

## Perspective

*Perspective*

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**Bible Text:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18  
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### **Wahoo Community Church**

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I want to dismiss the kids for Children's Church. Been waiting for that for so long and so off to a rough start but this morning I'll be speaking out of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, so if you want to turn there with me. Again, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Let's pray.

*Dear Lord, we just thank you for this time that we can come before you. Thank you for the word that you've given us that is breathed out by you; it is your truth and it is your word. And I just ask that in this time, you would speak to us through your word, Lord, you would use me and just speak through me in a way that I might just get out of the way of the Gospel and let it stand on its own two feet. Lord, I'm just honored to be in this position and I just commit this time to you and ask that in all things your will be done. Amen.*

Now, I'll be honest with you, I was fairly nervous preparing to speak in front of my home congregation. I'm in front of everybody that you know, everybody that raised you and taught, not you, me. But then it occurred to me that you're the ones responsible for having raised me; you're the ones responsible for teaching me about the Gospel and seeing me grow spiritually so ultimately if things go poorly today, the pressure is really on you. That's not on me. I'm just kidding. I really do want to take a minute to just let you know how thankful I am to be in this position to be asked by the church that has seen me grow throughout the years to come behind this pulpit that I have so much respect for and to speak to you this morning, it means a great deal to me and I'm just thankful for the opportunity.

Now, as I was trying to decide what I wanted to speak on, I didn't know if I wanted to stick to a topic or if I wanted to just preach on a passage. Ultimately I decided to go over this passage because, like I've already said, I want God's word to speak for itself so maybe I don't mess up too badly. But also, if someone were to ask me what my favorite passage of Scripture was, I would probably go with this one because it has been such an inspiration to me throughout the years and there is just so much truth just within this small passage. But as I examined it further and I prepared to speak, it became evident that there is undeniable topic here and that is the topic of perspective. I believe that that is really what the Apostle Paul is trying to get across in this passage.

Now, for some historical context, Paul was writing this to the church in Corinth, that's why it's titled 2 Corinthians. And I had always been under the impression that all churches at this time, that the very first Christians were all being persecuted externally by other people that wanted to put an end to this Christian movement, that they were experiencing a great deal of affliction, so that's why Paul wrote this but I came to realize that through reading different commentaries and things, that the church of Corinth really didn't have those types of problems. Actually, they were pretty well off. The city of Corinth was very wealthy at this time; it was really an economic center at this point in history and to reflect that, many of the members of this church were pretty well off themselves. They were wealthy beings so their problem, so to speak that Paul is speaking on, was worldliness and being so wealthy that they couldn't look past the things of this world. So, again, I believe that Paul is just trying to give them some eternal perspective which is really my focus and my hope for this morning.

Now, the topic of perspective, admittedly, it's a tough topic for me personally to speak on because it's something that I have struggled with throughout the years. Of course, I can't hide that from you, having seen me grow. Especially when I was younger, I failed to look at the whole picture and to look beyond myself further down the road. This was never on better display than my academic performance in high school and there are some teachers here that can attest to the fact that I was not a great student and specifically my freshman year, we had to take a Spanish class. I didn't want to, but it was a requirement, and at Wahoo, freshman are put into one of two classes, Spanish I being the beginner's level, and Spanish II being the next level, all the way on up to IV and V. So obviously I wanted to be in the lower class. I was lazy and I wanted to do what was easier but to my dismay, I was placed in Spanish II and it didn't sit very well with me. It might shock you to know that I'm fairly stubborn and I didn't take it very well. I went into the teachers and I begged and I pleaded, "Please put me in Spanish I! You've made a mistake. I don't want to be in the tougher class." And they said, "No. Based on what we've seen, maybe you need to be pushed a little bit. We're going to put you in the Spanish II class."

