

Sunday, March 1, 2020

2 Corinthians 5:6-16 Motivation for Ministry

Series: 2 Corinthians

Sermon: Ministry Motivation—2 Corinthians 5:6-16

Verse: *2 Corinthians 5:6-7 ESV So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.*

Description: Eternity. As Christians we believe in “forever,” not just as cute words in a love song, but as our future reality in the kingdom of God. The challenge we face is, do we live every day like “forever” is true? Is it on our minds? Do we see people in light of eternity? The Apostle Paul had deep, deep convictions about such things, and these convictions motivated him in his ministry for Jesus Christ. He walked by faith, not by sight. Future judgment, the fear of the Lord, and the love of Christ—all such things compelled him to speak of Christ to the church and the world, and to persevere in this life of faith.

Introduction

How many of you on this east side of the room **heard my sermon** last week?

Why aren't you **sitting on the west side**?

Did you forget that the west side is the resurrected, eternal, glorified body side??

(If you missed the sermon, check out www.stonebrook.org)

Last week I mentioned the **challenge** for me in preparing sermons.

And while sermon preparation is hard work, **I love it**.

One reason I love it is that the Holy Spirit challenges and helps me to grow.

As I study and pray and think and talk with others, almost always I am inspired to grow in some way. Almost every time.

I **value** the time spent in prayer, sometimes **desperate prayer**, to understand and believe the Lord's Word. And to obey it.

That is a work of the Holy Spirit in us.

Today's passage and **sermon** is no exception.

I've been challenged, having my eyes opened wider to the reality of eternity.

To be stirred freshly... that **this life will soon be over**, and only what is done by faith will matter.

English missionary C.T. Studd from the 1800's wrote in a poem:

Only one life, it will soon be past,

Only what's done for Christ will last.

Studd believed that his service to Jesus Christ mattered **not only** for this life here but into in eternity.

“What's done for Christ...will last!”

This is **remarkable**. Everything done by faith in and for Jesus **matters**.

From the smallest, least noticeable task like changing a diaper on your child to the greatest feat of evangelism. If it's done in service to Jesus, it matters.

And whatever is not done for Jesus and in Jesus, it simply...will...not...matter.

...That is a sobering thought to me.

Studd was really simply trying to imitate the Apostle Paul.

Perhaps more than any other Christian in the past 2000 years, Paul had a perspective on eternal things that shaped his entire life.

We will read Paul's heart today.

My prayer this week has been that our hearts--- every heart here this morning---would be **captivated** by the reality of eternity in Jesus.

And because of that, we would speak and live for him.

PRAY

Lord, by faith we believe that you exist.

That you are holy, powerful, and merciful.

By your mercy and kindness, help us this morning to understand and believe what is eternal. What matters. What will last. What pleases you.

Amen.

If you have a Bible, turn to 2 Corinthians 5. [page 966]

Introduce self.

I am Brad Barrett, one of the pastors here at Stonebrook. Welcome!

Review

We are in Week 6 of a sermon series going through a section of a letter written by one of God's spokesmen named **Paul**. He wrote this letter to a church in ancient Greece. A city called **Corinth**. It was the **second letter** of his that we have in the Scriptures, so we not surprisingly call it 2nd Corinthians.

Throughout this letter, Paul is explaining and defending his **role** and **heart** as an apostle for Jesus. Paul is suffering extensively... being persecuted because he is proclaiming Jesus to the world.

This suffering makes Paul look weak and unauthoritative to the Corinthian church.

Last week we looked at this key verse:

2 Corinthians 4:7 ESV But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

This **treasure** of the truth of God, the **message of faith**, that God wants to reconcile sinners to himself...this is a **greater treasure** than the largest pile of gold and jewels.

Paul is the carrier of the message, and he carries it in his earthly, fragile, frail body—this “*jar of clay*.”

Why does the Lord entrust his treasure to something as weak as Paul and you and me?

Paul tells us why: to show God's surpassing power. The power of the living God through the working of the Holy Spirit is on full display in our lives.

And Paul **contrasts** earthly, temporary things with heavenly, eternal things.

2 Corinthians 5

Now in today's passage, he continues that discussion.

Vs. 6-7

We finished here last week.

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight.

In light of eternal things that are coming, including **a life free** from tears and suffering and death, and new, glorified, resurrected bodies in the presence of Almighty God, Paul has courage in his ministry.

He doesn't lose heart.

He **walks by faith**, not by sight.

He walks with a **confidence** and **conviction** that eternal things about God and his Son Jesus are true. They will happen. Paul will be in glory forever and ever.

So Paul is deeply persuaded that what **ultimately matters** cannot be seen with our eyes. It is invisible to us now.

This life of faith is **not natural** for us.

