

Our insufficiency and God's sufficiency (Quality: Average)

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- [0 : 00] We will speak again with the Lord's help on the second epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 4, and the last two verses.
- Second epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 17 and 18. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. I believe I posed a remark this morning by saying that this was a very solemn chapter, and a very solemn text.
- And you may have felt so in your own thoughts, and realized that there was something very vital in it, and something which perhaps you felt you did not prepare.
- And in this connection, how true this is of so many scriptures. And how many can you come up to?
- [1 : 32] How many sermons can you come up to? They may find a place in your heart, in certain spots, but as regards the divine standard, how far short we all feel to come.
- And yet it is essential that we have a standard. If we have no standard, no divine outline, or revealed purpose, where should we be?
- We should be in chaos. What you thought would just be as much worth as what I thought. When it comes to thus, says the Lord, a very different matter.
- And it is in this that we have the great benefit of the word of God, that it is not to be contradicted, that it is the revealed mind of God.
- No, we cannot look at these sacred scriptures and say, yes, well, I believe every word of that. Though perhaps this morning we could not say of our particular pathway, yes, well, I feel my affliction is light.
- [2 : 56] But that does not alter the truth that it's God's own word, and it is intended to be, as the Son is intended to be, a drawing influence.
- Draw your heart and mind upwards, so that you know, as one hymn writer said, what Christians ought to be.
- So that in this respect, though we may often feel full, far short, we have a secret love for these gracious scriptures that set before us such a standard, a high standard.
- They are called in the word of God the old paths, and the boundaries, and the way marks, and they have been here from the beginning.
- And woe to him that seeks to remove them. And they are the guiding lights and stars and pillars, call it what you may, in the way of support, guidance, that have ever been the light of the Church of God.

[4 : 23] So that whilst we may not, as is so often the case, attain to the rich faith of such a script as this, at the same time, at the same time, we would not have it removed because of its sacred explanation.

how good it is for those who are early in the way to have these things said before them.

because it would be quite unwise to expect those that are early in the way to say, yes, well that's a good text.

that is something which I can understand they can't. but it is light before them as a headmistand.

and if God deals with them light before them for life. For life. So it is not just a passing sermon, or a passing hour, but it's a word which, which, er, falls their ear to the door.

[5 : 42] And, er, most of us have got some word like this, I trust, that older ones that we can look back to, and say yes, that, er, was, er, er, fixed in my heart years ago.

Though I could not see it, or did not follow that. I know it was so with me, as I've told you over the years, with regard to that word in the Acts of the Apostles, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of God.

how in my early days, I, first of all, wanted to, er, take out the word much. And then, as time went on, I began to learn what tribulation was, and then, er, the word much, how I learnt my father.

And whilst it is no discordant note, nor a discouraging note, it is a true note and, er, word, that, er, that, er, the Lord's people will, through, er, much tribulation enter the kingdom.

And yet, this much tribulation is not an overwhelming start. Why, they could look back, see now, a measure of gratitude that it is, and has been wanted, as heavy as the, er, trials have been.

[7 : 31] So that the Apostle is speaking from his own heart's experience, and under the Holy Spirit's guidance, he is putting things in their true perspective.

We spoke this morning of the light affliction and the adoration of it in the sight of God. He told the children to look at, er, God's, er, clock in the 90th Psalm, or, the 91st, the 90th.

For a thousand years, it's with the Lord as a day, and one day as a thousand years. That's God's time.

So that if we are enabled to see it in this light, it will give us a right, er, direction and balance, which, of course, er, is the only way that we can look at the things which are not seen.

Whereas our trials seem to be, er, almost of endless duration, yet, with the Lord, they are but from over. But we did, er, come to look again at the, er, things which are seen and the things which are not seen, and omitted this middle part, the, er, far more exceeding an eternal weight of glory.

[9 : 05] And it is to this, for the Lord's help, we would speak a few things, you see, glory, weight of glory. If we, er, had the ability, how, er, beautifully we could describe this, er, a contrast between a light affliction and the weight of glory.

It is the Hebrew way of writing, setting off in, er, complete distinction. extreme. Well, there, it isn't a question of balancing the scales this time, and an equal weight in both sides.

It is the, er, light affliction, not heavy affliction. Contrasted with this, he, er, speaks of the eternal weight of glory, which again, of course, is something that we cannot understand by nature.

But we can look at this, er, glory, first of all, as it is running through the apostles' mouth. It's like, er, the letters that you write, you know.

Certain things strike you, and you, er, put it down, in a sense, on the train of thought. And if you look at these two chapters, the third and the fourth, er, you can see that in verse, er, five of the third chapter, the apostles will come to this place where he says, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.