So there was nothing I could do and I resolved to do nothing. You know, I was going to prove them wrong; I was going to show them they had made a mistake and that I didn't need to be in there. So that's exactly what I did. I went to class late. I barely paid attention. I didn't do assignments well. I really didn't care about tests. I can specifically remember handing in at least one test entirely blank. I can actually feel my parents' blood pressure rising as I talk about this, so it's great. Needless to say, I failed the class and I

had convinced myself in some sick and twisted way that my failure was actually a good thing. I didn't think about it much at the time, but going further down the road, I became a senior and unbeknownst to me, your GPA is cumulative. That's not a joke for the younger kids in the audience. It really does follow you. So these bad grades, they caught up with me and so I'm a senior applying to colleges and time and time again I've got to write down my lowly GPA and send it off to try to get into these colleges and universities and I was just so frustrated at that time. I remember thinking, "Why didn't I get it when I was younger? Why couldn't I look to the future? Why didn't I have any perspective on any of this? If only I had known." Now, I did ultimately know. I suppressed that. I got it out of my mind and I only focused on myself and the things I could see right then and there. You see, I had no perspective so that story, I promise, it does have a purpose because I believe that this is a great life lesson and, kids, you know, do your homework and know that your GPA follows you, but it's the better spiritual lesson to know that the way we perceive the future and in terms of eternity, shape how we live here on earth for us with a Christian faith, and I think that's one of the greatest lessons that we can learn.

Now, I'm going to stop talking about my grades. I don't want my parents to have a stroke so I think we should move into our passage for this morning. I'm actually going to start in verse 17. I promise we will end up circling our way back to 16. I promise. But for now, taking a look at verse 17, it says, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." And there is a lot just within that one verse, so I'd actually like to take the opportunity to kind of divide it up, focus on one half, and then the other.

So, again, at the beginning we see Paul starts out saying, "For this light momentary affliction." Yes, he calls it light and momentary but I think it's important he does not deny the existence of afflictions. You know, he doesn't say that they don't exist or that this Christian life is easy. And I think it's also important to point out that he uses inclusive language here saying "us" and "we," that would show us that he's not just speaking about himself and his personal afflictions but he's telling us that all who take on the Christian faith are at some point going to experience some sort of trial, some sort of affliction, some sort of hardship because of this faith and this stuck out to me as I was preparing this, that that goes directly against the health and wellness Gospel that has become all too prevalent in our world today. For those of you that maybe are unaware, there are many out there that would teach that coming to faith in Christ guarantees you success and happiness and wealth in this life; you'll be happy and healthy and wealthy as the name would imply and that's just not true. I don't know what Bible those people are reading because that's just not consistent with the Scripture before me. Once again, going back to the Corinthians, I think they may have been experiencing some of the same hardship of looking too much into earthly things and being too focused on the here and now, focusing on their wealth. Paul says that there are going to be trials and afflictions.

And you may be wondering who on earth could talk about afflictions in such a way as to call them light and momentary? You know, you might be tempted to think that the person writing this doesn't really get it. You know, maybe they haven't lived very much or experienced much, but it was written by the Apostle Paul, which I think, if we take that

into account, gives this passage so much more power and so much more emphasis when we look at the life of Paul. The Apostle Paul was one of the greatest missionaries to have ever lived. He was converted by Christ himself and he went forth with a fire and a passion to preach the Gospel all over the world, and as he did so, he faced unbelievable trials and struggles and it becomes just staggering when you actually take time to list them all out and see all that Paul went through. We know that he was stoned and left for dead. He was beaten with rods three different times. He was whipped with 39 lashes on five different occasions. He was attacked by an angry mob. He received many death threats. He was shipwrecked three times. Like three times he kept getting back on ships. I don't know, that's just incredible to me. He was criticized and put down by other Christians. He was imprisoned for two years with no hope of a trial. He was bitten by a viper and ultimately we know that he died a pretty horrendous martyr's death for what he believed in. But he wouldn't stop preaching the Gospel and as I took that into account and I looked at this passage and he says that afflictions are light and momentary, how can he do that? How can he say that? Why would he keep on preaching this Gospel and enduring these types of trials?

Moving forward, that's where the second half of the verse comes into play; that's what gives it its significance. He says, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." So we see there that these trials, they serve a purpose. They are preparing us for an eternal weight of glory. They are getting us ready to be with Christ, to be with our Creator for all eternity. His eternal perspective is what gave him the motivation to keep going in the face of such horrendous trials. He looked past this life and he kept his eyes focused on God.

And I would like, just for a second, to look at 1 Corinthians 15:19, this also being written by Paul. He says in this verse, "If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied." Now, hold on, he just said that afflictions are light and momentary, yet in this verse he says that if we have hope just in this life, Christians should be pitied more than anyone. So we know that in his previous writings he acknowledges the hardship and he says that this life, if based just on this life, no one should be more pitied than Christians; no one should be more pitied than people like Paul who had to go through so much. But, again, we know that we don't have our hope just set in this world. We have a hope that's far greater and better than anything that we see here on earth and Paul knew that. If Paul is able to write that and to believe that and to call his afflictions light and momentary, then how can we not? I don't think that I've ever faced anything such as Paul, such as the things I've already listed that he went through. That's just amazing to me.

