How not to lose heart

"So we do not lose heart. Though our outward nature is wasting away, the inner nature is being renewed day by day" 2 Cor. 4:16.

Today a full-blown creed of secular humanism grips the minds of many in our culture. They believe that what happens to them when they die is no more important than what happens to a tree when it dies. It's over! They cease to exist. They feel nothing, know nothing and have no consciousness.

But written on our hearts is the truth that there is a Creator God and we were made to have an eternal relationship with Him. We know that what separates us from dolphins or chimpanzees is not casual mutations but **personhood – made in the image of God.** We can't help thinking about eternity because in Ecclesiastes 3:11 we read, ***"God has put eternity in a man's heart"***.

As believers in the Lord Jesus, it is important for us to think about what happens when we die. Perhaps it is also important to focus on this when discipling new believers. **For it is a test** – it is a measure of **the centrality of God in our lives**. It is a test as to whether, at the centre of our lives, we are more in love with life in this world than with God Himself. Does the thought of dying give us more pain at **losing** what we love on the earth than joy in anticipating all we will gain in spending eternity with the Lord Jesus?

So thinking about death is **firstly a test**. More importantly, **it is a call to courageous living now**. When the truths of Scripture grip us, they free us from fear and give us the ability to live the radical, self-sacrificing lives of love we are called to live. Someone who can truly say, ***"To die is gain"*** can also say – like no one else – ***"To live is Christ"***. Phil. 1:21

Being sure of what happens when we die is indispensable for **daily courage now** and so we won't **"lose heart"** through pain and the often failing health of this life. We find **the basis for not losing heart** in 2 Cor. 4:16-5:10. Paul tells the Corinthian believers why he doesn't lose heart in spite of the troubles and afflictions he is going through [4:8-12]. He knows he is slowly dying and his body is wearing away, but still he is full of joy and courage.

It is crucial we don't lose heart! In the last few months some of us have taken a pounding physically. For others that pounding has come from financial and economic instability and loss. Others are losing heart over deteriorating relationships. In some countries there is little response to the Gospel and growing persecution and this causes us to lose heart.

We are tempted to say, "Is it all really worth it?" Despair begins to seep in. Paul faced the same temptation. He was afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, forsaken and struck down. But he gives us a key reason why **he didn't lose heart**. He says in 5:6, ***"So we are always of good courage"*** and in 5:8, ***"Yes, we are of good courage"***.

So what is the threat to Paul's courage and our courage? Our bodies are decaying – rotting away. The "outer man" is decaying, wasting away, wearing out. The term in Greek comes from the leather industry. Remember Paul was a tentmaker and his tents were made of leather. So he was using a term about his body as if it was an old piece of leather worn out and breaking up through constant use.

Paul couldn't see as he used to or hear as he used to. His strength in walking from town to town was less and it was taking more out of him. His memory wasn't as good as it used to be. His joints were getting stiff when he sat still. In other words, like everyone else, he knew he was dying. The "outer man" was decaying and this had the potential to threaten his courage and eliminate his joy! So why doesn't he lose heart? It is because **day by day his**

"inner man" was being renewed (4:16). His decaying body tended to make him lose heart, but something else helped him to gain heart. What was it?

Well, he tells us! I think Paul says that he sees **three** things:

1. He is fixing his eyes on what can't be seen.

Paul is renewed in his heart from what is to many a very strange source – ***"Things that are eternal"*** (v. 18). He is not losing heart because he is looking at what he can't see!

The Lord Jesus criticised the religious leaders of His day (Mt. 13:34) saying, ***"Seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear"***. **This must be reversed in our lives** if we are to get our hope, our courage and our joy from the Lord Jesus and not lose heart. We need to look more and more to what is not seen, ***"For we walk by faith and not by sight"*** (5:7)

This doesn't mean that we take a leap in the dark without any evidence of what is there. It does mean that **all the most precious and important realities in this world are beyond our natural senses now** and it is these realities we are to "look at" now. ***"We look to the things unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal"*** (4:18). We know them through what we know of the Lord Jesus from Scripture.

So we strengthen our hearts, renew our courage and restore our joy by fixing our gaze on the invisible, objective truths we learn through the testimony of Scripture.

2. We are to look at the unseen *"eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison that is being prepared for us"* (4:17).

I love the way Paul puts it – our inner person is renewed each day by this great truth, ***"For this momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison".*** In 2 Cor. 11:16-29, Paul describes this ***"momentary light affliction".*** It is an awesome list!

The slow decaying of the body isn't meaningless. The pain, the pressure and the frustrations are not in vain. They are not vanishing into a black hole of pointless suffering. Instead this present ***"momentary light affliction*** (even if it lasts for years and is unremitting and painful) ***is producing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison".***

So these are ***"the unseen things"*** Paul is looking at and in seeing them, his "inner man" is being renewed. He sees ***"the immense weight of glory"*** being prepared for him – not just after he dies, **but during *"the wasting away of his body"***.

