

Eternal Rewards

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

Pastor Bryan Clark

Wouldn't you agree with me that people should ultimately live for that which is most real? So here's the question; it's kind of philosophical. What do you think is ultimately most real—that which we see or that which is unseen? That's what we want to wrestle with this morning.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4. Mark took us through most of this chapter last week. Chapter 4, Verse 1, Paul said, "We do not lose heart," and then he went on to talk about why they don't lose heart. We pick it up this morning in Verse 16 where Paul makes the statement again...**Therefore we do not lose heart...** This passage is full of "therefores" so it continues to just kind of develop a thought all the way through. I think the *therefore* in Verse 16 is primarily dealing with what he said about the resurrection in the previous paragraph. Because Jesus rose from the dead and we are promised that we, too, shall experience resurrection...**therefore we do not lose heart.** He's going to talk more about that in our text this morning.

...but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (*NASB, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

So what does Paul mean in Verse 16 when he draws a contrast between our *outer man*, which is decaying, and our *inner man*, which is being renewed day by day? Now I suppose, at first glance, we could just take this simply to mean it's a contrast between the physical body and the immaterial self—the soul or the spirit or whatever you want to call it. But we have to be a little bit careful with that or we play right into the false teaching in the first century. Whether you're calling it *Dualism* or you're calling it *Gnosticism*, there was a belief that there was this distinction between the material and the immaterial—between the body and the soul—and basically it was believed that material is bad; immaterial is good. So the body is bad; the spirit is good. The body was like a prison that housed the soul and they looked forward to the day when the spirit or the soul would be set free from the prison of the body. That is certainly not good theology and it's certainly not what Paul is saying, but he may be taking some of that language from the first century and redefining some of the terms. All you have to do is read the text and you can tell what he means. He's drawing a contrast between that which is seen and that which is unseen—that which is temporary and that which is eternal.

One of the interesting dynamics that we experience as believers is we really live in this overlap of two worlds. The day we trust Christ as Savior we receive eternal life. That life is internal. We learn that the Spirit of God is transforming us—*metamorphosing* us—more and more into the image of Christ. We are citizens of heaven living on earth. So there is this overlap between that which is temporary and that which is eternal. Eternal life doesn't start when you die; it starts the moment you trust Christ as Savior. So right now I'm a citizen of heaven. There's this eternal thing already

going on inside of me. I'm being changed and prepared for eternity but there's also this temporary side of me that includes my body living in a temporary earth. So we have this tension between that which is decaying and that which is being renewed.

If you remember in Chapter 3, we talked about the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant. The Old Covenant had a glory but that glory was temporary and it faded away and was replaced by a New Covenant that had a glory that would never fade away but actually becomes more glorious with each passing day. So you had the sense that the one is fading away and the other is being renewed. So you have the same basic idea here. There's a part of me that dwells in that which is temporary and there's a part of me that is already being made for that which is eternal. He talks about that in Verse 17:

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,

Now what's Paul talking about when he says **...momentary light affliction**? If we didn't know more about Paul's life, we might be tempted to say, "We'll that's easy for him to say. Apparently he had a nice easy life—must have taught in some seminary and lived in some penthouse and, for him, maybe that is how life was...but you ought to hear my story." But of course we know that isn't true. As a matter of fact Mark reminded us last week earlier in this chapter that Paul said that he was afflicted and perplexed and persecuted but, just so you don't think Paul had too cushy of a life, just flip ahead to Chapter 11. In the weeks to come we'll talk about this chapter, of course in depth, but pick it up in Verse 23.

(I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; (2 Corinthians 11:23b-26)

Okay, you kind of get the point there, don't you? Those are what Paul is referring to as... **momentary, light afflictions**. What is the basis by which he defines them as such? Well the answer, again, is found right in our text because it's on the basis of comparison. Paul says, **"For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."** In other words, what he's saying is the afflictions of this life are temporary and even though, in the moment, they may seem very, very hard, when you compare them with the glory to come, they are nothing more than momentary, light afflictions. If you want to use the language that we're using in this series—even though now the *cost* of following Jesus may seem really high, the *reward* is so unbelievably glorious that one day the *cost* will seem like nothing in comparison.

