A look to the Future: The Glory of God

Good morning my brothers and sisters in the Lord. How are you on this fine Lord's Day…? Have you ever wondered why Sunday is called the Lord's Day? Doesn't every day belong to the Lord?… But let's try and not chase any squirrels this morning.

Introduction

Today we are completing our Advent series by looking to the future. Specifically, the future as conveyed in 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. It begins with **It is written: "I believed; therefore, I have spoken."** …Squirrel! Here we go, this is a squirrel we need to chase! I definitely got my exercise chasing this squirrel all the way from Genesis to Revelations and back again as I was preparing this message. By the way, how do you like my picture? I made it with AI. Here is an interesting question, what do you think about using AI in Church? Never mind, let's not chase that particular squirrel today but it is probably a squirrel that the Elders need to chase on their own time.

Anyway, back to where in the Bible it is written. Turns out that this is found in Psalm 116:10 where the psalmist says **I believed, therefore have I spoken…** Found it! Great…or maybe not so great…because as I read the rest of that verse it says**…I am greatly afflicted.** Why did the Psalmist announce his belief when he cried out about his affliction? Let's get some perspective and take a quick dive into what Psalm 116 is all about. Let me read this verbatim because I spent a lot of time getting this just right. You have no idea of how much effort it took for me to cut and paste this from biblehub.com:

In summary, the psalmist narrates his personal journey from the brink of despair, through the experience of God's saving grace through His intervention, and into a life of gratitude and committed service to the Lord. Specifically, here in verses 8 through 11, he talks about being saved from death, tears, and stumbling, and still admits his affliction along with the unreliability of people.

That doesn't sound like a good time to speak up in my opinion. Typically, I shut up and try to figure out how I got myself into whatever situation I got myself into. But maybe there is another way to look at this. Zooming out a little more for perspective, Psalm 116 is included in a group of eight Psalms known as the Hallel. Hallel means “praise” in Hebrew and these Psalms focus on God’s deliverance from bad situations.

What do you think? Was this a Squirrel worth chasing? Why is it important to remember Psalm 116 as we read this passage in the New Testament? Because Paul wanted everyone to have this specific perspective as he continues his dialog. And because everyone knew this Psalm by heart, everybody knew it was about deliverance. So, just like the believers in Corinth, let us keep in mind the journey of the Psalmist as we stand and read: 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 (NIV)

It is written: “I believed; therefore, I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 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. 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. Therefore, we do not lose heart. 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, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Pray

Father, I pray that you use me today as Your instrument. That I speak Your words, not mine. That I speak Your truths, and not the truth I want. I also pray for those listening today that You open their ears to hear Your words. That You open their eyes to see Your truths. And I pray that You open their hearts so that they will know how to grow and strengthen their faith.

First point: The same God, now and then

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.”

Teach

Now that I finally stopped chasing squirrels, let's get down to business with my first point. And that point is that God is the same yesterday and today. Paul describes a

continuity of faith in the first part of **verse 13** where he draws from the Old Testament to show that the faith we profess today is part of a long-standing tradition of trusting God. Because we can see God's hand throughout the Bible, this realization can then strengthen our confidence in God's unchanging nature.

Here is another squirrel. Have you ever heard someone say that they do not like the God of the Old Testament but love the God in the New Testament? I chuckle to myself whenever I hear that. Either they do not read the Old Testament or they do not read the Book of Revelation. I am convinced the love that people see in the NT is also in the OT, and I am also equally convinced that the justice applied in the OT is also applied in the NT! In fact, I think our faith depends on the unchangeable nature of God. But let's get back on track.

Paul then continues in **verse 13** and tells us we have The Spirit of Faith. What do you think is this "spirit of faith"? It is a shared characteristic among believers. Not only do we share it with those around us, we also share it across time. It is rooted in the trust and confidence in God's promises that we have. Just like the Psalmist did way back when, this spirit compels us to speak boldly about our faith. You see the spirit of faith is not just a mental assent but an internal conviction that must find outward expression. Paul quotes the psalmist to show that true belief inherently leads to speaking and sharing your conviction with others.