So when he is in pain, hurting and frustrated, he fixes his eyes not on how much it hurts but on how heavy the glory will be **because of the hurt**.

So what does this unseen glory consist of?

In 2 Cor. 5 Paul tells us some of what he sees as he looks at the unseen!!

v. 1-5: The hope of receiving a new, glorious, everlasting body at the resurrection

v. 6-8: The hope of being with the Lord Jesus for ever

v. 9-10: There is a third factor won't cover here – Paul's efforts to please the Lord Jesus are rewarded at the judgement seat of Christ where he hears that ***"Well done"***!

3. Paul's great and final hope (2 Cor. 5:1-8)

It is this final hope that daily renews his courage and his joy and gives him the tenacity to keep pressing on. Notice the difference between the ***"tent"*** (his body that is temporary and decaying with use) and ***"we have a building from God, a house not made with hands."***

In the **"tent"** (his present body), he is groaning and longing for a **"house"** – a durable, everlasting resurrection body.

Then Paul says there are two possible options

Option One – his preferred option

He would like to receive his new resurrection body (his "house") now! He knows this will happen to all believers at the second coming of Christ. So he is longing for the Lord Jesus to return. The reason is that he doesn't want to be "naked" – his term for being stripped of his body. In Paul's view this is not nearly as good as being changed ***"in the twinkling of an eye"*** at the second coming of the Lord Jesus. So he would like to be "fully clothed" when he sees the Lord Jesus. But if this is not God's will, he writes of his second preference. He says, in effect, please take me home even if it means "a period of nakedness". Why is the thought of being ***"at home with the Lord"*** so irresistibly attractive to Paul?

Option Two – to die

From verses 6-8 it is clear that when we die, as believers, we go immediately into the presence of the Lord Jesus for ever. This is confirmed in other parts of Scripture such as Rev. 6:9 and Heb. 12:33.

Being alive here and now means that full knowledge of and intimacy with the Lord Jesus is not possible. ***"We walk by faith and not by sight"***. But we are of good courage and live with joyful expectation because we would rather be absent from the body (being "naked" – the separation of the body from the spirit) and **at home with the Lord Jesus**.

So Paul sees that he has three possibilities and he prefers them in this order:

1. That the Lord Jesus would return in glory and power and clothe his mortal body with immortality. Then he wouldn't die at all and would live on for ever in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus. If this isn't the Lord's will, then:

2. He would prefer to die – to be absent from the body and to live in the presence of the Lord Jesus – who he loves more than anything else.

Being absent from the body means being at home with the Lord and experiencing a far greater and deeper intimacy with Him and a greater "at homeness" than we can ever know in this life.

In Phil. 1:21 Paul puts it this way, ***"For me to live is Christ and to die is gain"***. He struggles with the need to stay here for the sake of the ministry the Lord has called him to do and his longing to go home and be with the Lord Jesus. So rather than groan here and bear all the struggles and sickness and hardships and above all the ever present sin, (Rom. 7:7-24, "***Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"***) Paul would rather die and be with the Lord Jesus! But if that is not the Lord's will then:

3. Paul will continue to **walk by faith** and not by sight. By faith he will be of good courage, pressing on with what God has called him to do. He is conscious his body is decaying, but he is even more conscious that his inner nature is being renewed day by day through faith in the unseen weight of glory to come. So he is willing to stay alive if it is better for God's people and for the glory of the Lord Jesus. He is willing to postpone the deeper, more immediate intimacy of seeing and being with the Lord Jesus. So he presses on in the ministry using his time on earth to advance the faith and increase the joy of others.

What about us? Are we out of step with these three priorities?

- Do we set our minds on things that are above? (Col. 3:1)
- Do we live our lives knowing our citizenship is in heaven and are we waiting eagerly for our Lord's return? (Phil. 3:20)
- Do we feel that death would be a far greater **gain** than a loss or are we so entangled with this world that leaving it is the worst thing we can think of?
- Do we long for the second coming of the Lord Jesus in great glory and power? Are we doing all we can to speed up His return as Peter urges in 2 Peter 3:12? The Lord Jesus tells us what to do to speed up His return, ***"And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations and then the end will come".*** [Mt. 24:14] We can rejoice that we are involved in this.
- Do we long to be at home with the Lord Jesus even if it costs us the surrendering of our bodies – nakedness, the separation of body and spirit?
- Are we committed to walk by faith until Jesus comes again or until He calls us home?

How we need to see a revival of these priorities. Revival is passionate inflaming love for the Lord Jesus – the utter devotion and allegiance of our hearts to Him – that we would love Him so deeply and long for Him so passionately that His coming would be our greatest hope. Death would be **gain** and life would be for His glory and for the extension of His Kingdom.

"Therefore my beloved brothers, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord your Labour is not in vain." [1 Cor. 15:58]