

Affliction Working Glory

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 4:17-18
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We turn in Sacred Scripture to 2 Corinthians 4. 2 Corinthians 4. The Apostle Paul is reflecting on his calling as a minister and what his perspective needs to be as a minister and that also applies to us and our various callings, and what our perspective needs to be with our callings and stations in life. 2 Corinthians 4. The text is the last two verses. Let's read the whole chapter.

1 Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; 2 But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 5 For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 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. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death worketh in us, but life in you. 13 We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; 14 Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. 16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

And now the words of the text. I won't re-read them because they are the last two verses.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; 18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

As I said, the text is verses 17 and 18. We'll be looking at this language of the text tonight so it will be profitable to keep our Bibles open to this passage. Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, as I said, the intention of the sermon this evening is to have like an old years service to closeout the year with fitting remarks and fitting reflection. Here we are tonight near the end of another year, the year 2022 is almost at its close and on the one hand, when you look back on the year, you might say it's been a long year. There's a lot that has happened in the past 12 months and yet, on the other hand, you can say just as quickly how the time flies. Another year is about to close, never to be lived in again. Time goes by quickly and the question is how do we react to this? How do we respond to the brevity of life? I think one of the most profitable things we can do when we're reminded of how time is so fleeting and goes by so quickly, one of the most profitable things is to reflect on the fact that we are pilgrims and strangers, and also to reflect on, as pilgrims and strangers, this life is not the only life we will live. I think that's very important for us to do for a number of reasons. First of all, we get so caught up with our earthly life, with the busyness of life and we lose sight of the fact that this life is going by quickly and we need to remember to always be prioritizing what needs prioritizing, lest the time slip by and you look back and and you say, "I should have been prioritizing different things in my life."

So it's good to reflect on these kinds of things and, second of all, it's good to reflect on the fact that we are pilgrims and strangers exactly because it reminds us that there is something better coming to us, there is something better than this present earthly life we are living. And sometimes that is something that is sorely needed, to remember that there's something better coming. After all, let me ask you the question: when you look back on this past year, what do you see? Certainly we see God's faithfulness in everything that's gone by in. In fact, the fact that we are here in church still tonight gathering as God's people is a testament to God's own faithfulness preserving us and keeping us as his people. We also look at some special moments that have gone by this past year. Weddings we've celebrated. Birthdays. Anniversaries. We've made special memories with family and friends in Christ this past year. God has been good to us. But I think when we also reflect on this past year, we also see a year of turmoil and tribulation. I think as a congregation, that's certainly how we started out the year. From one point of view, we could say the year 2022 was another year of walking through this valley of tears. That may be a depressing way of putting it, but that is our experience, that's what we say, that this is a valley of tears for some perhaps more than others this past year. Maybe this was the year where you saw the very hard realities and consequences of sin, broken relationships, family issues, arguments that divided families, sinful ways of

thinking that led people astray, struggles with certain besetting sins that kept rearing their ugly heads and maybe the struggle still continues. Or maybe this year was the year that you or a loved one became sick, you suffered under immense pain and changes in life had to take place as a result. Or maybe a loved one died this year and that has been a source of great hardship for you. Or maybe this year was just another year jam-packed full of work and you look back on the year and maybe it feels like work just consumed you this year, and that can kind of be a discouraging thing in and of itself when all you see is your days being spent working. And maybe as we experience the turmoils of life, we're tempted to ask, is this what life is? Is this life nothing but turmoil and tribulation, vanity and vexation of spirit, as the preacher puts it.

Well, what we want to do tonight is to be reminded of the fact that not only are we pilgrims, but we are pilgrims that are looking ahead to better things, and also what we especially want to do tonight is be reminded of how we are supposed to be looking at everything that is in our life and how the Lord is working at all because what we have before us tonight is a word that is going to put everything into perspective, everything that's happened in this past year, and it's a word, really, that we can carry with us into the next year. Really, it's a word that should shape our lives, a word that we should hide in our heart because it's going to be a word that puts every circumstance in our life into its proper perspective. We take as our theme "Affliction Working Glory," and we look at that theme under three points. First, we look at what that means, affliction working glory; second, we look at the judgment this produces, the kind of judgment we make knowing this truth; and then third, we look at how we enjoy this reality, this thinking, this judgment.

