

We faint not

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 January 2000

Preacher: Prof Donald Macleod

[0 : 0 0] we shall turn now to 2nd Corinthians and the 4th chapter reading at verse 16 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 16 for which cause we faint not I've heard it said that a preacher should never use the word I should never refer to his own experiences or in any way could force his own personality because it was said all such preaching is egotistical if I have some sympathy with that kind of argument we are called upon to preach Christ not ourselves and yet when we turn to the New Testament we find that time and again the apostles do in fact use the word I and do talk about the non-experiences and share them with the Church of God we find that Paul time and again reminds us of what he himself was experiencing and how he himself was feeling we find that especially in this epistle and even more especially in this particular chapter we find here that Paul tells us a great deal about his own personal providence and especially of his own suffering you see how it is in verse 7 we have this treasure he says in earth and vessels that is how he sees himself

God has given him this great treasure the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and yet that treasure Paul says is in this earthen vessel it's frail weak sensitive vulnerable human being and he goes on to tell us we are troubled on every side we are perplexed we are persecuted we are cast down now surely in all those ways the apostle gives us a great window into his own soul he reminds us of what he is experiencing reminds us too of how he himself reacts to those experiences shows us how he feels what the emotions are which are which are his response to the way that God is dealing with him now today two millennia separate us from the apostle

Paul in many ways what he suffered was unique to himself and yet the fact that he suffered was not at all unique to himself because the church of God today is still going through experiences similar to those of the apostle and the church is still reacting to them in the same way as he reacted to them we might remind ourselves that today in many parts of the world God's people are still being persecuted we remind ourselves that today many of them are experiencing physical pain they have their own thorns in the flesh they know what it is to be buffeted by Satan there are many of

God's children today going through illness and going through bereavement and sorrow and that sorrow often exacerbated by peculiar circumstances when lives are cut off in a timely way or in ways which are in some other details particularly harrowing and there are many of God's children who find it this morning very difficult indeed to be reconciled to the will of God and find it difficult to say that they are content whatever state they are in and there are many of them too who cannot say with Paul that they see all things working together for their good there are God's children at the end of their resources there are

God's children who are distraught there are God's children saying that they just cannot keep going there are God's children who feel utterly and totally overwhelmed and that's why this morning I turned your attention to those great words in this whole passage in which the apostle has said because the apostle is saying to us that notwithstanding all that he was suffering and notwithstanding how he was feeling here he says for which cause we faint not we are not disheartened and we are not going to give up and we are not going to fall by the wayside and Paul's determination doesn't reflect his own particularly fortunate circumstances these are words which come to us out of the crucible of almost incomparable suffering for the master and in that context

[7 : 08] Paul says we are not losing heart we are not going to give up now let's ask yourselves upon what arguments and upon what foundation the apostles bases that almost defiant affirmation this affirmation hurled in the face of his own circumstances well he says to us first of all though our outward man perish our inward man is being renewed day by day I will see that there still there is all the apostles we listen he's not hiding anything from us what effect is all this privation and all this strain and all this opposition what effect is it having on the apostles where he says the outward man is perishing it is having very distinct and very obvious physical effects the apostle is feeling the strain and he knows that all that pressure is destroying his physique he knows it's undermining his health he knows that every day he's getting weaker and weaker as the strength ebbs the way under the pressure of service in the kingdom of

God the outward man is perishing Paul is saying to very bluntly that the work is killing him it is shortening his days this terrible physical strain it is taking its toll the outward man is perishing and many of God's servants have known that same kind of experience you recall John Calvin that great saint of God with his life of quite incredible consecration that man who toiled day and night in the midst of a vast variety of diseases and illnesses who didn't sleep who at last couldn't sleep twenty hours a day wrestling with the word of God writing those great books to which we owe today so much and the work killed you think of sea smudge and all the terrible pressure of preaching

Lord's day in the Lord's day out to six thousand people and the great emotional strain of that ordeal on a very sensitive psyche and personality and you know what that led to physical illness and premature death well that's what Paul is saying to us and what I want to make of it this morning myself in the context of my own robust good health what I want to ask is whether indeed we can claim the level of commitment and of consecration that would approximate even remotely to this kind of situation we find ourselves protecting ourselves we find ourselves looking after ourselves and defending ourselves and I can in many ways understand and I can even begin in many ways to defend that and yet surely there is something here of a man who is absolutely reckless about his own life and about his own physical condition because he is so totally and utterly at the service of the king of heaven and the service of the kingdom of god the work is killing him and he doesn't say at all oh I must slacken off he doesn't say oh I must take exercise all these things may in some context be true but