That's what Paul is saying here and then he reminds us that actually these afflictions are part of what's producing that glory, producing that reward that we will experience. Because of this he says, *"We don't look at the things that are seen, because they are temporary. We, with eyes of faith, look at the things that are unseen because, ultimately, those are the things that last forever."*

So now we're back to our opening question. Which do you think ultimately is more real—that which we see today...but it's temporary...or that which we must see with eyes of faith...but it will

last forever. And obviously the answer is “...that which will last forever”. Paul is saying that we look with eyes of faith and one day we will know that it was the stuff of eternity that was ultimately real. The rest was temporary, at best.

Now I would suggest to you this morning that most people know that instinctively. Most people don't live that way but I think they know that. There are different ways we could make that argument. I think the simplest argument is what I see on a consistent basis at funerals. Whenever you do a funeral and you're talking to people who have lost a loved one, in those moments there's something instinctively within them—even though this is not how they live their lives— that says: *The stuff of this life right now doesn't matter does it.* In that moment I've never had people talk about cars, boats, houses, bank accounts, the economy—those things never come up. The things that come up are things having to do with life after death, things that last, things that suddenly seem to matter because, in that moment, there's a sense that, “Wow this was temporary wasn't it and I wonder what lasts forever?” Paul's point would be, *“If that's true, then shouldn't that be what we live for every day?”*

Now I mentioned two weeks ago that in this part of Corinthians it's best to forget the chapter divisions and just keep going with the train of thought. That's certainly true here. We roll into Chapter 5 has the word “for”. In other words he's going to continue to make the argument, *“Why is it that if we have eyes of faith that see things that are unseen and live for the things that matter, why live simply for the things that we can see and the things that are temporal?”* Now, if you have an NIV, it says the word “now”, which sounds like a new topic. That's very unfortunate. The word “for” is correct.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (5:1)

So Paul says, *“Okay, why do we look with eyes of faith? Because of what we know.”* And what do we know? Now it's important to remind ourselves that this particular text is built on what Paul has already taught them in the first letter—1 Corinthians, Chapter 15. There was a lengthy discussion because Jesus experienced a literal, physical, bodily resurrection. The promise is that we, too, will experience a literal, physical, bodily resurrection. Paul said, “This mortal will put on immortality.” In other words what he was saying is, *“One day there will be a body that will be well-suited. The outer man will match the inner man. There will be a body well-suited for that which is already eternal in the inner man.”* So Paul's making that argument here and he's using the metaphor of a tent versus a house. In both the Old and New Testaments a tent was reflective of that which is temporary, that which is mobile. It had a lot to do with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—when they continually were on the move—because they weren't in the land of promise yet, so they lived in tents. That imagery is used of us—that this body is my tent. This isn't my permanent home; this is kind of a temporary tent that I live in. Therefore he contrasts this earthly tent with a house that will not be made by human hands but will be made by the hands of God. Now a house speaks of that which is permanent. A house speaks of, *“I'm finally home”*. So he draws a contrast. When this tent is disassembled—which is actually the Greek word—then I'm going to move into a house that is my eternal home. Now again, you have to go back to the false teaching of Paul's day. They really believed that we would be set free from a body and that we would be a disembodied spirit that would just kind of float around in some mysterious way for the rest of eternity. And Paul is pushing back on that and saying, *“Wait a minute, no, that's not true. Right now there's a conflict between my outer man and my inner man but one day there's going to be an outer man that is going to be*

suited for my inner man and that will be my eternal existence. I will have an eternal body that I will live in, in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

Verse 2:

For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. (Vs.2-3)

Paul is talking about the fact that right now we feel this tension. Romans 8 says...“All creation groans”; it’s temporary and there’s a sense in which my physical body is fading while my eternal self is being renewed day-by-day. So he says, “*Right now that is the case.*” And he’s longing for the day when this mortal will put on immortality—when I will have a body, a physical body, that will be an eternal body—well-suited to match the inner man that’s being renewed. He kind of changes metaphors—he mixes his metaphors here—because he goes from a tent and a house to the idea of clothing in order to make his point. We are going to put on our new body like an item of clothing so that we will not spend eternity naked, which basically means without a body, but rather we will experience this new body—this immortal body that God has promised. Now when Paul says he’s longing for that day, he captures what all of the New Testament writers capture. I understand that there are all these different theological camps that have different ideas about eschatology—about end-times theology. But what the New Testament writers all had in common—and nobody disagrees with this—is that they were all longing for the return of Christ because there was a sense in which this is going to be war until Jesus comes back. When Jesus comes back, this mortal will put on immortality, He will usher in the New Heaven and the New Earth and we’ll go from war to paradise forever.

