

ARM Prison Outreach International

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BAD NEWS ... GOOD NEWS --- II CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

A message about God's answers for our worst fears.

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the 3rd email sermon of 2004 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers and Christian workers around the world. This message develops the idea that some of our worst fears are "bad news" that is MORE than overcome by the "Good News" of Christ's Gospel. It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach. Use it as a devotional, edit it, share it, use it or components of it! May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

BAD NEWS ... GOOD NEWS

II CORINTHIANS 4:16-18

Open: A beautiful red sports car plunges off 5th floor of parking garage! When the owner returns to drive home, the attendant tells him, "I've got bad news and good news. The bad news is that your car fell to street from the fifth floor." With pain and disbelief in his voice, the owner begs, "What is the good news?" Said the attendant, "It got over 100 miles to the gallon on the way down!"

Life is full of mixed blessings. No event is so good that it doesn't have its drawbacks. No situation is so bad that it doesn't have at least some blessing or advantage tucked inside somewhere. It's not easy, but we ought to be like the fellow who saw a silver lining in the cloud when his new sports car crashed to the street. It did get the best gas mileage ever on the way down!

In our text today, Paul is giving us a good news/bad news message.

2 Cor 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (NIV)

1. BAD NEWS: YOUR BODY IS DYING. GOOD NEWS: YOUR REAL SELF IS ALIVE FOREVER. 16

• Are people today pre-occupied with their physical bodies? Some seem to be totally obsessed with their external appearance, while others are concerned about their

organs' health. Still others are at the other end of the spectrum: they don't seem to care about their appearance or health! The Christian view is to be a good steward of what God has given without being overly concerned about fads, fashions, or failed follicles. (That is a fancy way of saying hair loss shouldn't be considered tragic.)

- Non-Christians typically today are unduly concerned with their physical appearance and health while not nearly concerned enough with where their spirit will spend eternity! They're tanning to correct the color of their skin when the color of their heart is what really counts. They're shaping their muscles when the shape of their loyalty to the creator is what really counts.

- Physically, we are all dying. Good stewardship demands we do not unjustifiably hasten the process by careless habits and omissions. But our only hope is in the spirit realm, in the next world. Every muscle man of the 18th century is now dead. The most beautiful women of the roaring 20's are either dead -- or very wrinkled. Physically, we are dying. But we do not lose heart. We do not faint. We do not lose our courage, our drive, and our motivation to live. Why? Good news! The good news is this: In Christ, our spirits will live, thrive, and flourish forever!

Call to mind the obvious lesson of Luke 12:15-31.

15 Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop.

17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.'

19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'

21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.

23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!

25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest?

27 "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these.

28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith!

29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.

30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.

31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

Seeking his kingdom first is investing primarily in the relationship with the creator. The things that God will add are the things we need for the short time we are on earth. Bad news, good news.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

2. BAD NEWS: CURRENT SUFFERING... GOOD NEWS: COMING GLORY! 17

• Paul makes it clear that it not only pays to serve Jesus. It hurts! Current suffering! Some think the Christian life is the road to avoid suffering. We do avoid some kinds of pain. I have never known the pain of a hangover nor the pain of watching my kids go hungry because I gambled all my paycheck away. But there is suffering in this life for the believer. Consider these scriptures:

Matt 13:20 The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. 21 But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (NIV)

Matt 24:9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Acts 14:22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Acts 20:23 I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

24 However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. (NIV)

1 Pet 4:12 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.

13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.

Paul says our 'light' affliction ... momentary. That is the key. Of course, our momentary is microwave style. Someone said that impatience is standing in front of the microwave set on 20 seconds and shouting 'hurry up, hurry up!'

In a perspective of all eternity, our troubles here are short in duration. It doesn't seem like it. I know. But this is where faith kicks in and gives us staying power because we know that while the bad news is current suffering, the good news is coming glory.

