

Why Do We Believe?

Text: 2 Cor 4:13-18

Suggested Hymns:

142, 488, 139, 327, 490

1) The Foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ

2) Faith has a goal

3) The effect of this living faith

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 4:13-18, ¹³ *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak,* ¹⁴ *knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.* ¹⁵ *For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.*

¹⁶ *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.* ¹⁷ *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,* ¹⁸ *while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Why do I believe? Did you ever ask yourself such a simple question? Yet it is one of the most important things we do in our worship and daily living as Christians is to confess before God and one another why we believe.

Every Sunday we make it known in our Worship Service that we believe in *God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.* This includes all things visible and invisible. God is my Maker and your Maker also.

We make it known that we believe in *Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,* Redeemer and Saviour of the world, and my and your personal Saviour.

We make it known that we believe in the Holy Spirit, our Helper and Comforter, on whom we lean when troubles and unbelief plague us.

In these last Sundays of the Trinity season we are reminded again and again that one of these days time is going to end for each one of us and eternity begin. Then what? That all depends on what we believe.

If we believe that God sent His Son Jesus Christ into this dark world of sin and death that the light of His love might shine into our hearts through faith, then we shall see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is what our text wants to make sure for us. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Foundation Of Our Faith Is Jesus Christ

Previous to our text St. Paul states that he is not preaching himself. Well he might have done so, for he was one of the most learned men of his day. There was a time when he did preach himself, telling people that their righteousness consisted in their own fulfilling of the Law.

In this preaching of himself and his own righteousness he became so enthusiastic that he was ready to imprison and kill all people who wanted find their righteousness in such a strange religion as that of Jesus of Nazareth.

But once the Holy Spirit had brought Paul to the living faith, all his self-righteousness became like rubbish, fit only to be taken to the dumping grounds. Through faith in the Gospel the Holy Spirit gave him a real foundation for his faith, a foundation that could not be shaken even though they persecuted him to death.

The Foundation on which our faith and hope rest, says Paul, is the living Christ. This is what makes the apostle Paul so sure of his faith, this is what had overthrown all of his former enthusiasm for the Law and self-righteousness, because he met the living Christ on the way to Damascus.

Our text states it like this, *knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus*. Now he could see how solid his foundation was, for Christ was in it everywhere. It was not a foundation like the foundation of so many other religions he knew, which crumbled away with time because their founders were gone. They were like a building built on the sand, for when the storms and the rains came, there was no foundation to hold it.

But with Christ it was altogether different because He was the living Saviour. Now Paul could understand how Christ could command His disciples to *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*²⁰ *“teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.* Only a living Christ could give such a promise.

This Christ, in whom every believer has the foundation of his faith, is really nothing new at all, though Paul had failed to see and recognise this for a long time. He states in our text,¹³ *And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak.*

Here St. Paul quotes the ancient psalmist. It is interesting to note that the psalmist is speaking under the same conditions as the apostle Paul and the Corinthians are living in. For the psalmist speaks of being greatly afflicted and even saying that *“all men are liars.”*¹

But when he himself considered the foundation on which his faith rested, when he remembered that he was yet to praise the Lord, who was the Health of his countenance and his God, then he said,¹² *What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me? ¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.*

So it made no difference where the apostle Paul looked in God’s Word, everywhere God’s people put their faith in the living Christ, whether it was Adam and Eve after the fall into sin, whether it was Abraham ready to depart into an unknown land, whether it was the prophets or the psalmist — every where people put their trust in the living Christ.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to be assured that the Gospel he was preaching to them was not something new, but was as old as the love of God; and to believe in the Saviour was to have the same spirit of faith as all of God’s people ever had, are now having, or ever will have.

2. Faith Has A Goal

But faith is not an end in itself. It has a goal. All of these grand and glorious things which Paul mentions concerning the living Christ are a wonderful comfort in this world of doubt and decay.

But for the Christian the greatest things are always ahead. Paul puts it this way in our text, *¹⁴ knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.*

Every time the Christian thinks about the change and decay he sees all around him, every time the end of things is remembered and the return of the Lord Jesus comes to his mind, he thinks of the resurrection, first of the resurrection of his Redeemer, then of his own resurrection.

This faith in the resurrection poses all kinds of questions for the Christian. But he has the answers. He is not going to raise himself by his own power or wisdom; this is going to be done by the God who raised up Jesus. The decay of his body is not a gruesome thing but a process in the hands of the omnipotent God.

In the Autumn the gardener plants the lily bulbs. What are you expecting from a bulb? A green stem about 75 cm tall, eventually topped with exquisite white lilies. Who is going to do all that? Who is going to see that bulb through winter's storm and frost? God is going to do that, and how well every gardener realises that.