The desire of all the New Testament writers was that this would happen in their lifetime. One of the things we struggle with is this mysterious, intermediate stage. The New Heaven, the New Earth and what’s involved in that, is actually way more clear than what happens if I die today— before the return of Christ. It’s that intermediate state that’s probably the most mysterious and the most difficult to define. That even goes back to the New Testament writers. They wanted to be alive at the return of Christ so that they would immediately go from mortal to immortal. They would go from this decaying outer body to their eternal body and they longed for that day. But Paul was starting to wrestle with the fact that he may not live that long. His outer body is groaning. He’s suffering affliction; he’s suffering persecution. He may very well be put to death for his faith. But still he longs to be alive when Jesus returns, so he’s kind of discussing that part of his theology there.

For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. (Vs. 4)

So you see it in that verse. What he wants most is to be alive when Jesus comes back. He wants this life simply to be swallowed up into the life to come. But Paul has a tremendous amount of confidence that, no matter what happens, they don’t need to lose heart, that they need to continue on the mission. One of the ways that we see that is in the verb tense in Verse 1 that I intentionally skipped over to come back to. One of the questions we have to ask in Verse 1 is, “Why does he say we **have** a building?” That’s not future tense; that’s present tense. In other words Paul is saying, “*Actually we already have the body.*” What does he mean by that? What he is saying is the promise of a heavenly tent—the promise of a heavenly body—the promise that one day there will be an

outer man well-suited to the inner man is so sure it's as good as done. It's as if I already have it today. In other words he's pushing back on this thought that there's a possibility that he may be some disembodied spirit that's just going to float around throughout eternity saying, "*No way! The body's as good as done and I know that God has promised that.*" How does he know God has promised that?

Verse 5:

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.

Paul already said this in Chapter 1. He said we've been given the Spirit as a promise, as a down payment, as a guarantee that, "We're in". Now this word **...pledge** is the Greek word used to describe an engagement ring. Paul is saying, "*God gave us an engagement ring and the engagement ring was His promise that no matter what happens, even if there's this mysterious period that we don't know much about, He's given me an engagement ring that promises the body is as good as mine. I am going to have a new body—an eternal body—and will spend forever in an outer man that matches my inner man in the New Heaven and the New Earth forever.*" So Paul draws great strength and encouragement from that.

Having understood that we go to Verse 6:

Therefore...so based on that...being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord—for we walk by faith, not by sight—we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. (Vs. 6-8)

So he's talking here about the fact that, "Yes, it is possible that he may die before the return of Jesus." Is that bad news? Does that mean he should be more cautious? Does it mean he should be more careful? Does it mean, maybe, they shouldn't be so zealous to accomplish the mission? And the answer is, "*No, we don't lose heart over that. We don't lose our courage over that.*" What he's saying here is there is a practical reality, "*As long as I'm here, I'm not there, and if I have a choice between being here with all of the affliction and persecution or being there in the presence of my Jesus, I would prefer to be there, even if that means I die before Jesus returns.*" So he's saying, "*Yes I would long to be alive when Jesus returns—that would be great—but if I die before that, I'm going to be in the presence of Jesus and that's still better than continuing to linger with suffering and affliction here.*" Now there are those that teach a doctrine called *soul sleep*—that when you die, you just go to sleep until the return of Christ. But this passage is very clear. The whole point of Paul wanting to be there is to be there in the presence of Jesus. He's not just looking forward to dying. He's looking forward to being in the presence of Jesus and that would be better than not being in the presence of Jesus. "*Therefore*" he says, "*we still have courage; therefore we don't lose heart. We're still busy about what God has called us to.*"

Verse 9:

Therefore...in light of that...we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (Vs.9-10)

This is what we refer to as **...the judgment seat of Christ**...sometimes referred to as the *bema seat*. That just comes from the Greek word. The bema seat was the seat of judgment; it's where the governor sat in order to carry out justice. It's also a seat where he sat in order to hand out Olympic medals. So there's a sense both of judgment and reward. When Jesus stood before Pilate, he stood before the bema seat—a very common imagery in the Roman world.

