Lownes Free Church Sunday Morning – July 29, 2018

The Apostle Paul’s Second letter to the Corinthians

how the Cross changes everything

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 Our message is Jesus, not ourselves.

The Background: How (and why) can you keep going?

 Paul is presenting evidence for his ministry and apostleship. He has shown that the New Covenant, ratified by the blood of Jesus, guarantees victory (2:14–3:18). How can he be discouraged when he knows he will win? He takes the argument further in chapter 4, by explaining that what the Corinthians see on the outside should be contrasted with what is on the inside. Don’t be too quick to judge me. Instead, focus upon Jesus, the central figure of the gospel message. This is the message of light and life which is the inward, glorious treasure. The Cross changes everything.

“Glory”: The Cross proves that our suffering is purposeful.

 The simple, but profound, message of the gospel is straightforward truth, unlike the deceptive manipulation and false teaching of the “super-apostles.” Paul explains that the fragility of the vessel highlights all the more the value of the treasure held in it. The result? God is glorified, we do not lose heart, and our suffering takes on new meaning and purpose. Our “death” (laying down our lives) brings life to others, just like Jesus’ death brought life to us. In Him, weakness wins, for our weakness is a channel for His eternal strength. While not all suffering is a result of persecution, and some is even self-inflicted, any trial can create a test of faith, whether it comes from an enemy, an infirmity, or circumstance. James 1:2-8

The Narrative: (Reading 2 Corinthians is like hearing one side of a phone conversation. But we don’t really have to guess much, since Paul is both explicit and passionate. That said, we’ll be paraphrasing each section to sort out the argument and the not- so -hidden assumptions the Corinthians were making about Paul and his actions.)

(1) Because our ministry is a direct commission from God, we remain encouraged to work according to His standards. Unlike others, who are trying to manipulate you and feel free to twist God’s Word. Those who refuse to embrace the simplicity of the gospel are those who are blinded by Satan. God is all about light!

(7) But this incomparable treasure (the gospel) is transported in plain “clay pots,” assuring that God alone gets the glory for success. This is why, in spite of every opposition and pain, we rebound. We fully expect be buffeted and bear the marks of Jesus’ disciples, for that is the cost of sharing Him. Our death to self brings life within and life to you. These scars are for you.

(13) All of this is merely a living out of God’s promises by faith. That is all we do, encouraging faith in Jesus. Just as He was raised after His death, so also we will be raised, along with you. For now, the more who receive grace, the greater God’s glory, since there will be that many more worshipers!

(13) That’s why we are encouraged and persevere. Our outer shell is wasting away, but our inner self is renewed each day. These afflictions are light and temporary, but they signal a great, eternal reward. That’s our perspective (and hopefully yours!), so we focus upon what lasts, not what is passing away.

The Challenge: Do I realize that present suffering has eternal reward?

***Memory Verses: John 14:1-3***

1. Do I see that while suffering for God is inevitable in a fallen world, God redeems it for His glory? Rom. 8:16-21; 1 Thess. 1:3-5

2. Regardless of my outward circumstances and health, is my true self being renewed daily in Jesus Christ? Philippians 4:10-13