[11 : 09] And from there, he goes on to say, who have also made us able ministers of the New Testament.

This is where he has another thread of thought. And it is from this that he enlarges in this third chapter.

The New Testament. He speaks then of the negative side of it, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

For the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth love. Very concise, very brief. And the truth.

You may see the over-shadowing, er, an inspiration of the Holy Spirit, bringing to him this contrast, saying what has seldom, if ever, been said before, that the letter, that is the old Lord, in it.

[12 : 12] But the Spirit giveth love. Very concise, very brief. Very true. And from this point, he goes on to cast his mind to that notable time when Moses went up to the, now, for him to receive the tables of stone, which were the letter.

That royal commandment from God. That holy law of God, which was the whole matter of Christ's coming to fulfill it.

And he turns, er, to that account in the, the, er, book of Exodus, where Moses was called up to the mount, and God wrote with his own finger the two tables of stone, the ten commandments on them, which God had done, and nothing else.

All the civil law, the social law, and the law of government were given verbally. But with regard to what we know as the Decalogue, or the ten commandments, God wrote them, we're told, with his own finger.

Er, an incomparable thing. There's nothing to equal it in the scripture. And it was this that arrested Moses, er, Paul's attention.

[13 : 46] And he speaks of the glory that attended this occasion. And it was a wonderful occasion of itself, that God should write.

We read of Jesus writing in the sand, stooping down and writing, and, er, the finger of God, the Father, never been sent forth to us in this way.

And there was, therefore, a glory wrapped up in this. Remarkable work of God to, er, put the letter that killeth into, er, into, er, such a form as it was.

It, er, was, as we all know, thou shalt not. And, er, it was accompanied with gracious promises.

That there was no, er, penalty, other than, er, death, or guilt for those who disobeyed.

[15 : 07] It was, er, called, er, the flame of Sinai. Now, this holy law, Paul well believed in.

Of course he did. And he speaks of it, as we go on to read in the seventh verse, as the, er, ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses, for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away.

Here you have glory, majesty, divine power. And this was visible. Uh, Moses' face shone.

So much so that, er, his, er, people could not look upon his face. And he had to put a veil over it. All this is, er, rehearsed from the Old Testament.

Er, confirmation is given to every act and word of Moses. Let men, er, say what they will about Moses.

[16 : 32] There is, therefore, the glory. He says this was glorious, and we know that it was. But he has something else to say.

And that is, in verse 8, he puts it in the form of a question, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?

And this is what he's speaking about. See, he is now, er, entered upon his train of thought, not sufficient of himself, or ourself, oh, but, er, er, written, with the Spirit of the living God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

Here we have the same hymn put beautifully before us, the fleshy tables of the heart, the ministration of the Spirit.

Now this indicates feeling. Fleshy tables of the heart. What remarkable words there they are.

[17 : 52] What wisdom God gave the apostle to make this most, er, suitable and unique comparison.

Nothing to equal it anywhere else in the world of God. But written in the fleshy tables. Now, when we come to our text, and what we were speaking of this morning, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, where is the seat of that world?

Where is God working? In the hearts of his church. Where has he ever worked? Is it not in the fleshy tables of their heart?

Of course it is. Of course it is. It's individual. It's personal. It's line upon line.

Precept upon precept. Here a little and there a little. But it's God working. I believe I quoted that other scripture of the apostles.

[19 : 05] Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you, both the will and the do of his good flesh.

And this is where the working is. In the ministration of it. In the fleshy tables of the heart. If you look at the effect of it, as it is wrought in the apostle.

In verse 5 again. He is saying. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves. To think anything as of ourselves. But our sufficiencies of God.

Here he gives his whole case. And sets it in full view of the church of God.

When God was working in the fleshy tables of his heart. It revealed to him his insufficiency. And yet, his sufficiency.

[20 : 08] Now this is the same with the Lord's teaching in every generation. This is looking at the things which are not seen.

And yet, as I said this morning. Children may say, Well how can I look at something that I can't see? The answer is, this is faith's breath in sight.

That sees God's way of bringing his people to feel their own insufficiency. For what?

Their daily work? Oh no. Oh dear no. What for then? Why for such spiritual matters as regarding with the eye of faith their affliction?

The duration of it. It is this that God writes in the fleshy tables of the heart. Now this ministration therefore of the spirit is glorious.

[21 : 21] Our thoughts about glory and glorious things need a good deal of attention, thy divine grace.

