

I was talking to a woman a few weeks ago and she said she had been upstairs reading while her husband was downstairs watching football. "I could hear him shouting at the television" she said. "I just don't get it!" I'm sorry but I can't understand why she doesn't get it. When you are watching football or rugby on the TV of course you shout.

Then I remember a bit further back talking to a man whose wife had become a Christian. "She has changed" he said, "don't get me wrong she has changed for the better. But I don't understand where she is coming from. I don't understand what this Christian thing is all about."

As people we see things differently don't we. It is too simplistic to say men and women see things differently but often we do. But also we find that when we become Christians we begin to see things differently. Last week we were looking at how we come to faith, as it says in 2 Cor 4:6, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ." That is by the work of the Holy Spirit God the Father opens our eyes to see and understand who he is through his son Jesus.

Knowing God changes how we view things.

It affects the way we view the whole of life, birth, life and death, joy and sorrows, tears and happiness. As an old hymn puts it "Heav'n above is softer blue, Earth around is sweeter green! Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen."

As we look at today's passage from 2 Corinthians we recognise that Paul, the Christian leader and preacher, saw himself and his world in a very different way from many of those who would have been living around him.

Last week we saw how Paul despite lots of pressures and problems said "we do not lose heart" (2 Cor 4:1) as we share the gospel 1. because it is God's work; 2. because of God's power and 3. because he had faith.

Now, as he looks at his own life, he says again "we don't lose heart (2 Cor 4:16).

What Paul you don't lose heart even though you are getting old – no we don't.

Not with all the suffering you have been through – no.

Surely as you face death that must cause you some consternation – no a bit of it.

So Paul what's the secret?

Paul's answer would be where is your focus in life? Is your focus earth or heaven? Is it now or eternity?

What we see in these verses is that Paul saw the whole of life in the light of eternity and that affected how he looked at life.

Paul would say to us here in Christ Church this morning and those who will read this on the website or listen on download, the secret is, (2 Cor 4:18) “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.”

The light of God had opened his eyes to see that this world and all that is in it is temporary and it is only the things of God that are lasting. That then affected his view of the whole of life and I want to suggest this morning that if we are followers of Jesus it can and indeed should affect the way we view life.

Paul said we don't lose heart because we know this world and all that is in it is temporary but through it we enter into the eternal presence of God. So we view all that happens to us now in the light of heaven towards which we are going.

1. it affected how he viewed aging v16

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

Well I would think all of us would agree at least with part of that verse, we know we are getting older. I wonder how you view the aging process.

You may remember the 2010 John Lewis advert, which in about 90 seconds shows one woman's path of life from birth to old age accompanied by the Billy Joel song, 'She's always a woman'.

Being an advert it gives a very rosy view of the aging process. There is nothing about the aches and pains, the endless visits to doctors, opticians and so on.

Let me ask, how do you view getting old? Some one once said the most frightening thing about middle age is knowing you will grow out of it.

So what does Paul say here? Clearly he was experiencing the aches and pains of old age. But while the outer shell of his body was failing the inner heart, his life with God was continually being renewed by the Holy Spirit. The flesh was weak but the spirit was more than willing. His daily walk with Jesus kept his heart alive to God and so, despite his frustrations over his weakness and frailty, he continued in the task that God had given him not losing heart. The unseen work of God in his life affected the way he looked at things. Yes getting old was a pain but it wasn't the most important thing.

So how about you? Do you live in fear of getting old or are you like Paul able to so say that while it may take me a bit longer each day to crank up my body and get it going my heart each day is filled by God's love and by a desire to serve and please him. Where is the focus on my body or my life with God?

2. it affected how he viewed suffering v17

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”

On balance, Paul said, the hope of heaven far outweighs or the pressures, pains and problems I have had to go through. Really Paul what all that stuff we can see over in 2 Cor 6:4&5?

Let’s be clear Paul suffered and he suffered a lot but here he says I see all my sufferings as light and momentary in the light of heaven. Yes the sufferings were real but were short lived in comparison with the eternal rest that would be his and were not to be compared to the joy that would one day be his. Suffering may well have caused Paul to give up preaching the gospel but it didn’t. He didn’t lose heart. The hope of heaven kept him going despite the suffering he faced.

But what about us? Paul would encourage us to take the long term view and in the face of our suffering, real and painful as it might be, to say one day all this will be behind me, one day I will be with the Lord Jesus Christ and “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev 21:4)

However all of this depended on Paul’s view of death and as we move into chapter 5 we see how his focus on the unseen, on heaven affected Paul’s view of death.

3. it affected how he viewed death 5:1-10

There are some strong words here “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven” v1. Then, “we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord”.

