

*“Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 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. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

In Greek mythology there is a story that tells how all the evil of the world was locked in a box. With evil confined, the world was happy and beautiful. The box was kept at the home of a girl named Pandora, who was given strict instructions not to open the box. Unfortunately the day came when her curiosity got the better of her, and she decided that she would just take a peek inside the box. But the minute she opened the lid, even just a crack, all the evil forced its way out and into the world. And with it, evil brought all the problems, the trials and troubles that plague mankind.

While there may be some parallels to the biblical truth of sin and evil, we know that the myth falls short of God’s truth. It also doesn’t have a solution to the problem of evil. There is no promise that the problems of life will come to an end, except in death—and death itself is a great evil.

Each and every one of us has our times of disappointment and discouragement. Yet no matter how dark the days may seem, we can be sure of God’s love and grace at work for our good. Paul tells us today: *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.* Even though it may not seem like it at the time, the truth is that the cares and worries of this world are just light momentary affliction. All the light stuff that troubles us now is not—and never will be—enough to keep us from the glories of all that God has prepared for us in Jesus Christ.

I have heard people say on more than a few occasions that they do not know how people without faith deal with the struggles and evils of this world. How does someone without faith cope with the death of a loved one, especially if that death has come tragically and suddenly? Paul said in our text that *our outer self is wasting away*. How do we deal with the weaknesses of our bodies, and the sad reality of everything from arthritis to cancer? Do you wonder and worry at times what this world is going to be like for your children and grandchildren? Maybe you are devastated already because your children and grandchildren, who were brought up in the faith, have wandered away from God, and are far too comfortable with the unbelieving world. Maybe you are worried about your job—or frustrated because you haven’t been able to find a job! It isn’t hard to see how sin has made an absolute mess of God’s perfect world. We see it in the horror of those remains discovered at a residential school. We see it in the wars that have been fought, and which continue to be fought. We see it in broken relationships, broken marriages, broken families. We see it in the poverty and crime and ugliness of so much of our world. Is that all there is: problems, problems, problems?

Paul looks at all of these things, and countless others like them, and knows that they impact our lives. Yet he calls them the light stuff—light momentary afflictions. In some ways, that seems so strange coming from Paul. He is a man who, by his conversion, is seen as a traitor by many of his friends and colleagues, for he is now part of an upstart religion. He had been on a brilliant career path, which he now gladly considers rubbish. We hear of his labours for the gospel, of the hardships and persecutions he endured, and finally of his death as a martyr. This is the man who spoke of his thorn in the flesh, the physical ailment that made his life and his work so much more difficult. Yet he says: *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 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.*

Paul saw things differently that we often do. He was not unaware, indifferent or unaffected by the problems of life. He had more than his share of suffering. He wasn't immune to the pain or the despair it could bring. Yet in the verses before our text he declares: ***“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”*** (2 Corinthians 4:7–11, ESV) Paul knew the reality of all the problems, struggles and suffering that surrounded him. Yet he also saw the unseen glory that is ours through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of the light stuff—the afflictions of this life, we need to cling all the more to the wonderful promises of God in Christ Jesus! I'm not trying to make light of the struggles and pains we feel in our lives. There is nothing light about pain. Physical pain is exhausting. It can be overwhelming. When you can't move because your back is out, that doesn't seem like the light stuff. There is nothing easy about dealing with cancer or with the treatments that can sap our strength, weaken our bodies and our immune system, and make a person feel nauseated all the time. We hurt when we are betrayed by people we love and trusted. Should our spouse break that trust, we don't feel we will ever recover. Yes, we feel the pain and grief of the loss of those we love who have died. We feel the exhaustion of dealing with COVID or the struggles with kids, who just won't listen or the fears for our jobs or the financial burdens we may have. Pandora didn't unleash all of this on us. It was the disobedience of Adam and Eve that brought sin into the God's perfect creation. Sin brought all the evil, including the physical death we all experience in this world.

Thankfully, we have a loving God, who sees our weakness, our failure and our need, and who has already done something to change it all. Even as Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, God went looking for them. There would be consequences to their actions, but the loss of God's love wasn't one of them. ***“The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”***” (Genesis 3:14–15, ESV) In judging the serpent, the devil, God made a promise of deliverance to Adam and Eve—and therefore to you and me, too. We see that deliverance revealed as Christ casts out demons and shows that Satan's reign is coming to an end. The ultimate victory would be won on the cross, as the Saviour takes all the ugliness of sin—of our sin—upon Himself as He suffers in our place and dies our death. All God's promises would come together in the resurrection of Jesus, so that Paul can assure us: ***that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.***

A missionary spoke of the conversion of a man from Hinduism; a man who, like Paul, lost all that the world would consider precious. In a social structure where caste was everything, this man became an outcaste. He was disowned by his family; he lost property and his status. One day a friend asked him how he dealt with all his problems. The man answered, “Everyone always asks me how I deal with the loss and the problems, but no one asks me the more important question: how do I deal with all my blessings?” Those blessings are the forgiveness and life we have in Christ. We are blessed with a hope that eludes the unbelieving world. They can only see the problems and burdens of life. We see beyond them. We see the glory that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ.

There is a poem which says:

God has not promised skies always blue,  
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;  
God has not promised sun without rain,  
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.  
But God has promised strength for the day,  
Rest for the labor, light for the way,  
Grace for the trials, help from above,  
Unfailing sympathy, undying love. (Annie Johnson Flint)

In God's promises Paul sees all the problems of life as light, momentary affliction. When seen against the backdrop of our victory in Christ, the cares of this world are light by comparison. Paul reminds us: ***For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”***

Look beyond the seen things of the world. Look beyond the problems and cares. Look beyond the light stuff, and to the glory that God gives us in Christ, that outweighs any and every care of this world. Amen.