

It's Worth It 2 Corinthians 4:13-18
June 1st, 2014 Easter 7 A Pastor Rob Zeratsky

Today I want to talk to you about being depressed. I find this amusing actually, because I think for all of us, overall, we're probably in much better spirits than we were just a few short weeks ago. The snow has melted and apparently stopped falling. The sun is shining more regularly and everything is green again. The winter was ridiculously long and cold and it wore down on all of us. But now that the nicer weather has shown itself, well I think most of us can't help but be in a good mood over it.

The reason I find this a bit amusing is because I actually think this is the perfect time to talk about the sort of depression and world-weariness that can plague us all. We've all had those moments throughout our lives. Sometimes they were just moments, sometimes they were days. For some people they can last years. I expect we all had at least one this last winter. It's the times when we feel lost and directionless. When we feel worn down by the pain and the misery of the world. When it seems like trouble and hurt won't let up, and we're left to face it without help of any kind.

Sometimes one big thing hits that sets it on. A major life-changing "disaster" of sorts. It could be the loss of a loved one, a loss of a job, a medical diagnosis, or just something else we value taken away from us. And that one big loss makes all the minor troubles seem to each hurt more than usual. It may not be any one big thing. It may just be too many small things all at once that we just don't feel we can handle. It may just be a feeling that nothing has gone "right" in our lives in so long that it starts to feel that nothing ever will. It may be the unending stream of problems that we have to fix. It seems like we can barely get the ship of our lives righted, and now we can finally do the things we want to do and get back to the life we want...before something else comes along that we have to give our attention over to first.

It happens to the best of us. But...what I just described, not to put too fine a point on it: that's life. This idea that there's some point of normalcy that we can hit and maintain is an illusion. People who say things like, "if it's not one thing it's another," or, "life is what happens when you're busy making plans," well they may have said those things to be pithy, but they're accurate. If your sense of contentment and happiness is based on removing the things in life that cause you grief and expecting that you can just achieve and keep a sort of quiet and trouble-free life, well you're going to be sorely disappointed and you're going to end up in that state of feeling helpless or depressed.

That's why I mentioned the good weather. No doubt a little sunshine raises everyone's cheer. And it's great that it makes us all feel good. But it's also a foolish thing to make your happiness dependent upon something as notoriously untrustworthy as the weather! That's just as bad as everything else we've been talking about. So what is the answer? Do we just keep hacking away at our lives to rid ourselves of every bad influence we can and replace them with as much feel-goodery as we can? We block out the bad and indulge ourselves in everything that makes us feel good? But what about then the bad you can't get rid of? And what about the good that does more damage to you than it's worth in the long run?

Actually, that's a good point. Because it's self-indulgence that got us in this mess to start with, you know. It was our first parents putting their wants above their own best interest that let suffering and misery into this world to start with. And it's our own selfish sin that perpetuates it every day. We are, each of us, under a curse of sin and it's because of the effects of that sin that we do suffer here on earth. Indulging more is not going to make that better or go away. It's only going to make it worse.

To put it plainly, we do need help. The troubles aren't going to stop and we can't fix them all and we can't make them go away. And that is what we have in our God: <read text: 2 Cor 4:13-18>.

It is selfishness that causes our problems. It was selfishness that got us in our current mess. It was the sin born of selfishness that ruined everything for us, including separating us from God for eternity. Our self-indulgence would have doomed us for eternity, the answer is not more of it. It is God, acting in complete selflessness that saves us. He lived for us, he died for us and as Paul writes here, because he was raised from the dead, we know that we too will be raised to life one day. And not just to any life, but raised to be with him and be in his presence forever (v14). That is what he has done for us already. And that is his promise to us. It is a promise he has brought each of us to trust in, and that trust is our link to eternal life.