The life that sees what is unseen and heavenly and eternal is **unusual**. But it is the only true, meaningful life.

Any life lived with just this life in view is **short sighted** and is, in a real sense, **a life of blindness**.

Such a life misses the very heartbeat of God...the **very purpose** for our existence and our salvation.

To live a life by faith and not by sight... a life filled with convictions about unseen and eternal things... happens more and more as we let **God's Word wash over us**, like waves on the seashore.

The Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts takes the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, and **penetrates** our hearts and our minds, **transforming** us from the inside out.

So by faith we rely upon the Lord. We trust what he says. We lean on him whom we cannot see...yet.

This is the walk of faith.

Vs. 8-10

8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

By faith, Paul continues this **gaze** into eternity.

Vs. 8. Paul is referring to the earthly body and the heavenly body. Home on the earth and home in heaven with the Lord.

Remember from last week: Those sitting on the East Side represent the earthly. The temporary.

Those on the West Side represent the heavenly and eternal.

Paul would rather be on the West Side.

Vs. 9 is remarkable. He says whether he is here on earth or in heaven, he has one aim. He has one goal in life: **to please the Lord**.

This is a remarkable **life purpose**: He lives to please the Lord.

Some of you had **unpleasable parents**. No matter how hard you worked, it was never good enough.

The Lord is NOT like that. When a child of his offers up simple deeds done by faith, he is pleased and honored.

Story: When my two-year old grandson scribbles out a Crayon drawing for me, I love it! I am pleased. His artwork compared to some of you is atrocious. But he gave to me all that he had to offer from his limited abilities.

Vs. 10 Why is pleasing the Lord his one aim? He believes by faith (not by sight) that he will stand before Jesus Christ someday to **be judged**.

What will he be judged for? *“For what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.”* What he has done with his life on earth.

Whether he has lived for Jesus or not.

Whether he has loved others like Jesus or not.

Now for you who **believe** in Jesus, vs. 10 might make you nervous.

“What do you mean I will be judged? I thought Jesus took care of my sins? He was punished in my place. Why will I be judged, and for what?”

Simply, this is **not** a judgment of condemnation for sin.

In about the same year he wrote to the Corinthians, he also wrote to the church in Rome.

In Romans 8:1, *“There is therefore now no condemnation now for those who are in Christ..”*

This is **very important** to know this. If you are in Jesus, you will never be condemned.

Now that we are in an eternal relationship with Jesus, and adopted as sons and daughters of God Almighty, everything we do by faith can **bring pleasure** to the Lord.

We can please the Lord.

And when we do, the Lord will **honor** and **reward** us.

What FORM these rewards will be we are not sure.

But the Lord is extraordinarily **generous**, and his rewards for faithful service to him will be beyond anything you can imagine.

They will make **any suffering** in this life for Jesus completely worth it all.

This gives meaning to everything we do by faith. From the smallest and least noticeable service to the greatest, seemingly most spiritual activity.

Many of us are quite ambitious.

We need to be ambitious for the right things.

Our **#1 ambition** in life ought to be to please the Lord.

To walk by faith. To serve him.

And to anticipate that he will graciously and generously reward us someday soon.

Vs. 11-13

11 Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.

*12 We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart.
13 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you.*

Vs. 11 Paul feared the Lord.

We might ask, “**What’s that about?** Aren’t we all about loving God? I thought fearing God was just Old Testament stuff.”

First, fearing the Lord is New Testament AND Old Testament stuff.

It’s right here. Paul said it.

In fact, fearing the Lord is **mentioned 20 times in the NT**, from Matthew to Revelation.

Jesus and the Apostles Peter, John, and Paul all speak of it.

So while fearing God and loving God may seem contradictory, **both are clearly biblical**, so it is upon us to sort it out with the help of the Spirit.

We’ll get into this more later.

So back to vs. 11, Paul **fears** the Lord. So what does he do? How does he respond?

He persuades others.

Persuades them to what? I believe Paul is trying to persuade people to turn to Jesus.

Jesus himself said (John 14:6), “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*”

Paul, being **extraordinarily convince eternity is real**... that heaven and hell are real...that the future judgment of Jesus is real....**proclaims** the gospel to anyone who will listen.

Paul knew what was **at stake**. So he was earnestly serious about his life’s mission, wanting to convince others of the truth of Christ.

This was **not a hobby** to Paul. It was his life.

Paul’s **example is stunning**. He was entirely sold out for Jesus.

Everything he did **centered** around Jesus, and what Jesus wanted... because **eternity is real and true**.

Vs. 14-16

*14 For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died;
15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*

16 From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer.

I have about 100 favorite Bible passages, but vs. 14-15 are truly at the top of the list.

