Sunday, August 29, 2021

Lesson:  II Corinthians 4:16-18; II Corinthians 5:1-10; Time of Action: 57 A.D.; Place of Action: Paul writes from Macedonia

Golden Text: “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

I. INTRODUCTION. Many New Testament passages remind us that the Christian is looking forward to his or her heavenly home. The Apostle Paul said “Our conversation (or citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the LORD, Jesus Christ” (see Philippians 3:20). This is our eternal hope not because we wish it will happen, but because we know that it will come to pass and it will be eternal. In this week’s lesson, Paul confirms that the believer has another eternal home in heaven.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. The Apostle Paul wrote the Second Letter to the believers in Corinth while in Macedonia within a year of the first letter to the same believers. After explaining his change of plans about visiting the Corinthians (see II Corinthians 1:12-2:13), Paul describes
what true ministry is. It means being ministers of a glorious new covenant and that Jesus Christ is the theme of that ministry (see II Corinthians 3:4-4:6). He then turned to the need to trust God in the midst of all the troubles he and his ministry had faced (see II Corinthians 4:8-12). In verse 15 which precedes our printed text, Paul gave the reason why he and his associates endured the trials he had just mentioned (see verses 8-11). He said it was for the sake of the believers at Corinth and elsewhere, and for the glory of God. Paul’s evangelistic team members were merely servants of the people and of God (see II Corinthians 4:5-15). This takes us to the first portion of our printed text, II Corinthians 4:16.

III. A MINISTRY OF HOPE (II Corinthians 4:16-18)

A. Renewing the inner man (II Corinthians 4:16). Our first verse says “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” The words “For which cause” can mean “this is why” and refers back to Paul’s desire to suffer for other believers so that God would be glorified (see verse 15). Paul said this is why “we faint not” or refuse to give up in the ministry (see II Corinthians 4:1). Then he said “but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.” Although Paul’s “outward man” or his physical body was wasting away due to age and the trials he was experiencing, still his “inward man” or his spiritual man transformed by God’s Spirit (see Titus 3:5) was being
“renewed” every day. In other words, he was growing ever stronger spiritually. I’m sure most of us if not all of us have seen older and more mature Christians often bear witness to what Paul was saying here. The older and weaker they become in their bodies, the more their spiritual strength and devotion to Christ increases. It should be noted here that the contrast between the “outward man” and the “inward man” is not simply between the body and the soul, but between the old fallen nature (see Ephesians 4:22) and the renewed humanity (see Ephesians 4:23-24).

B. Looking at eternal things (II Corinthians 4:17-18).

1. (vs. 17). This verse says “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory...” Paul’s reference to their hardships as “our light affliction” was an understatement because those hardships were real (see II Corinthians 4:8-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-33). He neither overrated their hardships nor denied them. Paul knew that those troubles were preparing him and his associates for a great reward. By viewing them in light of what lay ahead for him, he described the hardships he and his associates were experiencing as “our light affliction.” He could say this because his inward man was being renewed daily (see verse 16). If a person looks only at his or her trials and hardships, the burden can be more than they can bear. But when the same sufferings are seen from a heavenly perspective, they can appear as only “light affliction.” A person’s perspective makes all the difference. Only when
such hardships as those mentioned in II Corinthians 4:8-9 are seen in light of eternity can we appreciate the working of God. Paul viewed those hardships as “light affliction, which is but for a moment” because of their comparison with “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” of the future. To the unbeliever, it made sense to recognize Paul’s sufferings as heavy and long, grievous and tedious; but faith perceived them to be “light” and short, and “but for a moment.” The apostle and his fellow-sufferers saw their “afflictions” working towards heaven, and that they would end at last. For the believer, troubles in this life are “light” and insignificant compared to the important and significant “glory” that we will enjoy throughout eternity. These troubles that Paul and his associates endured and the ones we endure are preparing believers for a great reward. Temporal or physical things do not compare to the value of heavenly things. Paul’s point here is that we should endure hardship because of the “eternal” heavenly blessings received for it (see Matthew 6:19-21). Our faith and obedience in suffering pleases God, and He will not forget it (see Romans 8:17-18; I Peter 1:6-7).