Verse 17 we begin there, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Now what the apostle is saying there is this: affliction works glory. Your affliction is working for you glory. Now in order to understand what this means, we need to look at those three words in turn very carefully: affliction, working, worketh glory. First, that word "afflictions," what are afflictions? When the apostle speaks of afflictions, the word that he uses is a word that emphasizes the idea of being pressed down. It's a word that emphasizes the idea of being squeezed together so that as if there's a burden weighing on your chest and you feel even perhaps that you are suffocating or you are trapped, you have no place to turn; you don't even have space enough to breathe because you're being squeezed in. You feel like you are suffocating.

That's the word "afflictions." That's the idea behind it, and these afflictions that Paul speaks of includes all the sufferings of this present life. In the context, what Paul especially has in mind is the suffering God's people experience because they are Christians and because they are called to suffer for Christ's sake. In the surrounding verses leading up to the text, Paul writes about his own suffering as a missionary. He writes in verses 8 and 9, for example, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." And it's all these sufferings that Paul has in mind when he writes in verse 17 about his own light affliction.

Paul certainly had a lot that he suffered as a missionary. Maybe you even remember what God said about the Apostle Paul to Ananias. Remember when Paul was converted on the road to Damascus and then led to Damascus and God told Ananias to show hospitality to Paul and speak to Paul, and God said at that time, "Go thy way." Ananias, go to Paul. "Go thy way, for he," Paul, "is a chosen vessel unto me to bear my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." And then you look at Paul's life and really from his conversion to his martyrdom, Paul suffered greatly as a result of being brought into union with Jesus Christ. But now when Paul mentions afflictions here, he's not just referring to these particular afflictions, but he really includes all the afflictions that God's people are called to suffer in this life. These afflictions include cancer, Parkinson's, arthritis, back pain, spinal fusions, migraines. These afflictions include hospital days, sick days at home. These afflictions include struggles at work, struggles with finances, struggles in the home, struggles in the marriage, struggle with kids, with sick kids, car wrecks, miscarriages. Good desires that remain unfulfilled. Loneliness. Broken marriages. The sufferings of old age and everything else. Paul has in mind all the sufferings we experience in life.

That's the word "afflictions" here in the text. We're looking at the word "afflictions" right now and as the Bible says, we do have many afflictions. The Bible is very honest with that. Psalm 34:19, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." In Psalm 6, David writes, "All night I make my bed to swim with my tears." In Psalm 73, Asaph comments how, while the wicked seemed to prosper, God's people often experience the opposite. In Psalm 73:10, Asaph writes that "waters of a full cup are wrung out to God's people." Asaph says just as you would wring out a drying cloth or a wet rag and drop out the last ounce of water, just so God oftentimes sends his people a full cup of suffering that is filled to the last drop. And the apostle himself had his own thorn in the flesh besides the outward whatever that thorn in the flesh was, but besides all these other afflictions that he speaks of, and he prayed that he might be delivered of that thorn in the flesh three times but God said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." And then Paul lived his life with that affliction, whatever that was.

What are the afflictions that you experienced in 2022? These are the things the apostle goes on to say in verse 18 that we can see. These are the things that we can see with our earthly eyes. These are the things that we can feel in our bodies. We experience these afflictions in the present moment. They are very real and they are very present to us. That's the word "afflictions." Then the second main word that we want to look at, and that we need to look at, is the word "glory." At the end of verse 17, Paul writes, "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Now what is this glory? I have three things to break this up for us. First, what Paul is referring to here is the glory of the new heavens and the new earth. That's pretty straightforward. Paul is referring here to the glory of heaven where there is no darkness, where there is no night, where there is no sin or suffering or death or affliction, or being pressed together, or being squeezed in, or feeling like you're suffocating. No, this is the place of perfect joy and contentment. It's the place of perfect holiness where there's no struggle but there's fullness of life and perfect

satisfaction. This glory of which Paul speaks is the heavenly Jerusalem, that better country whose builder and maker is God. That's the word "glory."

