

Living In Light Of Eternity

preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on January 27, 2019

This morning we turn to the third sermon in our seven part sermon series on 2 Corinthians. Reviewing the background information, 2 Corinthians was written by the Apostle Paul somewhere around 56 A.D., during his third missionary journey, approximately ten years before he was martyred. The letter he wrote was addressed to the church in the Greek cosmopolitan seaport city of Corinth, as well as to believers everywhere. Paul had planted the church in Corinth about five years earlier and had nurtured it for a period of eighteen months during his second missionary journey.

Being the founder of the church in Corinth, Paul was held in high esteem. However, in his absence, his authority and his teachings were being challenged by others in the congregation who had a different agenda. As a result, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to affirm the gospel that he had preached, and to put the church on notice that he was coming to visit them in person, bearing the authority and power of an apostle, for the purpose of putting God's house in order.

And now, turning to today's reading, let us hear the Word of God as found in 2 Corinthians, chapter four, verses fourteen through eighteen.

2 Corinthians 4:14-18

14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. 15 Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. 16 So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. 17 For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, 18 because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

When I was finishing my last year of university my roommate had just finished getting his pilot's licence for small aircraft. Soon afterwards, he offered to take me flying and I was very excited to go. For our flight, we followed the highways going from Waterloo all the way to my hometown of Wingham, Ontario. What a blast! I loved seeing those familiar roads that I have traveled down so many times from the air...and finally seeing what everybody had stashed in their backyard.

Once we arrived at the airport in Wingham, we were picked up by my parents and

we had supper at home. Then, after supper, we flew around Wingham for a bit and headed back for Waterloo. During the flight back to Waterloo, my roommate let me fly the plane which was awesome! If memory serves me correctly, I logged over half an hour of flight time.

However, as we continued our flight, it started getting dark and my roommate resumed control of the aircraft. Very soon it was completely dark, and the only way we could tell where we were, and which way to go was based on the gauges in the cockpit. Using them, my roommate was easily able to get us back to the airport in Waterloo and he was able to safely land the plane.

In our Scripture reading this morning, the Apostle Paul was recounting the details of the latest journey that he had undertaken with friends. As mentioned in the introduction to this morning's reading, Paul was on his third missionary journey; a trip that took him about four years to complete, in which he traveled thousands of kilometers visiting numerous cities in the Middle East, Asia, and Europe as he preached the gospel, planted churches, and offered support to churches that had been recently established.

In his travels, Paul experienced many amazing wonders. At the same time, he also endured great adversity. As we have noted in the two previous sermons in this series, at the time Paul wrote the words we read this morning, he was going through a very difficult season in ministry. Had we read from the beginning of chapter four we would have heard even more about the trials he had faced.

And yet, for all the hardship he was undergoing, Paul did not lose heart or lose his way. Like a pilot flying a plane at night, Paul used the gauges that God had given him to direct his paths, and that allowed him to navigate the storms he faced, and stay on track. In our Scripture reading today, I see three gauges that Paul used to guide him through the challenging season he was facing in his ministry.

The first gauge that Paul used to stay the course was God's voice. This is what guided him from the time Christ called out to him on the road to Damascus. From that moment on, Paul never made decisions based on his own personal aspirations, it was the voice of God that guided him. When Paul was challenged by false teachers, by those steeped in witchcraft, and by powerful businessmen and Roman officials who were enraged by his actions, Paul did not listen to the voice of fear, doubt, or political expediency. Paul listened to the voice of God.

When challenged by intellectuals who were curious, or by those who were hostile, Paul did not listen to the voice of the philosopher or the salesman for wisdom as to how he should craft his response. In all matters, Paul listened to the voice of God,

and because he was so focused on the voice of God, he was able to navigate his way through impossible storms and accomplish the miraculous.

That was the first gauge that Paul used to stay the course. The second gauge that Paul used to guide him through the dark times was the beacon of his calling. As we discover in the book of Acts, from the beginning, Paul had been set apart by Jesus to be an evangelist to the Gentiles. And once given his mission, Paul stayed true to his calling through to the end of his life. In today's reading, Paul demonstrates this calling as he restates the gospel to the fledgling Christian church that he had established in the Greek city of Corinth.

As I reflect on Paul's commitment to his calling of preaching the gospel, I am reminded how past moderator of the PCC, Rev. Peter Bush, wrote in his book, "Western Challenge," that when the prairies were being settled back in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the Presbyterian church flourished, churches were being planted everywhere, and the growth of the church was consistent with the growth in the population.

However, something changed by the year 1915. Whereas up until that year the mission of the church had clearly been to preach the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the means of salvation for a sinful humanity, from 1915 and onward, the central mission of the PCC had become making good citizens. As Bush notes, it was at that point that the PCC stopped growing.

The third gauge that Paul used to guide him through a difficult season in ministry was his fixation on eternity. In verse sixteen of today's reading and following Paul writes, "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."

When I reflect on these words, I am reminded of two stories that powerfully illustrate the point that Paul is making. The first is another story about psychology professors with too much time and tax payer's money on their hands. In this study a Stanford psychology professor went to a nursery school and offered 600 kids a marshmallow or similar treat. The children were told they could eat the goodie right away, or, they could wait a short while and receive two snacks. The idea of the experiment was to see if you could predict success in life based on our ability to delay gratification. In the original experiment, this was the result. Children who were able to restrain their desire to eat the marshmallow right away performed better in life on a number of metrics than children who ate the

marshmallow right away.

A second story that beautifully illustrates the importance of always focusing on the end prize comes from a juggler who was performing for a crowd of young people. As he effortlessly juggled five balls, he explained to his audience the trick of accomplishing the task. Drawing their attention to his eyes, the juggler noted that when his eyes were looking up towards heaven, the balls stayed in the air. However, when he changed his gaze from heaven towards his hands, the balls fell to the floor and scattered everywhere.

Thus, the lesson to be learned was in life we always need to keep our eyes fixed on heaven; we need to keep our eyes fixed on the prize. Throughout our life, we always need to be focusing on our end destination. While the temptation in life is to think short term, and to fix our sight on temporal things, the gospel calls us to operate with an eternal time horizon as we make our daily choices.

This was the mindset that Paul embraced as demonstrated in today's Scripture reading. And this was the mindset that he credited in today's reading for getting him through some difficult times. This, along with a deep commitment to his calling as an evangelist to the Gentiles, and his attentive ear to the voice of God, all helped him through some very stormy seasons of life.

Which is why in today's Scripture reading, Paul encourages us to adopt a similar mindset as we navigate our way through our own life journey. Thus, in seasons of good visibility and in seasons of darkness, may we always focus on the voice of God. May we hear His instruction as it comes to us through His Holy Word, as it is discerned in the community of believers, and as it is confirmed through the witness of the Holy Spirit who speaks to our conscience.

In all seasons of life, may we be guided by our calling to bear witness to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as the God ordained path through which we find salvation. In our personal lives, as a congregation, and as a denomination, may we never lose sight of our calling.

And finally, as make the hundreds of small choices that daily living requires, may we make each decision, may we respond to each situation, in a manner that makes sense when evaluated in light of eternity. May we always be consciously aware of our eternal destination, may our eyes be always focused heavenward, and as we look to the horizon may we be safely guided down the straight and narrow path that will take us from our temporal dwelling to our eternal home.