So, eternity is guaranteed. That means that whatever happens in the meantime is largely immaterial. Whatever happens to us between now and then will not affect the outcome, right? All that truly matters is whether our faith in Christ is kept strong until that day when it is confirmed forever. And to do that, we strive to live our lives for Christ. A life lived that always keeps an eye on him first and foremost is a life that is always strengthening that bond. And it's a life that avoids the pain we could inflict on ourselves with our own sin. It's quite simply the best way to live.

So we believe and therefore we live entirely for him. The hurts that might happen in the meantime won't amount to anything because our God has rescued us from the worst of it, the punishment of hell that we deserve.

Except...well stuff still happens to us, right? Stuff still hurts. It's great that we have something to look forward to, but how does that help us each in the meantime? We're still being worn down by wave after wave of trouble. Where is the help *now*?

Before I answer that, we need to talk about the kinds of troubles we face in this world. For the purposes of this discussion we could divide them into two categories. There are the troubles that really are something painful that we can't really do anything about. And then there are the troubles that only hurt because we let them. A great deal of the things we get bent out of shape over have to do with this latter category. These are things that bother us, trouble us or hurt us not because something truly dreadful has happened, but because we set ourselves up for disappointment with the wrong expectations.

If we were to summarize the expectation of where these all come from, it would be that idea we touched on at the beginning. That false idea that there is some sort of stable "normal" zone in your life that you can always return any upset balance to. That things will not change and anything that rocks your boat can be dealt with and the ship righted again. It's the delusion that your life, the people in it, the things in it, and even the world around you and at large are all going to continue each day largely unchanged from the day before.

Logically, intellectually, we know this is nonsense. We know things change. They change on a worldwide scale and they change massively in individual lives without a moment's notice. And yet because on average we wake up each day and that day is basically like the day before it, well we assume that it's going to always continue on like that. And when things don't, we get upset and troubled without proper cause.

God never promised that your life would always be the same. He never promised that you'd have the same people in it, that you'd have the same job, house, friends, family around you all the time. He never promised what shape the world would take, how the governments would function and interact. He never promised you perfect health until you just drop dead one day. In fact, he as good as promised the opposite all those things. And yet, when any one of those changes for what we consider to be the worse, we have a tendency to cry "foul" when we have no right to.

What is unchanging are the promises of our God. That whatever shape your life takes he will provide for your daily needs, body and soul. That he in his ascended throne is guiding the events of the world to benefit your eternal journey. Not to make it comfortable, but to make it possible. With a sure trust in these promises of our God, anything that changes in our lives whether loss or gain, they do not change the underlying course. There is no fear or uncertainty when you trust God's promises.

There are, as I mentioned, real troubles though. There are things that some of us go through that cause us real and literal pain each day. There are losses that hurt, particularly when loved ones are spiritually lost. Our God did not leave us helpless in our sin and he does not leave us helpless in these troubles either. The pain may be necessary for our journey or even for the benefit of someone else, but through his power, by his Word, he promises to renew us each daily so that we have the strength we need to face these challenges. Stay close to him and he will give you what you need.

But ultimately, it does come back to our eternity. However you want to see it, whatever you face whether it's the loss of all your worldly possessions or just a snowstorm in June, each one of them is no more than what Paul calls them here. They are light and momentary troubles. And they are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us through our risen and ascended Savior Christ. That's really what it comes down to. This is a world full of sin. It is literally decaying around us, when something breaks or dies or just gets worse that should not surprise us. And that's going to happen whether we're believers in Christ or not. But in Christ we have something to hold on to. Something real, solid and unchangeable even though we can't see it. And since we have something to hold on to, we don't have to hold on to the stuff here that won't last. And so we won't be disappointed or surprised when any of it leaves.

Instead we just hold onto what's real, the promises of our God. Promises to watch and care for us every step of our lives now, and most importantly a promise that this time of trouble will end and we will join him in heaven forever. Yes, we have time here yet that we have to endure. But those troubles are what are guiding us on the path to eternity with God. No matter how you look at it, it's worth it. Amen.