Because the hymn writer is quite true you know when he says, The more thy glory strikes my eye the humbler I shall die. You may take that as a maxim through life.

Though written by a man it is fully scriptural. It is confirmed in every line of God's dealing with his people that his glory thus bring them down in their own judgment and view of themselves.

You are a happy person and so am I, a faithful person, if we truly feel their insufficiency.

And although that insufficiency may be such to drive you back from anything to do with the house of God, or the works of God, or the commandments of God, And though you may be much troubled in your heart about doing the right thing, test yourself by this.

[22 : 41] Is it, under a sense of my own insufficiency, that I feel right now? If so, can you not find comfort from the word of God, the word of truth?

This is not the word of man. But here is the working. The movement of God's gracious work.

Not killing, not setting you to do and live. No. But falling upon the work of the implanted faith to look at that which is not saved.

The argument the apostle raises is irrefutable. For in verse 9, if the ministration of condemnation be ruled this, which undoubtedly it was, was a glory that had never been seen before.

Moses had had close contact with Jehovah on occasions before this, but his face had never shone.

[24 : 00] And God met with him originally at the burning bush. Moses had feared to go near him, because it was the glory of God.

But that glory then was never reflected. And God restrained and restricted him. And on other occasions when God met Moses and sent him to meet Pharaoh.

He never read of this glory being reflected in the face of Moses. This was the occasion that God intended the glory of his holy Lord to shine forth for all generations.

Now, behind all this, therefore, is the purpose of God to make his holy law glorious. For this reason, that his people, proving themselves utterly incompetent to fulfill it, must have revealed to them another glory in the law for fellow, Christ Jesus.

And this is the ministration that he goes on to speak of, much more that the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

[25 : 31] What is this ministry or the ministry of righteousness? What did he preach? What was his one determination?

No other name, Christ. No other person, no other righteousness.

He makes it abundantly clear all the way through, and so do his fellow preachers. And this is the one great objective, the ministration of righteousness, which is life-giving, which is feelable, if there is such a word, which can be understood and received, written in the fleshing tables of the heart.

This isn't the ministration of self-righteousness, the exhortation of the creature. This is not saying something that may or may not be.

Secondly, it is the full gospel declaration that the ministration of righteousness is glorious. In fact, it exceeds in glory.

[26 : 55] That is, it exceeds the glory of the old law, which things were done away as the earlier verse 7 tells us.

Now, to come back to our text, therefore, these are our first thoughts of the weight of glory, which is in the middle of this text.

Worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Now, that's it. Here we must pause and ask ourselves this question.

In what form shall we put the question? Shall we say, do our afflictions work for us, a sense of our insufficiency?

Do our convictions, knowledge of ourselves, God has given, bring us to feel our death, complete inability to do any good thing in His sight?

[28 : 11] Is it true what we have just shown, that trials make the promise sweet, and trials give new life to prayer? Trials bring us to His feet?

Lay us low and keep us there. Is that true? Because it's really the sum and substance of the whole matter, isn't it?

Now, this working, therefore, is whilst we look not at the things which are seen. Now, if we're going to look at the things which are seen in this matter of the Gospel, where are we going to get?

If you're going to look at yourself, your capabilities, your sufficiencies, if you're going to look inside for some good thing toward God, and some inbred holiness, if you're going to wait until you're better, as the hymn writer says, are you on the right road?

Are you looking in the right direction? Do you really know at heart, if you're looking at the things which are not seen, the answer to all these questions is no.

[29 : 38] I shall never find any betterment in myself. If God has wrought in your heart the Spirit of the letter, and written it in the fleshy tables of your heart, really at heart, and the time has got to come when you'll have to admit it, though you may be loath to do so now, that there, like Paul said, in me, that is, in my sex, dwelleth no good thing.

And what was this work in you? What is the outcome of it? Can it be lost? Is this teaching partial?

Or is this for love? Does this teaching stop all of a sudden?

a sense of unworthiness leave us? Or is it God's purpose that the administration of righteousness should be exceeding glorious to us on this account that we are more and more unworthy of His mercy and faith?

In other words, we do what John Baptist said, we decrease. He must increase, but I must decrease.

[31 : 20] Now these things cannot therefore be written in the fleshy tables of our heart, without we're thoroughly persuaded of them. I do not say they're always there in the same degree, but they are lessons ruled by the Holy Spirit never to be forgotten.

And they are lessons essential to a knowledge of the exceeding glorious righteousness which is preached in the Gospel.

And that righteousness is the righteousness of Christ. This man is all thought of righteousness himself, and the two are never brought together.