Now the same God that operates in a lily bulb with His omnipotent power says He wants to do marvellous things with our body. In his great chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, Paul puts it this way, *³⁵ But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" ³⁶ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. ³⁷ And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain -- perhaps wheat or some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.*

⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. ⁴⁵ And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.²

Unbelievable as the resurrection from the dead may seem, Paul makes it plain that these marvellous things prepared by God and carried out by His wisdom and omnipotent power are done for people, for sinful human beings.

Paul says in our text, ¹⁵ *For all things are for your sakes.* Scripture says, *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*³ The greatest thing in the whole universe is the love of God by which He gave us His Son, and it was done for people — people like the Corinthians, people anywhere in the world, at any time.

If they believe what Paul is here writing, they shall be raised up on the last day with the Lord Jesus. Such a tremendous thing as the resurrection from the dead could never be thought of by man; and even if he did, he would have neither the wisdom nor the power to carry it out. Only God can do this.

Therefore St. Paul writes, *that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.* Paul knew from bitter experience how useless it was through his own righteousness to bring about the hope of a resurrection.

If he were left to himself, without the grace of God, Paul and the Corinthians would be separated from God forever and spend their time in eternal death with the devil and his angels.

Every time Paul thinks of himself being saved by the grace of God, every time he thinks of the whole world having the opportunity to be raised from the dead by God in Christ, he could hear the thanksgiving of the unnumbered grateful children of God redounding to the glory of God.

If we want to know what this looks like and what it sounds like, we need but look into the Revelation of St. John, ⁹ *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,* ¹⁰ *and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”*

¹¹ All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, Thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever."⁴

3. The Effect Of This Living Faith

This living faith built on the living Christ had a most wonderful effect on the believers. In several of his letters Paul counted up some of the troubles he had because of his being a Christian. He knew that the Corinthians were sharing many of these troubles with him. But he states in our text, ¹⁶ *Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.*

The persecutions which were raging against the Christians made their existence from day to day a most uncertain thing. They would rise in the morning with the possibility of it being their last day; they would go to bed knowing they might not live to see the morning. This weighed heavily on the outward man and made him weaker day by day. But the inward man, saved by the abundant grace of God and standing in the faith of the living Christ, was renewed day by day.

This inward man has some marvellous spiritual insights, which our text expresses in this way, ¹⁷ *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

The afflictions which come upon us, says the apostle, are light. This sounds strange and impossible until we look at the reasons for such a statement. The affliction lasts for a moment. At the time it may seem as if it might never end. It makes the Christian pray: *Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; ² Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive To the voice of my supplications.*⁵

But once the affliction ends, as it always does, and the Christian stands before God in eternity, then it will seem a short time. Then the Christian will say, as we read in Romans 8:18, ¹⁸ *For I consider that the sufferings of this*

present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

And with the psalmist of old we will sing, *When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion, We were like those who dream.* ² *Then our mouth was filled with laughter, And our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."* ³ *The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad.*⁶ Moreover, this affliction is light because of its effect on the Christian. God takes these things and makes them work for our good. They drive us closer to God. They make us search the Scriptures for all the words of comfort and strength we can possibly find.

Afflictions are light because of the goal that is constantly before us. What are we looking for? Not things that are seen, the persecutions, the dying off of the old outward man — all matters that belong to the process of leaving this world to be with the living Christ. We see things that are not seen with our temporal eyes but with the eyes of faith.

And what may these eternal things be that are not seen? St. John writes, *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea.* ² *Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*⁷

No one knows better what these unseen eternal things are like than the Son of God Himself, as He says to us in John 14:1-3, ¹ *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.* ² *"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* ³ *"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

These are the insights which the inward man has for his daily renewal. These are the goals toward which he daily raises his eyes to see his redemption drawing near.

But these wonderful treasures we have by our faith in the living Christ, what are we going to do with them while we are on the way, before we enter the mansions above? Exactly what all God's children did before us and will continue to do to the end of time: We are going to tell it to others.

Our text says, ***“I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak.*** When the apostles at the beginning of the New Testament church were commanded ***“not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus,”*** you know what they answered, ***“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”⁸***

“Why do I believe?” How can I do otherwise when I see all of this evidence resting in the living Christ, see all of those fellow travellers in need of the faith which I have by the abundant grace of God?

Therefore let us conclude with Isaiah, ***’O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” Amen.***

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psa. 116:12-13

² 1 Cor. 15:35-38, 42-45

³ John 3:16

⁴ Rev. 7:9-12

⁵ Psalm 130:1-1

⁶ Psa. 126:1-3

⁷ Rev. 21:1-2

⁸ Acts 4:18-20