A second, this glory is not just the new heavens and the new earth, heaven, as maybe we often think about it but it's especially heaven with Jesus there and seeing our Lord and Savior face to face, seeing the glory of God. That's what glory is, isn't it? Glory, in its most basic meaning, is the radiation of God himself. It's the outshining of God and the perfections of God. Just as the sun shines in the heat of the day and that's the sun shining in its glory, the brightness of its rays, so God is a God who shines in his glory, who shines forth in all his attributes and perfections, and that's the glory of God, the outshining of God and his perfections. And glory then, glory is the place where we will enjoy the fellowship of God and we will see God face to face and we will live in the light of his glory. That's this glory of the text.

And then in addition, third, this eternal weight of glory of which Paul speaks can be understood this way: it's the perfect enjoyment of all the blessings, of all the riches that Jesus secured for us through his suffering and death on the cross. Now of this glory, we are partakers already now in part because by faith we are made partakers of Jesus Christ and we are made partakers of these riches, the earnest, the down payment, the beginning of these riches. We have the Holy Spirit. We enjoy glory, in a sense, we're already glorified in the new man in our hearts. So this is a glory that we enjoy already now, it's the glory of being a citizen of the kingdom of heaven already belonging to that heavenly kingdom, having our citizenship in heaven. It's the glory of experiencing being renewed in the image of Jesus Christ who is the image of God, living in righteousness and holiness and true knowledge. This is the glory of living out of the new man. As I said, we have this glory already in part but the Bible also tells us that there is a day coming when we will receive that glory in its fullness so that we, as God's own children, will shine with the glory of God. Our bodies, our bodies themselves will be made like unto the glorious body of Jesus Christ and the beauty of Jesus Christ will be reflected in us as we bear the image of Jesus Christ fully and perfectly in body and soul.

Now all these things put together, that's the glory of which Paul speaks in the text. It's what the apostle refers to in verse 18 as the things which are not seen, by faith we look forward to enjoying that glory. We have a foretaste of that glory already now as we live by faith. That's the glory of which Paul speaks in the text and it's that glory that Paul is contrasting with our present earthly afflictions and the sorrows and struggles of this earthly life.

So we've looked at the word "afflictions," and we just finished looking at the word "glory," and now what Paul says in this text is very marvelous because what Paul says is that these things, our present earthly afflictions, our present earthly lives, and our sorrows and struggles are working for us that glory of which I just spoke. Afflictions, the afflictions of our life are working for us that hope of glory. Paul uses the word "worketh," so now we have to look at that third word. What does that mean? Well, the word "worketh" has the idea of to perform or to accomplish, or to achieve something. Think of the word "energy." That's the root word from which this word comes. The underlying

idea is this: there is an intimate relationship between our afflictions on the one hand and the glory that is awaiting us on the other hand, and that intimate relationship is this, the afflictions, we can say, are the means by which we arrive at glory, by which we arrive at our end. The glory that is awaiting us in heaven, that's the end goal, that's our destination, and the afflictions are God's means, God's tools, God's instruments, by which he brings us to that glory.

Now we need to be careful here. I want you to understand me rightly. This doesn't mean that our present earthly afflictions take the place of faith. Don't confuse that, that our present earthly afflictions in any way earn for us the glory of heaven, or my afflictions make me worthy of glory. No, we understand nothing but the shed blood of Jesus Christ and his righteousness freely given to me through faith. That's how I am brought to glory. But what Paul is saying is this: afflictions are the pathway which God is pleased to bring us, on which God is pleased to bring us to glory. And there's no other way. So there is a direct connection here, unless you travel this way, you cannot reach the destination and it's through the very traveling along the way that God is forming us and fitting us and preparing us for receiving that glory that he has laid up for us in heaven.

