

1 Samuel 8:4-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15)

⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵ and said to him, 'You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.' ⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, 'Give us a king to govern us.' Samuel prayed to the Lord, ⁷ and the Lord said to Samuel, 'Listen to the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. ⁸ Just as they have done to me, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so also they are doing to you. ⁹ Now then, listen to their voice; only—you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.'

¹⁰ So Samuel reported all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹ He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; ¹² and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. ¹⁵ He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. ¹⁶ He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. ¹⁷ He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. ¹⁸ And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.'

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, 'No! but we are determined to have a king over us, ²⁰ so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.'

¹⁴ Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.' ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal. There they sacrificed offerings of well-being before the Lord, and there Saul and all the Israelites rejoiced greatly.

2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1

¹³ But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴ because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

5 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Mark 3:20-35

²⁰ and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.' ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, 'He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons.' ²³ And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, 'How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin'— ³⁰ for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit.'

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' ³³ And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'

Hope 2Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1

A bit jetlagged still but it is good to be back. While I was away I heard my daughter speaking on a podcast talking about her training as an army officer and how she really pushed herself to do what she wanted but as part of that training had experienced her limits. We all push ourselves a bit to do what we really want to do. I have just pushed myself to fly those long distances with little sleep and my body is certainly complaining about the time difference. But it was worth it to spend time with my granddaughter and various family and friends I hadn't seen for so long. And I also notice that as I get older I feel the effects more and more. As Paul puts it in today's reading from his letter to the Corinthians, our outer nature is wasting away.

In his letter to the Corinthians he has been speaking a great deal about how hard he has pushed himself for what he really wants – to preach Christ crucified and risen, and to see God's grace extend to more and more people, to the glory of God. And so he gets to this passage and begins with what seems like a rather odd thing to say – we believe and so we speak. But doesn't everyone basically do that. Most people who speak out on any given topic believe in what they're saying, though perhaps in today's world where truth is regarded as less important that is not always the case. So the quote and what Paul says seem to be rather trivial ... until we look at what Paul was quoting. What Paul is doing is quoting a short line from a biblical poem, Psalm 116, to get his readers to imagine the whole setting and mood. So we can't understand what he is really meaning until we look at Psalm 116 for ourselves. What's going on in the psalm as a whole? And what's going on in this passage in the letter? Do they fit together in some way?

They most certainly do. Paul has been talking on and off all the letter, and particularly in the last few verses, about the way in which he had found himself crushed and ready to die—and about the way in which, to his surprise, the power of God was able to raise him from that death and give him new life. That is what the psalm is all about:

¹I love YHWH, because he has heard my voice and my prayer; ²he has turned his ear towards me; so I will call on him throughout my whole life.

³The traps of death were around me; the pangs of the underworld grabbed me; I was troubled and bitter.

⁴Then I called on YHWH's name: 'YHWH,' I said, 'rescue my life!'

⁵YHWH is kind and just; our God is full of mercy.

⁶YHWH looks after the simple; when I was down in the depths, he rescued me.

⁷So, my heart, you can go back to rest; YHWH has been very generous to you.

⁸For you have rescued my life from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from tripping up.

⁹I live my life in YHWH's presence, here in the land of living people.

¹⁰**I remained faithful, and so I spoke:** 'I'm in deep trouble,' I said.

¹¹I even said, like a fool in a hurry, 'Everyone is telling lies!'

¹²What can I do out of gratitude to YHWH, in return for all his kindness to me?

¹³I will take the cup of salvation, and call on YHWH's name.

¹⁴I will give back to YHWH what I promised I would, in front of all his people.

¹⁵When YHWH's people die, it is weighty and precious to him.

¹⁶I am your servant, YHWH; your servant, and your servant-girl's son; you have untied me and set me free. ¹⁷I will offer a thanksgiving-sacrifice to you, and call on YHWH's name.

¹⁸I will give back to YHWH what I promised I would, in front of all his people, ¹⁹In the courtyards of YHWH's house, in the middle of you, O Jerusalem – YHWH be praised!

