

Christian, what do you know?

*13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 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 to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*

*16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Tell me, is there anybody else who is beginning to wonder what they're supposed to believe these days? I mean, about the coronavirus. I mean, there are so many different seemingly contradictory "facts" about this pandemic. "Wearing a mask is a good thing. No, wearing a mask is a bad thing. Covid-19 affects the only elderly. No, it attacks children too. We need to start the economy up again. No, we need to keep it locked down. Things are getting better. No, things are going to get far worse." And what's troubling is that a lot of these views are coming from the so-called experts, the people who are supposed to know what they're talking about. The people we want to be able to believe. But when they make statements that contradict each other, we're left wondering, "Man, what am I supposed to believe? Is there anything we can know for sure? Anything we can count on to be true?"

In times like these, we can find ourselves craving something to hang onto. Something we know to be true. Something that we can use to guide our thinking and guide our lives when the future looks a little fuzzy.

Today we find that something right here in God's inspired word. Against the backdrop of the coronavirus, and the uncertainty it's creating in our lives, the Apostle Paul goes back to something we can know. Here in his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul invites us to think about this question, which will serve as our theme today, namely,

Christian, what do you know?

First, a little background on our text. Earlier in this letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth, the Apostle described some of the persecution that he and the other Apostles faced as ambassadors for Christ. Paul writes in chapter one for example, *We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death (2 Cor. 1:8-9).* In other words, there were plenty of times when Paul was sure he was going to die. A little bit later in this letter, he recounts some of the trials he faced. *I have been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. (2 Corinthians 11:23-25)*

Can you imagine? I mean, if just one of those things happened to us, would probably think, "This is beyond what I can bear!" But St. Paul put up with it again and again and again. The question is, how? How could Paul endure that kind of abuse, and still have a positive

attitude? How could he say about himself and his fellow apostles in the verses immediately before our text, *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) Paul was like a prize fighter who is knocked down time and again, but just keeps getting up off the mat. How does Paul do it? Well, he tells us in our text for today.

Paul begins by quoting the words of Psalm 116. Paul writes, *It is written: I believed; therefore I have spoken.* Actually, Paul is quoting King David, who originally wrote these words in response to the fact that God had rescued him from great tribulation. David's point was simply this: "Because God rescued me, because God did not let me lose my faith, I will praise him." Well, St Paul says that the very same thing is true of him and his companions. Paul writes, *It is with that same spirit of faith that we also believe and therefore speak.* In other words, just as David praised God for rescuing him, so also Paul praised God for what he had done and would continue to do for him.

And what was Paul's faith built on? How could Paul know that God was going to take care of him? What did Paul know that gave him confidence about his future? Well, Paul tells us right here in our text. 2nd Corinthians 4:14 says, *We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus.* Now, it would be easy to just kind of skip over those words and say, "Yeah, yeah, I know that." But I want you to think about what Paul is saying. "We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead." Paul's faith is not built on wishful thinking. Paul is not saying, "Wouldn't it be great if Jesus were raised from the dead?" No, his faith, and ours, is built on a historical fact, corroborated by eyewitness testimony. Jesus of Nazareth, who was put to death, was raised to life again. No other event in the ancient world has better documentation than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But notice how Paul goes on to draw a connection between what we know about Jesus' resurrection and therefore what we also know about our resurrection. Paul writes, *We know that the one who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus.* You realize, this is just one of many times that Paul draws that connection between Jesus' resurrection and the resurrection of all believers. You think, for example, about how Paul called Jesus *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep* (1 Corinthians 15:20), or *the firstborn from the dead* (Colossians 1:18). Jesus is always just the first, with many more to follow.

In fact, even those words, (God) *will also raise us with Jesus*,--in the original language, that word "with" means more than that our resurrection will be loosely connected to Jesus' resurrection, or there's this general correlation between Jesus' resurrection and our resurrection, kind of like the old timers saying "There's a correlation between when the lilacs are blooming and when the white bass are running" (which, by the way, is this weekend). No, what Paul is saying is that even though our resurrection is separated from Jesus' resurrection by thousands of years, in reality, our resurrection is intimately connected with Jesus' resurrection. In fact, you might say that it's contained in Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection.