Afflictions are working for us glory and what does all this mean? It means that all our afflictions and struggles and sorrows are not in vain. Our afflictions have purpose. Our afflictions are serving a purpose and that's great comfort. Just imagine if your afflictions of 2022 had no purpose, if you were suffering through everything that you went through this past year for no reason. How vapid, how empty, even those experiences would be in the end that they're worth nothing, they're not doing anything. What misery? It's hard enough to go through the afflictions and then it's quite another thing to consider that they would have no purpose in my life. Sometimes we feel that way though, don't we? We feel as if there's absolutely no point in the sufferings we have to go through and we talk to the Lord that way, too. "Lord, why? I don't understand/ This seems so unnecessary to me." And then maybe we can even in that moment comfort ourselves in the thought that this will soon be over, that this earthly life will soon be over, and I will be in glory, and I will be done with these earthly sufferings and these earthly afflictions, and that is a measure of comfort, but what God is putting before us in the text this evening is something much richer. It's something actually glorious and profound because what God is telling us is this: even your afflictions are serving you, they're serving your good. Every single tear you shed, every struggle you go through, every stress in the middle of the day, every tragedy is working for you that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

That's astonishing, really. It's very humbling because then we have to acknowledge God's ways are far higher than our ways, and who am I to speak against God? I must trust his word and this is the profound grace of God that I can't even comprehend how he's using it all for my good but this is the reality. We may not completely understand, then, how all this can be the case, how even this present affliction is working for my good, for my profit, or the sorrows of this past year are turning to my advantage but we don't need to understand it all because this is what our God and our heavenly Father tells us. Your afflictions are working for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

But I think if we explore the idea, we can understand a little bit how our afflictions are working for our good and for our glory, because we experienced that too, even as a Christian day by day as we go through the little afflictions and trials of lives because, first of all, don't our afflictions exactly have this effect on us that we begin to long more for heaven and we become more thankful that we are pilgrims and strangers and we see the richness and the beauty of the gospel? You see, what our afflictions so often do is they jerk us loose from our attachment to this world. They help us to get again a better perspective, to help us get our priorities back in order. We're often humbled through our afflictions. We feel our need for God's grace and then we turn to God for direction and strength but that's all good. We need that. And then we're brought closer under the shadow of God's wing and that's the only place where we want to be in the end.

So we understand how our afflictions are working for our good and then, second of all, our afflictions also have this effect that they sanctify us, and maybe that is a repeat of what I just said, but that's what Paul's talking about back in verse 16 when he says at the end of verse 16, "yet the inward man is renewed day by day." Exactly as our afflictions drive us closer and closer to God to depend upon him, to trust in him, wait upon him, our afflictions in the very same moment are sanctifying us so that we do become more content, we do become more loving, we are more compassionate, more understanding and patient, self-controlled, we put away sin, we become more humble, we understand what true joy actually is in life. Even as we learn to look to Christ to supply our needs, we also experience that we are living out of Christ more and more. That's what happens with afflictions for God's children.

In a way we can understand a little how afflictions are working for us glory by looking at Jesus and the path that Jesus himself had to walk, because in a very real way, Jesus' experience in life has to become our experience. He's the head, we're members of his body. And what was Jesus' experience? Well, Jesus could never have arrived at the glory of God's right hand in heaven except he go the way that God, his heavenly Father, had ordained for him, the way of the cross. And the affliction that he endured throughout his life, that was absolutely necessary to the arriving at that glory in heaven that was set before him. And that same reality is true for every child of God. We do have to make a distinction here. Our afflictions don't merit anything for us. In that way, our afflictions are, in a sense, different than Jesus. Jesus was suffering affliction for us to satisfy God's justice and to pay our debts, so there is a clear difference yet there is a similarity in this way, that as Jesus' afflictions did have this ultimate purpose, that they were also the way that would bring him to glory, so our afflictions in Christ also have this same purpose with us, that they bring us to the glory that is ours in and through Jesus Christ.