2. (vs. 18). This verse says “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.” Here Paul emphasized that this world’s pleasures are “temporal” or “things which are seen.” Because “the things which are seen are temporal” they don’t last and are subject to decay. This is why Paul also said that believers should “look...at the things which are not seen” referring
to heavenly things, because they are “eternal” meaning they last forever. For sure, this world’s trials will end because the visible world is passing away (see I Corinthians 7:31), but the promises of God and the glories to come are “eternal.” They will never fail or pass away. The faith of Paul and his fellow workers enabled them to make this right judgment of things: “We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.” Note: It is by faith that we see God, who is invisible (see Hebrews 11:27), and by faith we look to an unseen heaven and hell, for faith is the “evidence of things not seen” (see Hebrews 11:1).

There are unseen things, as well as things that are seen and there is a vast difference between them. Unseen things are “eternal,” but seen things are temporal or temporary. By faith we not only discern these things, and the great difference between them, but by faith we focus on unseen things, and place them in high regard. It really doesn’t make any sense to focus on trying to escape present troubles just to obtain present rewards because both are temporary and will end. Our desire should be to live for Jesus and escape future troubles to obtain future rewards, which although are unseen, they are real, and certain, and eternal. That’s what faith is, “the substance of things hoped for” as well as the “evidence of things not seen.”

IV. THE CHRISTIAN HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE (II Corinthians 5:1-5)
A. What the believer knows (II Corinthians 5:1-3).

1. (vs. 1). This verse says “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Here Paul indicated why he was focused on the unseen instead of the seen. He began by saying “For we know.” These words indicate that Paul and his associates were convinced and confident of what the future held for believers. What they knew was “that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God.” The apostle was well aware that “if our earthly house” or our physical bodies were “dissolved” or destroyed by death, “we have a building of (or from) God.” In other words, we know that our body, the tent we live in here on earth will be destroyed. But when that happens, “God” will have another home for us to live in.

Paul sees our “building of (or from) God” as a habitation, a dwelling-place, a resting-place, a hiding-place; it is our Father’s house, where there are many mansions (see John 14:2). Paul knew that if his sufferings must lead even to physical death, something far greater awaited him, and he described it as “an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” This refers to the heavenly place that is “not made” with human “hands,” but a place that God Himself has prepared for us (see John 14:2). It’s a “house eternal in the heavens,” in that high and holy place which far excels all the palaces of this earth as “the heavens” are high above the earth. It’s “a building of God,” whose builder and maker is “God,” and therefore is worthy of its
Maker. It’s “eternal in the heavens,” an everlasting habitation, not like the earthly tabernacles, the poor vessels of clay (see II Corinthians 4:7) in which our souls now dwell which are decaying. Paul speaks of our future home in wonderful, exciting terms, but we can never even imagine just what God hath prepared for those that love Him (see I Corinthians 2:9). Note: This joy that comes from having “a building of God” will happen immediately after death, as soon as “our house of this earthly tabernacle is dissolved.” The body, our “earthly house,” is just a tabernacle that will be “dissolved” shortly, and then the body will return to dust as it was (see Genesis 3:19). When this happens, then will come the “house not made with hands.” The spirit returns to God who gave it (see Ecclesiastes 12:7), and those who have walked with God here shall dwell with Him forever.

2. (vs. 2). This verse says “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven...” The words “we groan” denotes a groaning of sorrow under a heavy load. When Paul said “For in this we groan” he was saying that in our “earthly house” or our body, believers “groan” sighing with frustration at the limitations of this present life, with its sin, weakness, and corruption (see Romans 8:22-23). Paul continued to say that while we “groan” in our earthly bodies, we are also “earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” In other words, we are longing to “be clothed” or dressed with our immortal, eternal heavenly “house” or dwelling.
3. (vs. 3). This verse says “If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.” The meaning of this verse has been widely debated. But the text seems to indicate that since Paul longs to be “clothed” with his heavenly body, if he should die before Christ returns, the dissolving of his body does not mean that he is left or “found naked.” This term normally refers to a state of shame which is the state of the non-Christian. For the non-Christian to be “found naked” would be to experience God’s judgment and not the freedom from a bodily existence. Christians, on the other hand, have been undergoing the progressive renewal of their inner person, which provides them with an appropriate covering at death. So, even if Paul is in a state of undress or nakedness because he no longer has a physical body, he will “not be found naked” that is, in a state of shame. This is because his sufferings have been achieving for him “an eternal weight of glory” that far outweighs all his sufferings (see II Corinthians 4:17).

