arguments and snide remarks and persecution and we are tempted to just keep silent. But Easter keeps us from losing heart. It reminds us what's at stake, eternal souls. It changes our view of troubles by helping us fix our eyes on the unseen things that last forever. Whenever you are tempted to be discouraged remember Easter. Remember that Jesus rose from the dead and that he will raise you and all people and present you and all believers holy and blameless before God so that you can live with him forever. That's what kept Paul going and it will keep you going too.