My friends, it's that fact, the fact that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our resurrection and our entrance into the presence of God—it's that fact that gives us three things we can know about our lives between now and the final resurrection. Paul outlines those three things here in our text. The first thing we know as Christians? Paul says, *Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* What does that mean? Well I don't think we have to have a doctor's degree to realize that little by little our bodies are wearing out. Oh sure, we might get a hip or a knee replaced but the day is coming when the doctor is going to

say, “Sorry, we don't make parts for your model year anymore.” For some of us, that wearing out process is a little more obvious than for others, as our hair turns gray or the muscle mass disappears or the eyesight dims and the cataracts develop, and the senior moments become, well, the “new norm”. All of this is simply evidence of what Paul calls our “outer man” wasting away. It's the fulfillment of what God told our first parents, namely, *Dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3:19)* It's all part of being sinful people, living in sinful bodies, in a sinful world.

And yet contrast that fact—that our bodies are subject to decay—with the fact that, as Paul puts it, *inwardly (or literally our inner self) is being renewed day by day*. What's Paul mean by that? Is he saying that we need to do a little self-purge? We need to clean out our digestive tract? No he's not talking about our physical health; he's talking about our spiritual health. He's talking about what God does in us through word and sacrament, washing away our sins, creating in us a new heart, and renewing in us a right spirit. Ultimately God recreates us in his image, allowing us to once again see ourselves as God sees us in Christ, as holy precious children of God.

Do you realize what a blessing that is to be able to grasp at double reality about ourselves? To know that outwardly we are wasting away, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day by God's grace. Sometimes that become so evident in people's lives when they reach the final stage of life. I think of people like Jim Krueger and Larry Kath, Donn Komschlies, and so many others. Even though their bodies were riddled with cancer, they were still at peace. They had joy in their hearts because their souls were daily being renewed by God's promises, by God's love, by God's guarantee of a glorious resurrection in Christ.

You realize that what those believers knew at the end of their lives also applies to us in the middle of our lives. In fact, Paul speaks about that when he brings us the second thing that Christians can know on the basis of Jesus' resurrection in the past guaranteeing our resurrection the future. Paul says that we know that *our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all*. Now let's not misunderstand those words. Paul is not saying that troubles we face here on earth earn for us a greater glory in heaven. It's not like the woman who said to me “I figure that suffering life is a little like paying rent. The more rent I pay here on earth, the better apartment I'll get in heaven. No, that's not what Paul is saying here.

Rather Paul is simply drawing a contrast between what is truly momentary, namely, life here on earth, compared to what is eternal, namely, life in heaven. And he draws a contrast between the lightness of our sufferings and the weight of eternal glory. Now again, I realize that there are plenty of times when our afflictions in life don't seem light and momentary. When your parents just got a divorce, or when you're on your second year of chemo, or you just buried your spouse, nothing seems light and momentary. But when we put our earthly troubles on a scale balanced by an eternity with no tears or sorrow or death or pain, well, do you see which one becomes “light”, relatively speaking? It's what Saint Paul wrote to the Romans, *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (Romans 8:18)*.

And when you realize that, that the glory that awaits us is so much greater than the pain that we feel now, it changes our focus in life. Isn't that what Paul says? *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen*. What does that mean? We fix our eyes on what is unseen? Does that mean we spend all our time thinking about something we can't see, like that microscopic Coronavirus? No, when Paul says fix your eyes on what is unseen, he's not talking about seeing with our physical eyeballs. He's talking about seeing with the eyes of our hearts, he's talking about focusing our attention on something, directing our thoughts toward what is unseen.

In fact, that's the third thing that Paul says that you and I can know as Christians. We can know that, as Paul says, *what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*. Boy, isn't that the truth? All the things that you and I can see with our eyes, all the things that we're tempted to focus on in this world—they're all temporary. Our phone, our house, our job, our good looks, or IRA—they'll all be left behind. They're all temporary. But what is unseen, namely, our God, his love, his compassion, his presence, his Heaven—all of those things will never wear out. They'll never end. They're all eternal.

My friends, do you see what an amazing gift God has given us? By the power of the Holy Spirit, God has given us the ability to see what cannot be seen, to know what the world does not know. He's given us the ability to believe what is truly life-changing.

You and I may not know what to believe about COVID-19. But that's okay. Because in his Word, God gives us exactly what we can believe, yes, what we can know. And it begins with what Paul says here in our text, *We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus*. That fact, which God continues to use to renew us inwardly day by day, will in the end make all of our earthly troubles seem light and momentary, when we compare them to the eternal glory that is ours in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.