We've said this many, many times—that grace doesn't mean there won't still be accountability. So what are we accountable for? We are not accountable for our salvation. When Paul says **...we must all appear**...who does he mean by *we*? Consistently, through this text, the *we* has been a reference to believers. There's no reason to think that would change here. There is another judgment in Revelation 20 called the Great White Throne Judgment. That is a judgment for salvation. All unbelievers will stand before the Great White Throne Judgment and be sentenced. Believers will not be judged for salvation—that issue has been settled—so we will stand before the bema seat in order to receive rewards, and that's what he says—our works **...whether good or bad**. Now just from 2 Corinthians alone we can strongly make the case that our salvation is not in jeopardy. If you've trusted Jesus as Savior, there will never come a day, now or forever, when you will stand before God and your salvation will be in jeopardy. Think about the things Paul has already said here. You've been given the Spirit as a pledge, as a promise, as a down payment, as an engagement ring. All of those words have to do with the fact that you have been made a promise and God will keep His promise. He's already said that *you're* not doing the work. The Spirit is doing the work and you're already being metamorphosized—you're being changed. The promise is that your inner man is already on this eternal process—that the inner man is being renewed day-by-day. You are a citizen of heaven. There's just this tension with the outer man that hasn't yet been transitioned into an eternal body. So there's no question that the promise, just from 2 Corinthians alone, is that you've been made a promise—"You're in"; the process is already started. So clearly you aren't going to lose that.

So you're judged for a reward. So what does that mean? The best way to understand that is to go back to what he said in 1 Corinthians. So go back to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3, and let's remind ourselves what he has already taught the Corinthians and us.

In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3, Paul is dealing with the fact that the foundation has been laid in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and the only thing that we can do is build on the foundation that's already been laid. In other words there's no other foundation other than the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. With that in mind, we pick up the discussion in Verse 12.

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15)

Now a couple of things to note: Number one, Paul is very clear that what's at stake is not salvation. Even those whose works are burned up will still be saved. So whatever the reward is, whatever the loss is, it's something other than salvation. He says the issue has to do with building materials. We're going to build on a foundation that's already been laid and, depending upon what kind of

building materials we use, they will either remain or they will be lost. So what is it that defines the building materials? Skip over to Chapter 4. We pick it up again in Verse 5:

Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

(I Corinthians 4:5)

Now take the chapter division out of that and just read the text. What Paul says here about motives would be roughly, maybe sixty to ninety seconds later. So clearly he's talking about the very same thing and he's talking about the fact that what determines whether the building materials are good or bad [and that's the language of 2 Corinthians 5] works—good or bad—has to do with motive.

Skip down to Verse 7.

For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?

You remember, when we went through 1 Corinthians, this was a huge problem in Corinth. They battled spiritual arrogance all the time and Paul is challenging that here and saying, *"Now wait a minute—what do you have that you did not receive and, if you received it, why do you act as if you didn't receive it?"* In other words there's only one foundation that's been laid and that's been laid through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is the Spirit of God who is changing us, who is metamorphosing us. God's doing all of the work, so what do we have to be arrogant about; what do we have to take credit for? Well now that raises the question: With that theology then, what are we rewarded for? If God does it all, what are *we* rewarded for? Answer: *For believing that's true!* In other words, if the motives for what I do are to impress God, to somehow think I'm meriting favor with God, to impress my fellow believers, to somehow impress the people around me, to demonstrate that somehow I'm more than somebody else—if my motive is some sort of a performance-based motive that is selfish to the core and that is a building material—that's inappropriate—built on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Therefore those works will be burned up. But if I truly believe that Jesus has done the work and Jesus is continuing to do the work and all I'm doing is seeking to live my life consistent with what He says is true of me—in order that He might receive more glory—Ephesians 1:6: "...to the praise of the glory of His grace"...the more I live in light of what God says is true of me, the more His grace is on display, the more glory He gets. If that's truly my motive, then that is very appropriate to build upon the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That will remain. You have two people, side-by-side, both doing the exact same thing, one motivated by selfish performance, one motivated by grace. One will receive a reward; one will not. So what is the reward? Well he tells us in Chapter 4.

