

Do not lose heart!

"We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV)

Who was Paul to write off the present suffering in this world? Some might be tempted to ask if he really knew what suffering was all about. Paul tells us something about his difficulties in 2 Cor. 11 where he says, "I have...been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea,...I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers, ..Often gone without sleep, I have known hunger and thirst, ...I have been cold and naked." (NIV)

So when we look at the dreadful life of the one who wrote our verse for today we certainly can grasp what he meant by wasting away outwardly. Paul had incredible suffering in this life, yet he went on doing his work as a missionary. He wrote much of our New Testament, started many churches, trained others for the Gospel ministry and so on. He did not let circumstances get in the way of having a truly productive life.

As we look at the amazing life of this man we see contrasts.

On the one hand there is unbelievable suffering and on the other hand singular blessing. The harder he worked for the Lord the greater his suffering. We might say that serving the Lord does not pay, rather it costs. The more we wish to do for the Lord the greater our suffering.

Some might argue that mediocrity is the safer way to travel in this life. Perhaps there would be less pain if we simply meandered through life instead of doing all we can to imitate the wonders of Jesus' character.

However, for the one who truly loves the Lord we have counted the cost and believe the present suffering is worth it if we only get to know the Lord better and are more productive in His work. In Romans 8:18 Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Paul's comment on his suffering is that it cannot compare with the reward which we shall have for all eternity. Paul practiced what he preached. He endured the pain now for the pleasures of heaven forever. He saw what was beyond this present evil world and he realized that eternity was so rich in blessings that it was a shame to complain about the sorrows of time when

we had all eternity to be in bliss.

Paul did not lose heart because his long term view kept him safely on track. I recall being taught to drive by my Father. The first time we went on the highway I was constantly over steering and the car moved from side to side of our lane of traffic. I was trying to line up the white line with the corner of the front fender. When my Father realised what I was doing he said to look farther down the road to keep the car in the middle of the lane of traffic. This is how we need to live our lives. Don't concentrate on the present suffering. Rather take the long view and you will steer the right course in life.

Whatever your problem is today try and look farther down the road to what is waiting for you as a Christian. You will have the Lord forever. That should make enduring today a lot easier. If you are not a believer in Jesus, you have not hope. Why not turn to the Lord now and seek His blessing and grace in your life.

Never, never lose heart.

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