B. Why what believers know is important (II Corinthians 5:4-5).

1. (vs. 4). This verse says, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” Here Paul repeats what he said in verse 2, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan.” Then he added “being burdened” meaning “to be weighed down” or “made to carry a heavy load.” But here, Paul was not using the words “being burdened” negatively, but positively, for he then said “not
for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” In other words, he and his companions weren’t looking forward to being unclothed or separated by death from the body, but they were looking forward to being “clothed” so that the body which is mortal will “be swallowed up by life” after the resurrection. The new, heavenly “life” to come will overtake our present existence of “mortality.” In essence, here Paul was “burdened” or weighed down because he did not want to “be unclothed,” but he wanted to be “clothed upon” or over “clothed” with his heavenly dwelling.

2. (vs. 5). This verse says, “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” The words “the selfsame thing” refers to everything Paul has said about the believer in the previous verses. Then he declares who is responsible for providing our heavenly home. He said “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God.” All believers are designed for heaven and are “wrought” or prepared for heaven while we are here on earth. We are the stones of that spiritual building and temple above and we are fashioned here below (see I Peter 2:4-5). And He that hath “wrought” or prepared us for this “is God,” because nothing less than a divine power can make a soul partaker of a divine nature. A great deal is done to prepare our souls for heaven, and that preparation of the heart is from the LORD. Not only has God prepared us for our heavenly home, Paul said that He “also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” The word “earnest” can mean “a guarantee.” The Greek word means a deposit or down payment that is part of
the total due and guarantees the whole payment will be made. The “Holy Spirit” is the “earnest” or guarantee of our complete salvation that is yet to be realized (see Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:13-14). Since believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we already have heavenly life within us, before we reach heaven (see I Corinthians 3:16; Colossians 1:27). The “earnest” or guarantee “of the Spirit” gives us the assurance that God is preparing us for more in heaven; for an “earnest” is part of a payment, and is security for the full payment. The present graces and comforts of the Spirit that we now enjoy are “earnests” or “guarantees” of everlasting grace and comfort. The “Holy Spirit’s” work in us now in our daily renewal and spiritual strengthening (see II Corinthians 3:18; 4:16) is a foretaste and guarantee of the future completion of that work of resurrection bodies and complete sanctification.

V. THE HOPE OF ETERNAL LIFE WITH CHRIST (II Corinthians 6-10)

A. At home in the body (II Corinthians 5:6-7).

1. (vs. 6). This verse says “Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the LORD...” The word “Therefore” refers back to verse 5 where Paul declares that believers have been given the Holy Spirit. So “therefore” or as a result of having an assured hope of heaven by the presence of the Holy Spirit, Paul said “we are always
confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the LORD.” The word “confident” translates the Greek word tharreo which means “to be of good courage or cheerful.” Paul maintains a cheery attitude toward his present circumstances which is the opposite of losing heart or growing weary (see II Corinthians 4:16), a temptation that all of us in full-time ministry face from time to time. In addition, he is “confident” or cheerful not only when things are going well but “always.” Not even the prospect of death affects his basic attitude. Paul was “confident” or cheerful in part from knowing that “whilst (or as long as) we are at home in the body, we are absent (or away) from the LORD.” This was theirs and our present state or condition. Believers are pilgrims and strangers in this world. We are only sojourning here in our earthly home, or in this earthly tabernacle, and although God is with us here, by His Spirit and in His Word, we are not with Him as we hope to be. We cannot see his face while we live (see Exodus 33:20).

2. (vs. 7). This verse says “(For we walk by faith, not by sight:).” Although we are absent from Christ in the sense that we are not with Him in heaven, we can experience His presence now (see John 15:4), but that demands faith. So Paul said “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” The whole Christian life, whether walking with Jesus or expecting answers to prayer or anticipating God’s heavenly promises is a “walk” in “faith.”