Just as both Paul and the Psalmist spoke out of their belief, we too are called to proclaim our faith courageously, even in the face of adversity. But our proclamation should be more than mere words. Our words should align with our actions because belief is our faith in action. In other words, not only should we proclaim the transformative power of the Gospel, we should also live a life of transformation. Let me say that again, not only should we proclaim the transformative power of the Gospel, we should also live a life of transformation.

As Paul continues in **Verse 14**, he states quite matter of factly that Jesus was raised from the dead. Paul's simple statement of that fact conveys to me that it was common knowledge for everyone there. And Paul then uses this knowledge as a foundation for their assurance of Christ's promises. Just like the believers in the time of Christ knew that He rose from the dead, we also must have confidence in the risen Christ. And we have this assurance because the historical evidence of the fact that Jesus actually existed is very strong. We don't need to rely solely on the Bible for this assurance because there are many secular documents that point to the existence of Jesus. In fact, we have more documents confirming the life of Jesus than we have for many other prominent people in history. Anyone who proclaims that Jesus did not exist has either not done their homework, or is intentionally trying to mislead you.

Therefore, we can have confidence not only in the resurrection of Jesus but also His promise of our future resurrection. Even though we are suffering and are going through trials, we know that our present struggles are temporary and this assurance of being raised with Him gives us hope and strength to endure them. Furthermore, the promise of being "presented with you" only highlights the fact that we will all be there on that glorious day. It is a testament to our shared salvation, which should only encourage unity and fellowship among believers.

Illustrate

Consider the faith of a farmer planting seed. To an outside observer who has never seen a harvest, the farmer is performing what looks to be crazy: The farmer is burying perfectly good, valuable grain in the dirt. To them, it looks like a waste, a loss, and a foolish action.

But the farmer proceeds with a joyful confidence, which represents the spirit of faith, because he trusts in the unseen laws of nature and the sure future promise of a harvest.

In the same way, when we commit our lives to Christ, we are called to "bury" our old ways and trust in His resurrection power. Our bold action, our proclamation and living sacrifice, is not based on what we see today, but on the certain hope that just as the seed rises to new life, we too will be raised up by the power of God. The farmer's confidence in the harvest is a picture of our confidence in the resurrection.

Like the farmer, our belief in the future harvest compels us to take the bold, visible action of sowing the seed and proclaiming the potential for life. The power that overcame the death of the seed, which is the power of Christ, is the same power that ensures our harvest, or our resurrection through Him. Like the farmer, we can boldly proclaim this not just for our own benefit, but as an invitation to others so that we can all be "presented" together, emphasizing the importance of Christian community and shared mission.

Apply

Before we move on to my second point, I think it is important to talk about how we can apply this to our lives. I have chosen three possible action points for you to consider.

The first action point is to focus on a bold or risky action: What specific "seed" (a resource, a relationship, a plan, or an act of service) is the Holy Spirit prompting you to "bury", to commit to fully, knowing that to an outsider it may look like a risk or a waste?

The second action point is to focus on the assurance of a harvest: The farmer acts despite the seed dying in the ground. What visible "death" or lack of immediate results in your Christian life or ministry makes you tempted to "lose heart", and how does the promise of a certain "harvest" change your focus?

And the third action point is to focus on proclamation: The farmer's confidence makes him happily discard valuable seed. How does the assurance of resurrection give you the boldness to speak openly about your faith and to proclaim the gospel, even if you face ridicule or the possibility of loss?

Second point: The Purpose of Grace

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."

Teach

As we move on to my second point, I want to help us understand the purpose of grace. I am so grateful that God has shown me grace, that gift that I don't deserve. But Paul here in **verse 15** seems to be taking it one step further. Paul states that God's grace is not just for our benefit but is meant to extend to others. Because it is not just for us, it is what unites us as believers. Since we are a part of a Christian community, we can provide encouragement and support to each other, helping us to remain steadfast in our faith.

But grace does not stop there. It is not limited to our community of believers. There is enough grace for everyone. And because there is enough grace, Paul is encouraging us to share the gospel contributing to the spread of thanksgiving and glory to God.