And we see in other places in Scripture, such as Matthew 6:20, that God is gracious to us to give us other motivations and rewards for faithful service. To paraphrase this verse, it essentially says, "Don't put your treasures here on earth. Don't be consumed with wealth in this life but store up your treasures in heaven because the things that are eternal, the things you place in heaven, will never be lost, cannot be afflicted." We know that the things in this life we can't take with us but this passage from Matthew tells us that the things we store up for ourselves in heaven, the treasures and the rewards, they're eternal.

So God gives us ulterior motives to be strong in our faith and we're promised rewards for good and faithful service. I want to be clear in that I'm not saying that we earn our salvation in any way by works. We know that that is not true. It's by faith alone and by grace alone. But if we are faithful, God rewards us for that and we have rewards saved up for us in heaven.

Once again, to come back to our topic of perspective, if we still need some more examples, ultimately the greatest example we're given on any spiritual aspect throughout the Bible is best seen through Christ. We saw Christ be crucified in such a horrendous way. He experienced more pain and more suffering than any being to have ever walked the earth and it makes you wonder just how he could do that; how could he move forward to the cross knowing full well that not only was he going to be physically beaten and destroyed on a cross, but spiritually he took on all the sins of everyone who has ever lived. We cannot even fathom the depths of that pain or that sorrow. He took on the full wrath of God in its entirety and how could he do that? What kept him going?

Well, in Hebrews 12:2, we know that it says for the joy that was set before him, Christ endured the cross. Christ had to have an eternal perspective to keep going in the face of unbelievable affliction and pain. We know that Christ had faith that though he may die, he would be resurrected, and that he would ascend to heaven where he reigns. And he looked not only to those things, found joy not only in that, but he was looking out for us. He kept an eternal perspective for our eternal souls. As he hung on that cross, I believe that at any point in time he could've come down. He had power and authority. What kept him there was ultimately his perspective to see us in his place and to take that on for us. So even Christ, we see, has a phenomenal example of looking past this life and these afflictions and keeping our eyes fixed on eternity. He saw his eternal reign and he saw our eternal souls that needed saving and I believe that there is no greater example we can give to see a Christian perspective on things and to keep an eternal perspective in the face of all things.

I know that that's a lot to pack into just one verse and I know that there is so much in there that we can't even cover in one day, but there is just so much truth and so much encouragement, I believe, in knowing that we can endure because we have faith that goes beyond this life and because we have an eternal hope. That, to me, is beautiful and it is awe inspiring.

As we move into verse 18, we see that this idea of having perspective, seeing things in the proper point of view is continued. Eighteen says, "as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." It's only perspective from a Christian point of view that could enable us to look past the things that are seen. You know, the first time I ever read this verse, I'll admit, that didn't make any sense. How can we look at something we can't see? That can't be done. So maybe we're not looking at things we can't see but we're keeping our minds eye; we are focusing our hearts and our minds on the things that we can't physically see, they're not physically here. And what are some of these things that

we can't see but we know are there? People's hearts. People's souls. People's minds. These are the things that matter. These are the things that we need to look to at all times.

If we are, in some way, enabled by God to see things in eternal perspective, it changes everything. When we think about souls, we know that all beings on this earth are eternal. Now, we may go to heaven, we may go to hell, but all souls are eternal things and, to me, that has to change everything that we do in this life. It has to change how we live our lives as examples to non-believers and how we engage with non-believers, keeping in mind that their souls as well as ours are eternal. That changes everything in this life.