B. Absent from the body (II Corinthians 5:8). This verse says “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to
The faith by which Paul and his companions lived gave them great courage and good cheer. So after declaring that they were confident in knowing that being “at home in the body, we are absent (or away) from the LORD” (see verse 6), here Paul also declares that they are more “confident... and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the LORD.” In other words, they would rather be separated from their bodies by death so that they could be with Jesus. Their faith didn’t guarantee that their lives would be free from trials and suffering, but it did give them a hope that could not be swayed by the prospect of death. The things relating to eternity are more important than the things of this life. God promised His children a heavenly body (see II Corinthians 5:1-2), and by faith we should live in anticipation of receiving it. Such anticipation brings faithfulness from God’s people.

C. Appearance before Christ (II Corinthians 5:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). This verse says “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” The word “Wherefore” draws a conclusion from verses 1 through 8 and begins directing the readers’ minds to their accountability regarding Christian service. Knowing that one day he would be present with the LORD prompted Paul to “labor” for Him. So he said “Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” The Greek term for “labor” means “to be ambitious.” Whether he was “present” with the LORD or
“absent” from him while on earth, Paul was ambitious for Christ so that he might “be accepted” or pleased by “him.” No doubt one day he wanted to hear the words “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” (see Matthew 25:21). To be well-pleasing to Jesus when he met Him face-to-face was a high priority with Paul. He constantly lived and acted with that event in mind. But the apostle realized that the LORD was always with him (see Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5). Therefore, it was needful for him to live well pleasing to the LORD whether he was “present” in the body or “absent” from the body. Like Paul, it should be our ambition to live for divine approval at all times (see I Thessalonians 2:4).

2. (vs. 10). Our final verse says “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Another motive Paul and his associates had to excite them to Christian service was the consideration of the judgment to come. Paul said “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.” It was this anticipation that especially made them labor in such a way that would be well pleasing to the LORD. The apostle knew that one day he and all other Christians will visibly “appear before” the LORD. This will take place at “the judgment seat of Christ.” The term “judgment seat” is from the Greek word “bema” which means an elevated place or platform. The term was used for platforms from which speeches were made to large gatherings and magistrates heard court cases and decided issues. The “bema” was the tribunal or the judicial bench.
Paul used this familiar cultural situation to illustrate believers appearing before the LORD in judgment. This appearing is an inclusive one, for Paul said “we must all appear.” The words “must appear” evokes images of being called before the judge’s bench to give an account of one’s actions. This future reality brought solemnity and seriousness to Paul and it should do the same for every believer. The “judgment seat of Christ” is different from the great white throne judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. First, the “judgment seat” experience will take place at the rapture when Jesus returns for His church (see I Corinthians 4:5; II Timothy 4:8; Revelation 22:12). The great white throne judgment will take place after both the great tribulation and the thousand-year reign of Christ have been completed. In addition, at the “judgment seat of Christ,” only believers will be present. Notice that Paul was writing to Christians when he said “For we must all appear.” But at the great white throne judgment, only unbelievers will be present. Paul also said that at the “judgment seat of Christ,” everyone there will “receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” The word “bad” here is better understood as “worthless.” All the works that we have done will either be of worth or worthless. The truth is that many of the good deeds we do are done out of selfishness and pride, and those are the ones that are “bad” or worthless and will result in loss of rewards. This is a “judgment” of the believer’s works, not sins, because our sins have been forgiven and are remembered no more forever (see Hebrews 10:16-17); but every work or deed must be judged (see Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 6:8; Colossians
3:24-25). God’s people will either receive rewards or lose rewards, but the believer “himself shall be saved” (see I Corinthians 3:11-15). Salvation is not the issue here; instead the issue is receiving rewards for faithful service.

VI. Conclusion. The Apostle Paul clearly tells us that our hope is to be with Jesus Christ. But in the meantime while we are here on earth, he reminded us that we will face “light afflictions” meaning those temporary troubles that come our way in serving Jesus Christ. While these difficulties may seem overwhelming to us now, they pale in significance to the glories we will share in heaven.

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