Verse 5:

...will disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God. (Vs.5b)

There it is! Praise from God! Now I think there's a very simple way to separate out good motives from bad motives. If, when I tell you the reward is the praise of God and honestly, in your heart you say, *"Well actually I was expecting a little more. That doesn't sound like much,"* that's revealing that what you think you deserve is a trophy. You deserve a ribbon; you deserve a medal; you deserve something that says, *"Hey I out-performed the others"*. That's clearly evidence that your

motive was wrong; therefore your works will be burned up. As a matter-of-fact, what I would say to you is, “If you don’t find that reward appealing, you don’t need to worry about it because I don’t think you have it coming.” If you truly understand the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and that, from beginning to end, God has done it all and you’re simply the recipient, you cannot imagine any reward more glorious than the praise of the One who saved you. That’s what Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians, Chapter 5. That’s the bema seat; that’s the place where it will happen and that’s what will separate out works that are good from works that are bad. Now it’s very important here to understand in 2 Corinthians 5, this is not a text that is filled with anger. It’s not a text that is filled with warning. It’s not a text that is filled with, “*You better straighten up or God can’t wait to get you to the bema seat so He can slap you down.*” That’s not the heart of God at all and that’s not the flavor of this text. The tone of this text is warm; it’s encouraging; it’s loving; it’s longing to be home; it’s longing to be with Jesus. Paul says this is why we don’t lose heart. This is why we keep courage. The whole point of the bema seat is not that you will become fearful to stand before Jesus. It’s just the opposite. Yes, if you as a Christian are living for the things that you see—things that are temporary—you do need to make a mid-course correction; that is true. But Lincoln Berean Church is filled with people that love Jesus, that want to do the right thing, that want to pay the cost, that want to follow him, that have eyes of faith and live for the things that are eternal and it’s hard! Paul is saying, “*But one day we’ll stand before Jesus and we will know that it has been worth the price.*” The bema seat, in this context, is meant to be encouragement, not to produce fear. It’s just saying, “*There’s going to come a day when you will know you did the right thing. You lived for the right stuff—that it really did matter and Jesus is going to applaud for you and it’s going to be a glorious day.*” And Paul says, “*I can’t wait to be home and I can’t wait to be in a place where I will know that it was worth the cost.*” Is there a cost to following Jesus? Absolutely there is. And some days the cost seems very high. But Paul says, “*If you look with eyes of faith, you will see that the reward is so much more glorious, that the cost will seem like nothing but momentary, light affliction by comparison.*” Therefore, with eyes of faith, we live for what matters, knowing that one day we will see clearly that it was worth the cost.

Our Father, we’re thankful this morning that You love us, that You’ve saved us, You’ve called us. Lord, it is easy to start living for the things that we can see, rather than the things that are unseen because that’s the way the world around us lives. Lord, help us to maintain eyes of faith, to live for the things that are unseen, for those are the things that last forever. Lord, like Paul, we long for that day when the war is over and we will have an outer man that matches our inner man and we will spend forever with You in Paradise. Lord, there’s going to be a day when we stand before You that should be a great day, when we will know that it was worth the cost and we can celebrate together. Lord, my prayer for every single one of us would be that we would ultimately live for that which matters. This we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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Eternal Rewards

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What keeps you from getting discouraged or “losing heart” as a believer?
2. Which is easier, to walk by faith or walk by sight? Why?
3. Which seems more obvious, the costs or the rewards of serving Jesus? How does this affect our daily walk?

Bible Study

1. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. The “therefore” in verse 1 refers to reasons not to lose heart (4:1) in the previous passage (4:1-15). What were some of those reasons?
2. What does Paul mean when he says our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day? Does he mean more than just our body versus our spirit?
3. Why does Paul refer to his afflictions as “light?” Compare 4:7-12, 11:23-29. How does this help us gain perspective in what it costs us to be faithful to the mission?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. The “for” in 5:1 helps us know these are still reasons why Paul does not lose heart. What are those reasons in this text?
5. Why does Paul use the present tense “have” in 5:1 referring to his heavenly house? How does that give him courage (5:6, 8)?

6. Compare 5:10 with 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 4:5-7. What do we learn about the Judgment Seat of Christ (bema seat) from 1 and 2 Corinthians? While we may not understand every detail of that moment, what is Paul's point in telling us about that future event?

Application

1. Based on this text, what is one thing you've learned that will help you to not lose heart as a Christian? How can you keep what you've learned in perspective when you encounter the afflictions of this life?

2. "Therefore" (4:16, 5:6) how should we live in light of this text? What will be necessary to be rewarded by Christ?