Paul is saying to us no here he is and the work is killing him the outward man is perishing but it isn't only physical because there is the great emotional toll as well you see all those words in verse 9 almost are psychological and emotional terms this man tells us that he is troubled on every side this man is perplexed this man is cast down there was the emotional toll of his service in the kingdom of god Paul knew what it was to experience emotional stress he knew what anxiety for the churches of god was he knew what bitter disappointment was he knew what it was to be distracted and perplexed and obsessed by all the burdens which he bore and he knew this terrible thing which he calls being cast down sometimes beyond measure he says never quite to the point of despair but you have the impression that sometimes

Paul went very very close to it right down into those depths where he felt that he just couldn't take anymore couldn't face anymore couldn't get anything extra on couldn't keep on going and that's where he was and I say it because I know that there are at least some at least a minority of God's people and they've been down in those great drops as well and they know something of the emotional trauma of which the apostle is speaking to us here they have known days when it seemed to be only too that deep was calling unto deep as one trouble came on the heels of another one disappointment followed close upon the predecessor the burdens of disappointment of apparent failure of felt weakness as an error and vessel and I find it so tremendously comforting that the apostle

[14 : 24] Paul had the same kind of feeling it isn't only that the apostle had similar outward and objective experiences greater than him it is that he seems to have gone so close sometimes to cracking and breaking up under the strain this man was not by temperament an effervescent man who found it all was easy to be jolly this was a man who was exquisitely sensitive and a man who many a day was troubled and perplexed and cast down and I love him for that and I love God's word for those great bits of insight he gave us into the way that God's great men in the past how they actually felt and if the days come on you in the service of

God and I don't mean simply as pastors and preachers and evangelists but if those days come on you as husbands and wives and parents and teachers and whatever else it may be you don't see it in God's service it's so tremendously important to remind yourself I am not the first I'm not unique in what I experience or unique in the way that I feel there were times when many of God's great men of the past cried to God and said Lord I can't take any more I can't go one step further they said to God Lord I don't understand and I can't pretend that this makes any sense whatsoever I can't see no fruit I can't see no reason for these terrible things that have come into my life

Paul is saying to his son it is so precious that the outward man was perishing all these things were having their physical effects and they were having too their emotional effects that he says this truth yet the inward man is being renewed day by day that greater depth in Paul's personality where his fame and his hope and his love resided that core of his being which was Christ's citadel and was the temple of the Holy Spirit there Paul was experiencing constant and daily renewal and again this and that glory then in that very context in which his body was being debilitated and this emotion so the borne so the rot that a way down in the depths of the soul he knew every day the renewing grace of almighty

God enabling him to face new challenges to climb new mountains and to bear new burdens the apostle is reminding us of the great lessons that God was teaching him and by which God was renewing things he would never have learned in a different context what important lessons they were I have learned he says in whatever state I am there was to be content how lovely it is that Paul says I have learned it it wasn't at all his temperament or his instinct or his education or his genes no it was something that he had learned in that very context where his body was being destroyed and where his emotions were being stretched taught and close to breaking point he was learning this great lesson of contentment and he was learning this too he was learning that nothing would ever be able to separate him from the love of

God in Christ Jesus that love that never let him go never let him go from people persecuted never let him go from the church mocked him and condemned him and tore him critically apart but the love of God was still there that love that never let him go and stress or pain or sorrow or anguish or loneliness that love which was always there and Paul had learned that I have come to be persuaded I have come to the persuasion that nothing has the power to separate us from the love I have come to the persuasion it is the affirmation of experience he doesn't say I have heard that nothing shall settle he doesn't say I have read that nothing will settle he says

[20 : 14] I have come into the personal possession of the persuasion that nothing shall separate from God's love in Christ Jesus that Paul was learning and seeing so much else too he was having a quality of his faith proved that faith that would have said in prospect oh I could never stand that and I could never do that and then the day came and God said good and he did it and God said suffer it and he suffered it and what a great proof of his faith that was that faith of Paul's it had resilience and resources and adaptability that he would never have dreamed of but which he came to perceive in the crucible into which God had put him until he had the proof of