These 2 verses have been what I call my “**Life Verses**” for nearly 40 years.

Slide

In fact, I have them tattooed on my right arm!!

(btw, I have worked out a discount with a local tattoo shop for Stonebrook members....just kidding!)

OK, take that off the screen now! 😊

Now, if you’re paying attention, you just caught something in vs. 14 that doesn’t seem to fit.

Paul says the LOVE OF CHRIST compels him.

But in vs. 11, he says he FEARS THE LORD.

How does this work?

We’ll look at this more later. They are not contradictory.

For now, it’s important to hear Paul’s heart and passion.

The love of Christ is a **powerful motivator** for his life’s direction.

It was Christ’s love for us that prompted him to go to the **cross** to die, to take our sin **upon his back**, to be **forsaken** by the Father, be **buried** in a tomb, and to **rise** from the dead into eternal glory.

Jesus now gives life to anyone who believes. That believer in Jesus has new life.

It's like we were **dead on the operating table. Gone.** The heart stopped.

But the surgeon used a defibrillator and brought us back to life. We were dead; now we are alive.

Because Jesus died giving Paul life, Paul now owes his life to Jesus.

Why?

Vs. 15 “*Christ dies for all so that those who now are alive forevermore would no longer live for themselves... no longer live in their **self-centered, God-ignoring ways.** But that they would now live for Jesus who died for their sake.*”

God saves us freely...by grace and grace alone...when we look to Jesus. When we believe in him for life.

It's free. It's grace.

Then once we are saved and have life, God does have some expectations for us.

We are now his. He adopts us into his family. He loves us. He is holy.

So he calls us to walk with him as **beloved children.**

Slide

Ephesians 5:1 ESV Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

This is just like 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Not to earn salvation are we to follow him. But because we are LOVED.

The love of Christ **controlled Paul.**

He now sought to imitate Jesus. To lovingly obey him. To joyfully serve him.

Why would we do anything else?

Christ loved us and died for us, giving us life that we could never attain on our own.

We **owe** our very lives to him.

And **if and when** we are living NOT for him but for ourselves, we need to **take inventory.** What are we missing? What **truths** are we not believing? Has sin **deceived** us?

Vs. 16 Because of all this, Paul says he views people differently.

He doesn't view them the normal human way. “*According to the flesh.*”

He sees people with **heavenly eyes.** Eyes with eternity in mind. Eyes with the judgment of God in mind.

Paul looks past the external and the ordinary, and he knows **their souls matter.**

NEXT WEEK: Matt will continue Paul's flow of thought.

Paul tells us that we should not look at anyone the way that the world does – from outward appearances.

Everyone is either in Christ, and is a new creation as a result, or they are not, and need to be.

All of the old ways of looking at people are gone.

That's next week.

Lessons

So I want to finish up by answering the question, “So what?”

So what does all this have to do with me?

How does it relate? What do I do with this?

Let me offer a few lessons from this short passage.

Slide First Lesson:

Be eternally minded

We talked about this last week because Paul keeps talking about it.

Do you think Paul thinks this is important? YES!

We cannot SEE eternity. We cannot feel it.

But by faith, we believe it is **all true.** It is **as real** as the world we can see and feel here.

We live with one eye on ETERNITY.

Like back in Chapter 4, we **compare our suffering** here with the glory ahead, and we realize even the worst suffering here is **light and momentary** COMPARED TO the glory that awaits us in Jesus.
So we don't lose heart if we suffer for Jesus.

We live with one eye on ETERNITY.

Like in **Chapter 5:1-8**, we long for the day when we will be made whole. Complete. Our bodies will be **transformed** to be like Jesus' body. Immortal. Powerful. Glorious.
This is ours in Christ, so we have **courage**.

We live with one eye on ETERNITY.

It's all true. **Heaven and hell** are real.
We are all going to **die** and end up in another place.
Unbelievers will face a judgment of condemnation.
Believers in Jesus will face a judgment of reward.

Story: We had a funeral here at Stonebrook yesterday. It's another reminder of the **brevity** of life. The end is coming soon for each of us.

So we live with eternity in mind.

How do we do this?

The Scriptures are our ultimate source of truth. We **immerse** ourselves in them.
We pray every morning, "Lord, let me live with eyes of faith, seeing the invisible, seeing beyond this world into the next world."

Slide Second lesson,

Fear the Lord

With the help of the Holy Spirit through the Scriptures, we must develop a healthy understanding of who God is.
We are actually commanded to fear the Lord, even in the NT. Peter said it in 1 Peter 2: "*Fear God.*"

God is so holy and powerful and infinite.

He has a majesty and greatness that is utterly overwhelming. **He is mighty**. He is Creator.
So we tremble.