And as I covered this verse, I couldn't help but think about our time in Guatemala. A couple of years ago, a trip from this church went to Guatemala to work with a small church in Sumpango. That was my first time being out of the country and I saw things that I could never imagine here in Wahoo, Nebraska. I saw pain and suffering. I saw poverty that was just unimaginable where I had gone. I saw people who had nothing and for some reason they were happy and I couldn't understand how. We saw families living in tiny wooden and metal structures with dirt floors, that probably wouldn't even pass for a garage we would park our car in here in America. And we saw people afflicted in so many ways that we never experience here in this life. And I remember specifically, this has stuck with me, we talked to the pastor there in Sumpango and I don't remember those entire conversations and they were in Spanish and we already know I couldn't do that, but the gist of this conversation was, "We're praying for you. We want to help you. We want to establish a relationship with you in any way that we can." You know, it was a mission trip and we were there for a purpose and a reason and I'll never forget his response was essentially, "And I pray for you that you can remain Christians in America." And I didn't really get it at the time. Like, "That's not how this works. You don't pray for us. Like, don't you get it? Don't you see? You have nothing here. You're worshiping on a dirt floor. We're praying for you, why would you pray for us? We have everything in America." And I've come to know that perhaps Pastor Manuel knew something that I didn't at the time and that is that things we perceive as blessings such as our material goods here in America can be dangerous to our spiritual lives. They can get in the way of us seeing an eternal perspective because if we can imagine for ourselves trying to see something off in the distance such as an eye test or something like that, I imagine that the Guatemalans, they didn't have anything to get in the way of that vision, that perspective. They had nothing in this life or on this world that would get in the way so that their only hope each and every day was to get up and to see the glory of eternity that awaited them; to have hope in the truth of the Gospel was the only thing that they could cling to and the only thing that they could see.

Then I looked at myself and I see us here in America and it's the exact opposite. As we try to look to the things of eternity and we try to look off into the distance, into the future, we have so many things, we have so much stuff that gets in the way of that so often. And going back to the verse, Paul is telling us to look past the things that are seen; look past physical things and look to eternal things. And as we examine our society, what does it preach? What does it teach us from an early age? The exact opposite, right? To look to the physical things. That's what everyone looks at. It's the idea of keeping up with the

Joneses. We want to know who is the most attractive, who has the nicest clothes on, who drives the nicest car or lives in the nicest house. That's everything that our society is predicated on and that's what draws us ultimately away from having an eternal perspective. It's too easy in this life and in this world that we live in to get consumed by everything that we can see and I'm as guilty of it as anyone else. I focus on my material self in this life and being happy and being wealthy and I catch myself not looking to eternal things, not caring about people's eternal souls because I'm so focused on my physical self. And that just had such a great impact on me as I really sat and I examined this verse. It was very convicting for me because it's so true of us that too often we can't look past the things that we see.

And moving on back to verse 16, it says, "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day." Now, the preceding passage ultimately is talking about salvation so that's where the word "so" comes from. Because of salvation, so we don't lose heart, but I think that it also helps to just isolate this passage to look at verse 17, verse 18, get a grip on what they're talking about because we know that we need to look past these afflictions and in comparison to eternity, they're light and they're momentary and we know that we need to train ourselves to look to things that are eternal. If we can do that, if we can have that eternal perspective and that eternal hope, then we can't lose heart, so we don't lose heart because we know that we have an eternal perspective. We know we have something waiting for us that is undescribly better than anything we can know in this life and that is ultimately to be with our Creator for all eternity.

Now, I've struggled with this question and I saw it again this year as I took a Christian Philosophy class. We were talking about a lot of spiritual matters and a girl posed the question: is it not selfish of God to have created human beings for the sole purpose of glorifying him and worshiping him? And that just shows, once again, our failure of perspective. That's putting God in a box or seeing him in a human-like way. God is not a human being. He is so much greater, so much more than anything that we know. Now, I don't know all that God is but I know from studying the Scripture that it is the greatest things that our souls could ever experience. It is ultimately what we were made for, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, and that ultimately is what heaven is. I don't know all that heaven is or what might be there.

When I was young, I had a totally different perspective on heaven. It was just like Disney World. It was a nice place to go. My mom wouldn't yell at me because I didn't have to go to sleep, I didn't have to clean anything up and it might be cool, I might get to play football or do different things, but ultimately I realized that that's an immature perspective on things, once again. Heaven, whatever it is, we know that we will be in the presence of God and that alone is our joy and our hope. That is our all-encompassing pleasure and that's something that we can't find no matter how we try in this life, how hard we try to do so in this life. And we can see that with non-Christians who don't have an eternal perspective, who don't have a hope past this life, try to fill themselves with everything that this world's got to offer. They chase after everything materialistic and everything physical. They try to be the best looking, the best dressed. They run to things

like entertainment and drugs and alcohol and all these different things to try to find an all-encompassing joy and pleasure in this life and it's fleeting and it's transient. All of those things fade.