And that's a marvelous thought, beloved. Just think of this and I don't know all the details, obviously, I don't know the details of what life will be like in heaven or what our memory of this earthly life will be like, those things aren't revealed to us, but I think we can contemplate it and I think it's safe to say that it will be something like this when we get to heaven, that when we get to heaven we will be able to look back on our whole lives and we'll be able to look back on the year 2022 and we will be able to hold the year 2022 before us and we will be able to see how it all went, and seeing how it all went in the

light of eternity and in the light of all of history and God's purposes with history, we will be able then, looking at 2022, to turn to the Lord with utter astonishment and reverence and we will be able to say, "Well done, Jesus." Now I mean that with all reverence, with all humility and praise. We will say, "Well done, Jesus. You led me through the year 2022 in exactly the way that I needed to be led. Every affliction, every joy, every sorrow, every triumph, Lord Jesus, it was all perfect. It was all perfectly orchestrated to bring me to glory. All my affliction in 2022 was working for me this glory, and really all my life and all its afflictions and all its pathways, it was perfectly orchestrated." And that's true for every single one of God's children put together as the body of Christ. That's astonishing.

It was all perfectly orchestrated to bring us individually and collectively to glory, and the wisdom and the love of God will stand out to us all the more clearly. We will stand amazed at just how perfect and true the Bible was in everything it said, even as it says what we're looking at tonight, it's working for us glory and we heard it preached to us but now we see it and our hearts will be stirred up again perfectly to give God all the praise and all the glory. And then you know what we will also say in heaven, if we may continue with this thought? We will also say, "O heavenly Father and King Jesus, what folly it was for me to complain. What folly it was for me to doubt thy word and to question how my afflictions could have been for my profit because now I see that it could have been no other way." And indeed to add to that, "What was all that suffering I endured compared to this glory that I am now experiencing in heaven. O truly Lord, I could suffer those afflictions a thousand times over and it still wouldn't be worthy to be compared to this glory that I am now enjoying with thee in glory." And you know what? Each one of us will be able to say that as God's people.

That really brings us to the second point of the sermon, the judgment that this produces. We've looked at the meaning, the idea affliction works, glory, now the judgment that this produces in the child of God. What is that judgment? Well, the judgment that the Apostle Paul makes in verse 17 is this, that his present earthly affliction is to be viewed, they are to be viewed, as light and momentary. That's very striking language Paul uses in verse 17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, a heavy and eternal weight of glory." Paul says his afflictions are light. It says our afflictions really do not amount to much. They are light and they are but for a moment.

Now pause and think of about that, beloved. Let me ask you: are your afflictions light? Were the afflictions and struggles of 2022 a light thing for you? When you were in those afflictions, did time seem as if it was just flying by or did time seem as if it was at a standstill? Maybe you had stress at work this past year. Maybe it was something else. It was a very difficult time for you. Well, what if I came over as pastor and I said, "You know what? Your affliction is pretty light." What would you say? I think you might say to me, "You're some kind of comforter, pastor." Because you see, the reality is our afflictions are heavy, they are exceeding heavy. The reason they're called afflictions is because that's exactly how they feel as if we're being squeezed down, as if we're being suffocated, and that is no pleasant feeling. It's a hardship.