Now I have a confession to make. The second part of **verse 15** talks about the spread of thanksgiving and glory to God. I understand about giving thanks to God, that part is easy. As for glory, I know that God already has all the glory, so how can we add to it? How can we make an infinite being more of an infinite being by giving Him more glory? That just did not make sense to me for the longest time. Thankfully, an answer was revealed to me how we give glory to God and it is not what I expected.

We give glory to God when we reflect His glory by living as He intended, making His character and worth known to the world through our transformed lives. It's about making His goodness visible to others so they too, might come to know and honor Him.

That was such a profound revelation that I want to repeat that. It is when we reflect His glory by living as He intended, making His character and worth known to the world through our transformed lives. It's about making His goodness visible to others so they too, might come to know and honor Him.

So, we show our thanks to Him by changing the way we live. And because of the testimony of our changed life, we show others what God can do for them too.

What do you think? Did I get it right? Let me know in the comment section.

Now on to **Verse 16**, Paul boldly declares that we should not lose heart. He is admitting that times are tough and things are not going well in Corinth. But despite those challenges, he is boldly encouraging them to remain steadfast and hopeful. How can Paul be so bold in his declaration? Maybe it is because he went through a time of transformation himself on the road to Damascus. The Paul that was Saul had to waste away so that the Paul that is Paul could be revealed.

Just like Paul did in his own life, we need to recognize the difference between the temporary nature of our physical bodies and the eternal renewal of our spiritual selves. And we need to emphasize the importance of daily spiritual renewal through prayer, scripture, and reliance on the Holy Spirit. Paul is encouraging the believers in Corinth as well as us today to focus on eternal realities rather than temporary hardships, fostering resilience and hope.

Illustrate

The famous artist Michelangelo once said, “The more the marble wears, the better the image grows.” When a sculptor creates a masterpiece, like Michelangelo’s David, the process is one of outward destruction. He takes a large, beautiful block of marble and begins to chip, saw, and wear away the stone. Dust flies, and massive chunks of material are thrown away.

If you only focused on the "wasting away" of the marble, you would lose heart. You would see a precious resource being destroyed. However, the sculptor's purpose is not destruction; it is renewal and revelation. Every chip, every hit of the hammer, every bit of dust that falls is part of the process of revealing the perfect, glorious image that was hidden inside the marble all along.

How does this illustrate **verse 16**? There are two parts of this illustration. First, we address the outwardly wasting away. In the illustration, this is the wearing down of the marble. This represents the pressures, troubles, aging, and afflictions that cause our "outer self" to "perish" or decay.

In the second part of the illustration, we are inwardly renewed day by day. In the illustration, the chipping and wearing away are the very actions that reveal the inner person, shaping our character, faith, and patience. The suffering is not meaningless loss, but the necessary work of the Holy Spirit to reveal the glorious image of Christ within us. The things that fall away are what expose the glory in our lives.

Apply

Now let us try and identify three more action points for us to consider based on this second point.

The first action point is to focus on identifying the "chipping": What specific affliction, challenge, or loss (the "chipping away" of the marble) are you facing right now? How can you consciously shift your view of this pressure from a meaningless problem to a necessary part of the Holy Spirit's process of revealing Christ's image in you?

The second action point is to focus on daily renewal: The sculptor works on the marble day by day. What is one practical daily discipline, such as time in the Word or dedicated prayer, that you can commit to that will ensure your "inner person" is actively receiving the renewal necessary to outweigh the visible "wasting away" of your outer life?

The third action point is to focus on thankfulness: Paul states that grace causes "thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God". How can you intentionally give thanks for the pressure, the destructive process in your life, by recognizing that the "wasting away" of your outer self is precisely what is producing the eternal, glorious image?

Third Point: Living in Grace

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."

Teach

And now on to my third point for today. And that point is that we should understand our current affliction compared to what the future holds for us. Knowing that grace saves us, how do we live a life in grace? In **verse 17**, Paul points out that our current sufferings are "light and momentary" in comparison to the eternal glory awaiting us.