Being with our Creator is the only thing ultimately that can satisfy us and that enables us to look past the fact that our outer self, it's wasting away. We can look past that because we know that internally we're being renewed by the truth of the Gospel; we're becoming new; we're becoming molded more and more to be like Christ, to be like our Creator so that we can be with him for all eternity and to enjoy that. And so this is our hope, that we can keep going with an eternal perspective no matter what we face in this life. We have this hope that goes beyond everything that we know.

So I believe that the application for this passage, for this sermon today, is fairly evident and it's just simply: do you see life in these terms? Do you have a proper point of view that enables you to look past yourself? To look past the things in this world and to look to an eternal glory? Our faith, we can't see it and we can't know it until it's put to the test. There are many passages in the Bible that would support the idea, again, that the trials and persecutions, they have a purpose and they have their place to mold us more like Christ, but also to show the genuineness of our faith. And so I encourage you to, in times of struggle and trials and persecutions, to look where your faith leads you. Do you come to the foot of the cross or do you look to yourself in those times? Is that faith true and is it eternal in the face of all odds?

Ultimately I believe that this passage comes back to how do we view the Gospel itself. The Gospel is the good news. What is the good news? Well, we know that we're all broken and sinful people, we're all born in open rebellion against God and everything that he wanted for our lives but he was good to us to send his Son to teach us, to teach us and show us how to live a life that had an eternal hope; to live a life that was honoring to God in all ways. And he was not just a great teacher, if we leave it there we miss the point, he was also our Messiah and our Savior, the one that was sent to break the power of sin. And he was the only one who could do so because he was the only one that was perfect. Now, I know that many of us in here would have heard it a thousand times but if I ever get to the place where the Gospel doesn't penetrate my heart and doesn't enable me to have a proper perspective on the world, well, then I've missed the point of the Bible itself.

So he took on that sin in its entirety. He took the wrath of God and he died a gruesome death on that cross. Then three days later we have a hope that he was resurrected. He lived again. He went and he spoke to people. He went and spoke to Paul himself who wrote this very passage. So we know that sin was taken away and we know that the bonds of death were broken, and because of that and that alone, we can have an eternal hope that is greater than any of our trials. We can have a hope of an eternal glory that is beyond all comparison; that can allow people like Paul still living today facing trials and persecutions for their faith, to keep going, to keep fighting the good fight and to look to our Savior in heaven in all eternity.

And maybe you find yourself this morning not in a place where you see the Gospel in this light. Maybe you don't understand the Gospel the way I've explained it or you don't understand this type of an eternal perspective that can have people going to all odds to share the good news; that would allow Paul to endure such trials. If that's you, then I would encourage you to read the truth of the Bible for yourself; to see, to know what motivation these people had. And there are so many people out there who would be willing to share the truth that they know. If you know people that have a hope that you know that you don't, you want to know where it comes from, ask them. There are people here, there are elders that would love to share with you the truth of this message, the truth of the Gospel. And my prayer, my hope for everyone here this morning and ultimately all eternal beings, would be to know the truth of the Gospel so that we all might share in knowing an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison.

Let's pray.

*Dear Lord, our God, our Savior, our good Father, we come before you so humbled by the truth of your word, convicted in our hearts and our minds that we don't have this type of a perspective so often in our life. There are so many times where we're faced by trials and afflictions and we lack the perspective to see past it, to see past our pain and our suffering here and to look to you. And Lord, I just ask that you would do a mighty work in the hearts and minds of all the people here; that you would allow us all to go about our lives from an eternal point of view and to see past this life in all ways. Lord Jesus, you came and you hung on the cross looking past that pain to your eternal glory and to looking to our eternal souls. We can never thank you enough for denying yourself and for looking to us in our hour of need, to having that proper perspective that allowed you to endure the most unimaginable pain of all time. But through that sacrifice, we can have a hope and a joy unimaginable and we're so thankful for that, Lord, and I just ask that that truth would continue to shape us, to mold us, and to allow us to be more like you in every way. And as we go forth from here, that we would live lives that clearly have a hope beyond this life and that other people would be drawn to our hope and our perspective and want to know the truth that is in your word. It's through the power of Christ I pray. Amen.*