Our afflictions are not light but Paul says in the text they are light, and then maybe if we are in the moment, caught off guard and we're not thinking, we might be tempted to say, "Well, Paul doesn't know what he's talking about. Paul never went through what I went through or what I'm going through." And then I think you hear that and we pause right away and then we think of everything that Paul went through. I don't think there's a person here tonight who has suffered as much as Paul suffered from an earthly point of view. How many times was he not imprisoned? How many times was he not beaten with rods, left for dead? And we need to remember Paul was a man of like passions as we are. Paul is no different. It wasn't as if Paul was a Stoic, as if he had a higher pain tolerance than us, or that he was numb to pain. No, on the contrary, what do you read about Paul? Paul had a very sensitive heart. He had a tender spirit. We read in the Bible that when friends forsake him, he mourns over it. It breaks his heart. If the churches are suffering, he is agonizing over it. If there's sin to deal with, it affects him greatly. He knew what it was to cry over friends and family who rejected Jesus Christ and walked in sin. Just think of what he writes in Romans 9. He says, "I am in great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for I could wish that myself were accursed of God for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

You see, that's how Paul lived. He was a very sensitive man who lived out of his heart, and yet what is the judgment that Paul makes? He says light. It says these afflictions are light. Well, why does Paul make that judgment? Why does he say his afflictions are light? Well, I have two reasons, ultimately. The first reason is because, as verse 18 goes on to say, Paul is not looking at the things which are seen but Paul is looking at the things which are not seen. You see, Paul has in mind that glory that is awaiting him reserved in heaven. Paul has in mind that hope and deep desire to see his Savior face to face, to see the glory of God shining in the new heavens and new earth. And Paul knows that compared to that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, his earthly afflictions are light.

Paul knew a man once who was caught to the third heavens, knew, experienced, and heard things which cannot be uttered and Paul wanted to go there, and he said in the light of that glory, experiencing that just a moment, I can make this judgment that these afflictions here below are light and they're going to be just for a moment. Compared to the eternity of glory, these afflictions of this present life are but for a moment. Compared to the exceeding weight of glory, these afflictions are light. Indeed, in another passage of scripture, Paul says, "For I reckon, for I reckon, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us, that these two things are not worthy to be compared to each other, our afflictions and the glory that shall be revealed in us. They're not worthy to be compared with each other. The cross that you carry here on the earth is not worthy to be compared to the crown of glory that shall be yours in heaven."

That's the first reason he makes this judgment and then, second, Paul says his afflictions are light, he makes this judgment because those afflictions themselves are working glory for Paul. In a sense, even those afflictions themselves are glory because they're working glory for us, they're serving our glory, they're serving to bring us to glory. You know, the

word of God is not simply bear up with your sufferings because it will be over one day. No, the word of God is right now through Jesus Christ in the midst of your present sufferings, you are more than a conqueror because even these sufferings, even the battlefield has been so arranged so that every swipe of the sword you need to take, every lifting of the shield that you need to carry out, it's working for you. It's all been preordained so that you walk through that battlefield and it's all working for you. You're more than a conqueror. You're not just a conqueror but you are walking through that battlefield and all those afflictions and battles are working for you. That's an astonishing thought. Everything in your life, your enemies, your sufferings, it's all your servant, right? This is our comfort in life and death, that everything is subservient to my salvation.

So, in a sense, what are the sufferings of this life? Really if I had that right perspective, if I know that ultimately they are not against me but for me, well then what are these sufferings? And this is real, beloved. We need to apply this. We need to remember this verse, maybe memorize it because this is real in your day-to-day trials. "This suffering is working for me so I can go through this suffering as long as the Lord calls me to go through it. I can deal with this work and this challenge because the Lord's got a purpose with it. He will provide for me in the moment the grace I stand in need of, and he's got a good end with it. There's nothing in vain, nothing superfluous."

So it's a light affliction and it's but for a moment, that's the judgment that the child of God makes and that leads us to emphasize one last thing that the apostle emphasizes in verse 18. In verse 18, he writes, "while, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal." And what does Paul mean by that as he caps this glorious thought off in verse 18? What does he mean? What he means is this: this is how you enjoy, this is how I enjoy this reality, this is how we judge our afflictions to be light, this is how we hold onto the reality that our light afflictions are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, we enjoy it, we enjoy this judgment, we enjoy this reality by concentrating our thoughts and attention not on these things we can see with our physical eyes, sometimes that's hard to do, but by concentrating our attention on the things that we see and that we know by faith. What Paul is simply saying here in verse 18 is this: we need to live and walk by faith. That's how we will experience and enjoy this reality that all our afflictions are for our good and serving our eternal welfare.