We know, we are confident. Why did Paul have such confidence, well because of v7, “We live by faith, not by sight. That faith was based on the empty tomb, the eye witnesses of the risen Jesus and the direct intervention of Jesus himself in Paul’s life. Through these things he was convinced that Jesus had risen and so death was not the end. Further, it was based on the promises of God, which he has just spoken of in 4:14, “because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.” He trusted the promises of God that as Christ was raised so those who believe in him will also be raised to a new and fuller life.

Paul had a confidence and knowledge that stemmed from faith in God and his word.

So he did not view death with foreboding. With Paul there was no Woody Allen type hesitation of the “I am not afraid of death I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”

Rather Paul embraced the idea of dying and saw it as the entry into life, life eternal and life as God intended. Death for Paul was coming home to be with his Heavenly Father – what was not to like?

No wonder in Phil 1:21 he wrote “for me to live is Christ to die is gain”.

So again I ask what about us?

Watching the storms battering the country and especially the problems in Dawlish took me back many years to when we used to holiday there. Before we set out my Mum would ensure we were as ready for the journey as we could be, been to the toilet and so on. I'm sure most of us now setting out on a long journey will get prepared.

It makes me wonder if we are prepared for the journey through death?

Do we have the confidence that Paul had that our journey will end up in us coming home to our heavenly Father? If so on what do we place that confidence? Paul said "we know" and it was because of his faith in what God the Father had done through his son's death on the cross.

Are you confident? If not then now is the time to make preparations for that journey because this life is as Paul says temporary and heaven eternal. So to focus on the unseen helps us think about and prepare for our own death.

4. it affected how Paul lived 5:2-10

We see in these verses how Paul's focus on eternity affected how he lived in the here and now.

a. there was a longing, v2-5

In v2&3 he says, "Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked."

He is describing dying like putting an overcoat over our present birthday suit. The laying of our body in the ground doesn't mean we are bodiless souls because we will have a new resurrection body. But note he uses the word longing. Tired of that same old body which always let's you down? Tired of having to take it in to be repaired and patched up? Well here is the new super model that will not wear out, and will not know pain or weakness or infirmity. There is the longing which Paul expresses as he faced death. But then he uses a different analogy in v8 where he says I "would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord". Here is the longing to be at home. It is a great picture that heaven, far from being something strange is like coming home. As we face death Paul says we are on our journey home. We all know that longing at the end of the working day, a long journey or a holiday just to get home. That is what Paul is describing here. Whether life is tough or life is great heaven is going to be much better, heaven is what we are being prepared for and Paul says we should long to be there. How does that resonate with you?

If life is tough then our prayer must be that God would give us strength to cope with the struggles we have and that he would help us focus beyond today to all he has for us in heaven – strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow!

However, that is not where many of us are at. For many of us life is good. It is then I think we struggle to have a longing for heaven. We find it hard to imagine anything better than having fun with our children or grandchildren, sitting on a bench looking out on a lovely view, a nice walk on a

summer's day or whatever floats your boat. Often life is good and so as Paul put it in 2 Cor 4:4 "the god of this age blinds our minds" the seen becomes all important and all sufficient. Often it is only when the good things are taken away that we begin to look at eternity and we begin to long for heaven. Can I make a simple suggestion here? When we are enjoying something nice it may only be a cup of tea or glass of wine that we say "God thank you for this moment it is great but I long to drink with you in eternity the new wine of the Kingdom". If we don't have a longing for heaven it may be because we are too caught up in the things of this world.

b. there was a confidence v6-8. This is what we have been seeing. Paul was confident of heaven and that helped him deal with the ups and downs of life.

His certain hope of eternal life helped him look life in the eye and continue no matter what. He had a confidence that helped him through those hard and bitter moments.

c. there was a goal v9-10

Paul's goal in everything was to please his Heavenly Father. He did that because he knew that one day he would be held accountable for how he had lived his life as a follower of Jesus. Not that his salvation was in doubt or his place in heaven but that one day we will have to give an account to our heavenly Father of how we have used the life and gifts he has given us. "It reminds us we have been saved not for a life of aimlessness or indifference but for a life of serving the Lord" (Barnett p104)

We make it our goal to please him. What will please my Heavenly Father was central to Paul's thinking as he focused on eternity on the unseen. The danger for us even as Christians is that we seek to please people rather than God. As we think about sharing our faith we are more concerned with what people will think of us than with how God sees us. I'm not saying we should ride roughshod over people and their feelings but I am suggesting that our aim should be to please our Heavenly Father and we do that as we live and speak in ways that bring honour to him.

Paul said we don't lose heart because we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen. That perspective helped him cope with aging and suffering. It gave him a confidence in the face of death and it affected his daily life so that he had a real longing to be in heaven, a confidence that he would one day be there and a goal to please his heavenly father in every way in the mean time. We live by faith and not by sight. May God help us to do just that.