This is the great error which Satan broaches, and has broached through generations, the visions of the coming together of your righteousness, and the righteousness of Christ, intermingling, being interwoven, so that there's some of it yours, and some of it Christ's.

And this deadly error has brought many into eternal position. No clear line between the two. Trusting in self or something base, instead of trusting sovereign grace.

[32 : 49] I say, to see this clear distinction in your youth is no small burden. Thus not one thread of your righteousness will ever be woven in the righteousness of Christ.

Not one. Now you won't disapprove of this. You will heartily agree with it. And for this reason, that the two are not comparable, they're not the same.

One is sinful. The old law was that a linen and wooden garment should not be wool.

We hear much today about nylon and wool, a mixture. They go together, so far as we're concerned, with clothing, but they have to be admitted by the law of the land, and the trade act, that they are what they are.

And therefore we have a clear understanding of the two. So, do we have with the linen and the woolen garment, which God prepared.

[34 : 09] Now this very ancient figure brings us to say that our own righteousness is not to be mingled with the righteousness of Christ.

But let us come back to the point, it's to be worked in us. You've got to learn it yourself. It's got to be by God's teaching, and the letter, the ministration of righteousness.

It's something that you cannot teach yourself, and I cannot teach you. It's God's gracious work worketh in us, the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Now this is part of the lesson, therefore, which the apostle begins to unfold in this third chapter. He goes on to speak, Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech.

This is very like Paul. But you notice the word hope that he uses of himself.

[35 : 34] He doesn't say, Seeing then that I have such assurance, and such utter confidence. He says, I believe what some of you here could truthfully say, seeing then that we have such hope.

Hope in what? Why? In the righteousness of Christ. Perfect. And I was saying only last Sabbath, wasn't I? I think so.

Speaking of the bride of Christ. And her garment. That it was without wrinkle, heart, blemish, or any such thing.

Now here lies the glory of it, which must be felt and realized in the individual heart. But you see, it takes time. And you can't listen to one sermon too many on this subject, under God's blessing.

It is so vast. And yet, it's in his hands to teach by degrees and unfold the reality of it in all its beauty.

[36 : 55] And the hope that the apostle had enabled him to use great plainness of speech. In the ministration of the glorious doctrine of the righteousness of Christ.

That which covers a guilty sinner who is condemned by the law of Moses, and that law was glorious. And it is a fulfillment of it by the person of Christ.

And it is all prevailing merit and righteousness that is now the good news of salvation. That Christ was mighty cursed.

He was mighty cursed. He was actually cursed. And this gave the death. But it is so obvious. Therefore in eternal we■■ to christ, And this gives much credence to the cross of Christ, or wherever he was crucified.

To the Israelites, like Absalom, for example, who was caught in the hope, he was cursed. Though the Lord Jesus Christ was my sin, he endured the cross, he was my life for cur.

[39 : 00] And this honors the Holy Lord God in every jot and tittle, that the ministration of this man is the exceeding righteousness of the gospel.

And there is nothing to exceed it. It is the full gospel. Seeing therefore we have such hope, we don't fear anyone.

There's the apostle in effect. We use plainness of speech, you can't misunderstand what I say. And we must remember that he wasn't preaching to people like I am.

How full of prejudice as they were then. People that were immersed in Jewish law. They still are.

He was speaking to people who were quite ready to stop. But this did not alter the glorious declaration of this gospel, which he calls the ministration of righteousness.

- [40 : 18] He used great plainness of speech. He wasn't afraid, through God's grace, to declare this remarkable doctrine. He was speaking to people who were quite ready to stop.

Then he comes back in verse 13 to speak of Moses and the veil over his face. And the blinding of Israel.

And the veil not taken away from Israel. That is, that they are still under the law as a nation. Then he comes down to this. Nevertheless, when it or they shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

And when this veil is taken away, as with all Jews whose eyes are open to see Christ, where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

So that this is a part of the glory that the Apostle is speaking of, and a very great part, and a part that concerns us here we know.

- [41 : 24] Now, to come to the word wait. We are able, I believe, to assess this as waiting.

Not something that we can't carry. Not something that we are afraid to declare. Not something that we don't understand.

Nevertheless, something waiting, solid, real. The imputation of the righteousness of Christ to the Church of God.

Waiting. Now, this wait. Is like all waits. You can feel.

It's written in the fleshy papers of your heart. That it is. Waiting. In this sense. That it's entirely true. There is a wait in truth.

- [42 : 28] We speak of words carrying conviction. We can say, and do say, you could tell that that person was speaking the truth.

You can, can't you? There's a wait. You can tell when the children are speaking the truth, don't you? There's a wait. There's a wait. There's a wait.