I hardly need to spell out the point: the psalm fits Paul's situation like a glove. You can see what he's done. Knowing the Bible as well as he did, and continuing as he had from boyhood to weave the psalms through his daily prayers, he found the experiences he had had in recent days fitting in amazingly well to what the Psalmist was talking about. The traps of death were around him, the bitter smell of the underworld seemed to be coming for him, dragging him down. And there, down in the depths, YHWH, Israel's God, came to his rescue; the God Paul now knew as the father of Jesus, the one by whose power the

Messiah himself had gone down into death and been brought up to new life. So it was with him: 'You have rescued my life from death, my eyes from tears and my feet from tripping up.'

So, as he reflects here on the whole experience, he finds himself in the same position as the Psalmist in verse 10: he has stayed faithful, and so now speaks. The Psalmist stayed faithful, and spoke—to YHWH himself in desperate prayer, in the anguish of his heart, and to those who would read and sing his poem. Paul remains faithful, and speaks in prayer and thanksgiving to the God who raised the Lord Jesus. He speaks within his own heart, and now to those who read his letter: because, as with the psalm, so Paul is keen that the end result would be more praise arising to the living God. The more people are praising God, the more the world is taking the shape it was meant to have, and the more God's power goes out to save and heal where those generous blessings are still needed. Paul has taken the whole psalm, has lived through its experience himself, has reflected deeply on it in the light of the gospel of Jesus, and has now made it the instrument of his appeal to the Corinthians not to despise his sufferings, but to share his gratitude to God and turn the whole experience into praise.

So he comes back in verse 16 to where he was at the start of the chapter: explaining why he doesn't lose heart despite the circumstances that might have made people think he had fallen out of God's care and purpose altogether. Though he has pushed through in his ministry to the extent that he was suffering like this God is with him. And, to back up this repeated assertion, he comes out with one of the most astonishing statements of Christian hope ever written.

¹⁷ For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸ because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Unfortunately, it's easy today for people to misunderstand it. It's easy to imagine, within the worldview that many have today, that in verses 17 and 18 he's saying that bodily things, outward things, don't matter. It is easy to assume that he's insisting on true reality being non-bodily things, 'spiritual' things in that sense. But, as his other writings, and indeed the next chapter, will make clear, this is not the case. He is talking not about 'physical' and 'non-physical' things, but about the present world as contrasted with the future world. The point about 'things you can see' is that they last for only a short while. But God's true reality, which will one day be brought to birth in his new world, is more richly physical in ways we can hardly imagine, though at present out of sight.

All we know about it is that it will involve 'a weight of glory'. The glory of the giving of the law was as nothing to the glory we already have in the gospel, as he argues in chapter 3. Now Paul declares that the glory we presently have, which is like treasure in earthenware pots (verse 7), is as nothing compared with the glory that is yet to be revealed. And in that light even the huge, overwhelming, deadly sorrows and difficulties that Paul had endured appeared as 'slight momentary trouble'. He had come to realize that the present body is only the beginning, the initial clothing for a true self that will one day be much more fully clothed. That is totally different from saying 'the present body is the outer shell for a true self which is non-bodily and will one day, thank God, be freed from the whole business of bodies'. It is more like saying: 'I live in a tent at present, but one day I shall live in a palace!'

It may seem that in our church life pushing on to seek God's righteousness, and having to personally change and grow, even as we have many years of change behind us, is harder and more challenging, still painful and seeming to require more difficult self-reflection than ever before. But pushing ourselves like this is what we do if we really want to see God's Kingdom grow.

And so as we push on for God's Kingdom to come here and now, and his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, as we experience the difficulties, the troubles and struggles, personal suffering and pain, like Paul, we have hope

that, in this slight momentary affliction, God is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.

We will pray, like the psalmist Paul was quoting,

¹I love YHWH, because he has heard my voice and my prayer; ²he has turned his ear towards me; so I will call on him throughout my whole life.

¹²What can I do out of gratitude to YHWH, in return for all his kindness to me?

¹³I will take the cup of salvation, and call on YHWH's name.

¹⁴I will give back to YHWH what I promised I would, in front of all his people.

¹⁶I am your servant, YHWH; your servant, and your servant-girl's son; you have untied me and set me free. ¹⁷I will offer a thanksgiving-sacrifice to you, and call on YHWH's name.

¹⁸I will give back to YHWH what I promised I would, in front of all his people, ¹⁹In the courtyards of YHWH's house, in the middle of you, O Jerusalem – YHWH be praised!

Let us pray.