By having this eternal perspective, we can focus on the eternal glory that God promises and that can transform how we view our present difficulties. This eternal perspective encourages perseverance and faithfulness. Paul is teaching us that we should focus on the eternal rather than the temporary. Our lives should be oriented towards what lasts forever, not just what is immediately visible or tangible.

I know that sometimes suffering seems meaningless, but Paul assures us that there is value in the suffering. In fact, Paul indicates that our suffering is producing something of eternal value here in **verse 17**. When we can realize the value of our eternal existence, we can live a life with purpose and strength to endure whatever trials that life throws at us.

Then Paul moves on to **verse 18** where he calls us to cultivate a faith that trusts in God's promises and the reality of the unseen spiritual world. Even when our circumstances are difficult and we are struggling with significant issues, we can see the future that is reserved for us. When we begin to recognize that this earthly life and our possessions are just dust in the wind, and that our eternal life is built on a solid foundation, our priorities and decisions should also naturally align with our future goals.

Illustrate

Imagine what Paul is describing is like a scale of justice, where you can weigh your entire life of trouble against the promise of eternity:

On one side of the scale, you place all of your afflictions. This side holds every moment of pain, every instance of grief, every setback, and every trial you have endured in your lifetime—from the smallest annoyance to the most crushing loss. Paul calls this the "light and momentary troubles."

On the other side of the scale, you place the Eternal Glory. This side represents the incomparable, everlasting weight of being raised in Christ, perfected, and spending eternity in God's presence.

When you weigh them, the Eternal Glory is so vast, so heavy, that your entire lifetime of suffering becomes "light" by comparison. It's like placing a single grain of sand that represents our momentary troubles on one side of a scale and placing Mount Everest that represents the eternal weight of glory on the other. The scale is not balanced; it is completely overwhelmed.

The promise of this verse is that our troubles are not merely endured, but they are achieving this incomparable glory. Because the troubles we have in this life are temporary, we must fix our eyes on what is unseen which is eternal.

Apply

Now for this third point, what do you think should be our action points? Here are the three that I came up with.

The first action point is to focus on shifting the balance: Name one current "heavy" struggle in your life right now. How does the imagery of that struggle being reduced to a "grain of sand" when weighed against the "mountain of mercy" change how you think about that struggle today?

The second action point is to focus on the eternal instead of the momentary: If your entire lifetime is just a "moment" compared to the eternity of the glory to come, what are you holding onto that you need to release knowing it cannot compare to the unseen, lasting reward?

The third action point is to focus on the unseen: The analogy of the scales should help us to look away from the scale's light side that has our troubles, to the heavy side that has eternal glory. To help keep your eyes fixed on what is unseen, what personal daily practices like; doing acts of faith, developing holiness, or kingdom building action, can you commit to start doing this week?

Conclusion

As we complete this sermon series for Advent, I think it would be appropriate to look at the key topics we covered. In this sermon, we have addressed the future where God has promised something beyond our wildest dreams. We started the series with Hope, then Peace, Joy, Love, and during the Christmas eve service we focused on the Light of Christ. Unfortunately, the world does not understand what these things really are.

This world does not know hope. Hope is not a fleeting wish. It is actually based on the same Greek word that faith and belief are. Faith, or pistis, is a noun translated as: faith, trust, or conviction. Belief on the other hand is pisteuō. This is a verb translated as: to believe, trust, or rely on. Hope in the Greek is elpis. It is also a noun that translates as: an expectation of what is sure. So, you can think of biblical hope as our faith in what the future holds. Here is an example of Biblical hope. When you read Revelations do you have a hope that those events will come true? Or do you question the future outcome of the conflict? The world will try and convince you that the future is unknowable, but for me, my faith assures me that Jesus will return as the conquering king.

Peace in the worldly sense sounds like a life without troubles, but we all have troubles. Biblically speaking on the other hand, peace is the ability to sleep even when the waves of this life are threatening to overwhelm the boat you are in.

Worldly joy is equivalent to happiness, but happiness depends on good happenings. Biblical joy is like wearing a pair of rubber waders. While you have them on, you can slosh through the most rancid of swamps and not get anything on you.