Slide After seeing the glory and power of God in Israel's deliverance from the Egyptian army, Moses said,
Exodus 15:11 ESV Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?

God is **not our cosmic buddy**. We don't relate to him in the way we would to our spouse or a good friend.
He is transcendent. He is beyond us.

One way to cultivate a greater fear of the Lord is to **ponder** many of the **great stories** in the Scriptures. Reflect on the awesome power of God.

Story: Jesus and his disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a small boat.
A huge storm came up. The boat was being swamped.
The disciples were terrified of dying.

Slide

Mark 4:35-41 ESV

But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?"

Slide

And how did the disciples respond to Jesus stopping the storm?

And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

They were afraid of the storm.

But now they were MORE afraid... afraid of Jesus. For he had **more power and authority** than the storm that threatened their

lives.

When we encounter Jesus Christ in his glory and power, **we will tremble.**

The **reason** Paul fears the Lord is **because of vs. 10:** He will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Paul will **give account** for his life....for the ministry that the Lord assigned to him.

So he lived to **persuade** others about Jesus. He lived to **speak** about eternal life in Jesus.

Everything we do...everything...by faith in Jesus will never be forgotten. He will reward us.
And the good news is, God is **easily pleased.**
He is pleased when we, in childlike faith, trust him.

Too often we are driven by the opinions of people. We **fear** what they think. We worry. We make decisions we shouldn't because we are concerned of their judgment of us.

But the Eternally Minded man and woman is **driven by one desire:** To please the Lord Almighty.
To live for him. To walk with him.

Like Paul, we know the fear of the Lord.

Third lesson,

Be controlled by the love of Christ

Don't be driven by guilt or shame.

Don't be compelled by **fleeting ambitions**--- by pride, a desire to make ourselves look better or more impressive.

Don't be swayed by the opinions of men or women.

Don't be allured by the enticements of this world.

Instead, be controlled by Christ's love.

The **only reason** we have **hope** is because of Jesus.

Without him, we are dead. And dead for all eternity.

We were dead, but now we are alive.

And **the reason we now live** is to no longer live for ourselves but for Jesus.

Because he loves us so, we love him with all our hearts.

And love others.

This makes me think of a story in the Gospels.

There was a crazy man possessed by demons. Many demons. A LEGION of demons.

He could break chains.

He could not be controlled. He ran around naked.

But Jesus set him free from his years of horrific bondage by casting the demons out.

Mark 5:17-20 ESV

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him.

And he did not permit him but said to him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you."

And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.

This man was so happy. So overjoyed. He had **lost his life** from a Legion of demons **ruining him.**

But Jesus graciously and lovingly gave him a new lease on life.

The man **simply wanted to be with Jesus.**

But Jesus sent him on his way. "Go to your city and tell your friends how much the Lord has done for you. How merciful he has been."

No less than that man have we been **set free** and given new life.

What a wonderful picture that is of what Paul is speaking of in Corinthians: *May the love of Christ control us.*

May his love constrain us and squeeze us and dominate us and control us.

Fear vs. Love

Let me take the last few minutes to attempt to explain how we can **LOVE** the Lord and **FEAR** the Lord at the same time.

In my all-time favorite book series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis describes an encounter with Jesus Christ.

In the series, the Lion Aslan represents Jesus. Aslan is powerful and intimidating, yet beautiful and glorious. People long to be with him and touch him, yet they tremble before his glory.

In the last book in the series, *The Last Battle*, the people enter into the eternal Narnia. Narnia's version of heaven. And the characters encounter Aslan.

Let's read this excerpt from the *The Last Battle*:

"... as he spoke the earth trembled. The sweet air grew suddenly sweeter. A brightness flashed behind them. All turned. Tirian turned last because he was afraid. **There stood his heart's desire, huge and real, the golden Lion, Aslan himself**, and already the others were kneeling in a circle round his forepaws and burying their hands and faces in his mane as he stooped his great head to touch them with his tongue.

"Then he fixed his eyes upon Tirian, and Tirian came near, trembling, and flung himself at the Lion's feet, and **the Lion kissed him and said, 'Well done, last of the kings of Narnia who stood firm at the darkest hour.'**" (C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, ch. 13)

I read this scene to my grandchildren a few weeks ago, and I had tears in my eyes.

This is how I picture loving the Lord Jesus AND fearing him.

There is no conflict between the two reactions.

We serve someone so mighty and powerful—the Creator of the heavens—we tremble before him.

We serve someone so tender and kind—the Savior of the world—he is our heart's desire.

Like Tirian, may Jesus Christ be our heart's desire.

May we with trembling, kneel before him and bury our hands and faces in him.

May we seek his rich, powerful, tender blessing.

May we long for him to say, "Well done, dearest one. You stood firm at the darkest hour."