Rom 8:17-18

17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

3. BAD NEWS: VISIBLE DISCOURAGES/ GOOD NEWS: INVISIBLE ENCOURAGES! 18

When we look at what we can see, we are discouraged. I know, I looked in the mirror this morning! So Paul recommends looking at the invisible instead. Contradiction of terms?? Look at the invisible? He means, of course, to focus on the intangibles. Faith, hope, and love to name the big three. We look to God, not mammon. To zero in on heaven, not this temporary earth.

2 Cor 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (NIV)

Do you remember the story of Elisha and Gehazi and the invisible army? II Kings 6:14-17

Then the king sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city. When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked. "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, "O LORD, open his eyes so he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

TWO MEN LOOKED OUT OF PRISON BARS... ONE SAW MUD, THE OTHER... STARS! Where are you looking?

Where we fix our attention makes a lot of difference in how we feel, the degree of our courage, and the hope (or lack thereof) with which we face our future.

Heb 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

2 Let us **fix our eyes** on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Paul said in 2 Cor 5:7 we should walk by faith not sight. Picture in your mind the cutest baby you ever saw. Does that not bring a smile to your heart, if not your face? We can control our focus; our imagination cannot be imprisoned. We choose our focus. Paul says, "Look at the invisible."

The bad news is that everything you can see with the human eye is decaying, rusting, getting flabbier, or deteriorating somehow. The good news is this: What can't be seen with the human eye is more real, durable, and dependable than the visible.

What can you see with your physical eyes? Houses ... cars ... trees ... the sky ... even your loved ones' faces. Did you note that these are all, in themselves, discouraging? The house will grow old, eventually decay. So will the car. So will the tree. So will the faces of your loved ones. But the good news is that the faces of your loved ones can radiate Jesus! They can remind you of the invisible traits of love, faith, loyalty, and hope. So it is these invisible gifts of our Creator that bring encouragement. Even when it's difficult to see them, even when buried out of view for centuries, we can know, thru Christ, their value and power will eventually be seen.

4. BAD NEWS: THE SEEN IS TEMPORARY... GOOD NEWS: THE UNSEEN IS ETERNAL! 18B

- Out of sight is out of mind... Too often true. And our tendency to forget about what we can't see causes us to remember what ought to be forgotten and forget what needs to be remembered.

- But a part of Christian maturity is focusing on the reality that this world--with its lusts and its treasures and its sorrows and its cheap thrills -- is passing away. And what is coming is the eternal, unshakable kingdom of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

- If you can see it, it won't last. This was a comfort to the first century Christians yet is considered as bad news by 20th century Christians. Why the difference? How was it a comfort to the first century Christians? Their lives were filled with persecution, hostile soldiers, and endless physical disappointments. To learn that this would all pass was good news. We look at our houses and cars and lands and goods amassed. And we aren't comforted by the truth that what we see won't last. We too

often have our roots too deep in this earth. We have forgotten that this world is not our home, for we are just passing thru. Our real treasures are invisible. Laid up somewhere beyond the blue.

A young widow was weeping as she looked out the north window of her home. She was looking at the two-month-old tombstone of her recently deceased life mate. Her mind raced with a thousand thoughts and sorrows as she remembered her late husband's untimely death. He was only 34. Sadness welled up in her like a flood. About that time, her kindly father placed his loving arm on her shoulder. Seeing her focus, he pointed to the east window in the room. "Look there, Johnny has found some flowers!" She turned to see her precious son, age 4, happily collecting fresh spring wildflowers, the first of the season. The joyous picture of his smiling face and God's handiwork brought an unexpected smile on her tear-stained face. Said her father, "Precious daughter, when life overwhelms, remember that God has another window for you. There is always hope in our Lord Jesus."

Most of our disappointments here are due to a wrong perspective, a wrong focus. We just have mistakenly chosen to look out the wrong window. The Good News is that with the Risen Lord, there is ALWAYS ANOTHER WINDOW. A WINDOW OF HOPE!