Biblical love is not infatuation or a great interest and pleasure in something as this world sees it. We know what love is because God loved us first. He loves us so much He sent His Son to die on the cross as payment for our sins.

His Son Jesus, the light that this world so desperately needs but seems to have forgotten. Without His light, there would be no biblical hope, peace, joy, or love. The world calls them emotional responses but the Bible seems to indicate that hope, peace, joy, and love are something beyond emotions. I'll have to admit that if they are not emotions, I have no clue of what they truly are. If you have an idea of what they are, I am interested in hearing your opinion on that.

What I do know is that when we accepted Jesus, it is like He gave us our own personal tool box full of tools. Tools that include: hope, peace, joy, and love. My question to you is: Do you know where your tool box is? Is it hidden somewhere in the back of your closet? Is it covered in dust? Do you have that one screwdriver that you continue to use as a chisel? Or are you a master craftsman that can reach in and pull out 'hope' just by knowing what it feels like by touch alone. Do you use them often enough to be skillful with them? Can you train yourself not to use that screwdriver as a chisel? Do you clean and maintain your tools so that they will be ready for the next time you will need them?

The Future

Just like Paul wrote this message to the church in Corinth, I do believe that this is also applicable to SVCC. Although the building is not the church, SVCC does go through good times and bad times just like we do. Sometimes SVCC grows, and other times it diminishes. To tell you the truth, before Ruben announced his retirement, everyone in leadership was perfectly happy with the status quo. But since the announcement, we had to change, and SVCC had no clue on how to do that. And like the psalmist, like Paul, like Corinth; we have suffered loss. There have been tears, stumbling, and we see our affliction. We have lost some we had come to rely on, and others were, to say the least, unhelpful in this time of transition.

But in a way, Paul is also declaring that the old church needs to pass away so that the new church can be revealed. And just like us, we need to strengthen SVCC's faith in what the future holds. We, as the church, need to grasp those tools and tear down the old and build up something greater for the future. The only problem is that we need you to help us to get

there. We want you to be part of the metamorphosis that turns this church from a caterpillar into the butterfly I can see in the future.

I would like you to do me a favor. Reach out and lift up the volunteer card that is in the seat back pocket in front of you. Then, put it in your pocket. Congratulations, you have completed the first step to becoming a volunteer. Take that card home and place it somewhere visible like on your refrigerator. Then every time you see it, I would like you to contemplate and pray about how you can best grow the church. There are many opportunities. Big ones, tall ones, small ones, old ones, new ones, and some are just twinkles in SVCC's eyes. Every one of them has a 'you' shaped hole in it. I am not saying you personally have to volunteer for every one of them, what I am saying is that there is a hole that someone here can fill. Commitment and skill levels range from none at all the way up to a significant time, talent, and time commitment. It is up to you to find where to plug in and fill the hole. Here are just a few options that could be for you.

- Show up on any given Sunday: Find the person handing out the badges and say "here I am, send me." They will find a spot for you to serve that day. No long-term commitment, Just serve when you want to.
- Teach the children: What a wonderful ministry that teaches the next generation about God! Unfortunately, I am not gifted for that particular ministry.
- Worship team: It is such a blessing to be part of the team that leads us into praising God. Can you sing? Play an instrument? Mix music so that it helps point to God? How about clicking a mouse? There is an opportunity for you with us.
- Random acts of kindness: Pete has some great ideas on what to do to spread the word about SVCC. He just wants to go and help the community. Tackle him before he can escape today if you want to help out or want more details.
- Ducking Stool: It is a torture device that everyone on the transition team has to sit in. Guess what, there is an empty chair for you to sit in if your faith is strong and your life is full of biblical hope, peace, joy, and love. You can then help us reveal the church that we need to become.

This is just a very short list. Many more opportunities exist other than these that I have pointed out. There is room for you somewhere here.

Invitation

As we enter a time for response, let this song of invitation help you evaluate the state of your toolbox or where you could best serve the church. The altar is always open for you. I am here to pray with you or you can come to the altar and talk with God one on one.