You know, it might be that there is a wrong. But you can tell that they're telling the truth. There's a wait in their little words. It was so with Paul's meditation.

And let me say this. You can tell whether there's any wait in what I say. I know that. I'm not unaware that your judgments are fully capable of assessing the weight of the gospel.

You know whom God has taught, whom command into light to shine out of your darkness, who shine into your heart.

- [43 : 37] You can tell whether there's a wait in this glorious truth. It is the wait of glory, but it is eternal.

Eternal wait of glory. Now, it means to say that it won't finish here below. Well, if it did, if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we should be of all men most miserable.

Look here as the apostle came towards the latter days of his ministry as we were speaking in Philipians. And he wasn't far from his latter days.

He wasn't far here from the end of his journey, I suppose, what? Three or four years. But it was this that he declared then, that he looked.

Yes. He looked for that eternal wait of glory. He himself puts it like this. Whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are unseen.

- [45 : 02] And he declared to Timothy, I have finished my course. Henceforth there is laid out for me a crown of glory, which the Lord shall give unto me at that day.

And not to me only, but to all those from love and superior. This was his hope to see the face of martyrdom.

He can't enter into it, but there it stood with all its brilliance and glory, shining forth in the dear man of God as he approached his end.

Well, it is not confined to it. And even if it was, it would still be true. But it isn't confined to the New Testament. David's great assertion is this, he will give grace and glory.

Can we look at the things which are not seen? What? Beyond the clouds? Beyond the river? What to Dr. Walsh's sweet fields beyond the spreading flood that stand clothed in verdant green?

[46 : 25] Can we look across? Can we look to that eternal weight of glory? We can't see it.

Not with our mortal eyes have we beheld the world, but do have a light of friction and trial.

The present pathway. Are they preparing us for this? Are they working in us? This weaning from time thing? Are they?

And this weaning often takes a lifetime. It is this, eternal.

How can poor earthbound creatures assess the weight of eternal glory? How can they?

[47 : 24] By the ministration of the Spirit. And only by that. And as the weight of this glorious righteousness of Christ is revealed to them, so in measure and degree do they feel the weight of that eternal glory which is prepared.

There are one or two beautiful words with regard to this. You turn out to chapter 5. We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Here the weight of glory is described in human language, so to speak. a building of God, a house, as distinct from a tabernacle.

A tabernacle was movable. So is our tabernacle. Our earthly tabernacle certainly is movable. It will be taken down.

But a tabernacle wasn't taken down and burnt at a crematorium. A tabernacle is taken down and reassembled.

[49 : 04] We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Oh yes, this tabernacle must be dissolved.

But he goes on to declare, we have a building, a house not made with hands. I say, is not this glorious?

Is not there an eternal weight about this? Is it not our mercy that Paul goes on to speak like this? Almost word for word from the 14th of John.

Though it wasn't written then and Paul had never read it. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself.

That where I am, there ye may be also. Same truth. It's not this the weight.

[50 : 09] We are committed to look at it with the eye of faith. Whilst we look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen.

I go to prepare a place. we have a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

written on the fleshy tables of the heart under the glorious ministration of the gospel and the grace of God that this is eternal.

We will not go on into this fifth chapter, but do read it when you get home and see the confidence of the dear man of God in verse 7 of chapter 5.

And it will come into your path by idea of not, for we walk by sight but not by sight. We walk by sight and not by sight.

[51 : 21] Now this is the trend of his thoughts. And these light afflictions and these tests and trials which we have to pass here if they are of God they will work in us these things.

We shall not go into them and come out as we went in. We shall be bettered by the cross. Yes? We shall be taught by the cross.

You know as well as I do that you can turn to innumerable scriptures. Turn to the message 12th of Hebrews.

Therefore seeing we've come just about the path of so great and cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us. And so on.

Now this is the path and this is the eternal weight of glory but contingent upon this whilst or while.

[52 : 36] failure to look in this way of the things which are not faith means there's no lesson is learned.

Failure for as regards a living faith in the word of God and the way of God means that there's no profit in the lesson.

We may hold it in the judgment but unless it works in us as it says in this text of far more here again I haven't got time have I there's no need for me to come to these things that this learned man he can't put in the word he says far more far more and this is left with us to assess this far more we never measure that but this is God's word far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory whilst we look at the things which are not seen and these are the things as I commenced to say this morning which God is doing has done as for the case of his people Israel getting things ready putting things in their proper place working to quote finally the apostles well known word for we know that all things work together for good for those that love

God for those who are the called according to Israel that God will go by to Israel and for the