We need to live and walk by faith and what Paul is saying is this, "Look beyond what you can see with your earthly eyes and lift up your gaze unto heaven where Christ Jesus sits at the right hand of God, ruling over all things for the good of his church, governing and directing all things for your good in particular. When you see Jesus sitting on God's throne, well, then even in the midst of your afflictions, you can have this peace and this comfort. He's working something good. This here below it's serving me, it's leading me, it's shaping me, it's preparing me for glory. Look beyond what you can see with your earthly eyes and look once again at what Jesus accomplished for you through his own suffering and death and resurrection. Look beyond what you can see with your earthly eyes, these things that are temporal, and see the eternal love of God which elected you in Jesus Christ from before the foundations of the world, which sent Jesus Christ to the

cross, the eternal love of God which is directing all the events in life for your eternal good and profit. Look beyond this present earthly life, this is just but for a moment, and look at the reality of eternity ahead of you and keep your eyes fixed on that hope of glory. Live by faith, Walk by faith while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen."

And so, beloved, that's what we need to do with the year that has gone by. We don't understand how everything works for our good. I'm sure Joseph in the moment, too, I was thinking about that this morning, or no for a funeral message that I I'm preparing, remember Joseph's brothers? "But as for you, you thought evil against me but God meant it for good." Even Joseph's whole life, he couldn't fathom how the Lord would use it all for good, being despised by his brothers, thrown in the pit, sold to the Midian merchant men, brought into Egypt, falsely accused, thrown into prison, all of it. "But God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." And that's what we need to do in the moment. Again, we don't understand how everything works for our good. God's ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. Why 2022 went this way for some of us and it went this way for others of us, it remains to us a mystery. Why some had to travel this path and some had to travel that path and you had this turn in the road and you had that turn in the road. Why did I have to spend the year 2022 the way that I did? We don't know the answer but this we do know: our Jehovah God is faithful and he is good. Isn't that what Christmas is about? To see that our God remembers his covenant? Isn't that the theme for Sunday school, God's faithfulness even towards an undeserving and unfaithful people?

This is what we know: God is faithful. Every page of scripture tells us that and he is our Father who loves us and he is able and he is willing to work all things together for good to them that love him, to them who are the elect, who are the called according to his good pleasure, and that's exactly what he's doing, he's working it for good. And then we have peace. As we close out the year, we have the memories, we have the sorrows, we have the joys, we have our present circumstance going into 2023, and we can have peace. We do have peace because these are my Father's ways for me. And then I can even praise God, lift up my voice and thank him, even thank him as we heard on Thanksgiving Day, in everything give thanks, because he's doing it for me. All things are for your sakes. That's an astonishing thought.

So we close 2022 praising the Lord. We close 2022 confessing God's goodness and faithfulness, and we begin 2023 with a cheerful heart understanding that whatever lies before us, it's the exact same truth that is my reality in life, these afflictions are light and they are working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. We have confidence. We have hope. We keep trusting the Lord. We keep on pressing on as pilgrims. God is with me. God is my guide. He will be my guide even unto death. He knows exactly how to lead me and as our spiritual forefathers, we keep pressing on looking for that city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, that we should be thy children and that we should have thy love upon us in this way, it humbles us and it causes us to see how worthy thou art of all our praise and all our strength. Lord, we thank thee for these truths of thy word. Shape our hearts by them and shape our attitudes and shape our lives by them that we might remember them, and that thy word might not return into thee void but it might truly accomplish that good work of strengthening us as we close this year and as we begin another year as pilgrims and strangers, citizens of thy heavenly kingdom. Bless us and glorify thy name even through the strengthening of our faith. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.