God himself the proof of the fidelity of the God who was always there that God who never forsook him that God who kept every one of his promises but let me put the whole thing differently what is Paul saying to us here he is saying to us that at the end of every day he was utterly worn out and utterly exhausted and he felt he just could not face another day not one more step could he take one other piece of bad news and that would be the end of everything one other word about that church that current and that would be the very limit and then you see tomorrow came and it came with more bad news and it came with more pain from that thorn in the flesh and it came with more criticism and it came with more disappointment and with more challenges and God said to him

Lord Paul I have another burden for you I have another mountain for you to climb I have another puzzle for you to solve and for did Paul find he found he was new he had the strength he had thought that he was spent but the new day meant new strength and the new challenge meant new strength and that new mountain that new and awesome mountain yes he could climb it and that Lord oh yes he could carry we can be more than conquerors through him that loved us and Paul found this earthen vessel he found the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining from it once again a new vigor and a new power it was the power of God and the salvation the excellency of God's power this physically exhausted man this emotionally taught man and then in that man this magnificent and this unsuppressible light and all of a sudden he is

God's power once again he has been renewed and he says it's happening every day day by day I have gone to sleep at night to try to sleep and I felt I couldn't take more I have felt I had given all I had to give but the new day came and with the new day there came new strength the inward man is renewed day by day he can't die this morning in my mind's eye look round this congregation and think to myself whether I saw us hear and know what that is physical exhaustion emotional stress feeling at the end of the tether and then the new day comes with its own load of troubles its own vacation and suddenly we find the glorious divine fulfillment of the

God God's own promise as thy days so shall thy strength be then Paul also says this to us our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory what can one say about words as glorious as these the apostle is making this remarkable evaluation of what he himself is suffering these he says are only a light affliction well we know they weren't light they weren't light by our standards you have the list persecute trouble perplex cast down all the journeys all the criticism all the lashes all the imprisonment and the shipwrecks and the poverty and the privation and he says it's light not only so but he says to us it's only for a moment and yet we know that right through his life the apostle had had this kind of treatment from the very day of his conversion right down to this present moment there had been hardly a moment where despite all the days had been fraught with difficulty and stress and yet here he is saying to us it is light affliction and it is only a momentary affliction and how can he say it because of the standpoint and because of the standard he is thinking of glory and I see he thinks of glory then his present sufferings they seem so light and they seem to be so ephemeral and so transient in comparison with that glory because the glory says is an exceeding and eternal weight and he says two things about it it reminds us of the eternalness of that glory how utterly unending it is you may remember the words of

[28 : 14] Newton Sim Amazing Grace remember how he tells us yes when this flesh and heart shall fail and mortal life shall cease I shall enjoy within the veil our life of joy and peace and remember the appendix to that hymn which we have in those worlds which had their own problems I'm sure from a little point of view but which yet express a great truth when I been there ten thousand years bright shining as the sun there's no last days to sing God's praise than when I first began and that's what Paul is thinking of he is going to come to the end of the sufferings weeping made for a night in June at morn and joy arise this great fact that the valley of the shadow of death is not a cold sack or a bottomless pit it is only a momentary experience for the church of God the Lamb leads them in and the

Lamb leads them out who are these and white robes they are those who have come out of the great tribulation it is not at all that they are in or have been in that is not the great point the ones who have come out of the great tribulation God brings the third part not only into the fire but through the fire this affliction which is so momentary to which at the last death shall put an end and from which we shall be assured into that presence of God and there we shall sing God's praise one day and two days and three days and we may say to ourselves how many days to go this cannot possibly last this is too good to be true and then we find we've been there ten thousand years and we've been singing

God's praise and still we haven't exhausted the praise we haven't explored the depths the infinitudes of God we haven't found the bottom of the ocean we haven't found the shore we are still saying to God Lord I need ten thousand more and God is saying yes my child ten thousand more there's no less days to sing God's praise than when I first began this is an eternal weight of glory then he says to us too it is a weight it has such marvelous solidity it really is substance all noises not the sufferings they don't have the same solidity they don't have the same substance and the same weight and the same density but the glory the glorious weight and the glorious substance and the glory has reality it is an exceeding a hyperbolic weight of glory now what shall I say of it

Paul is reminding us that this glory which God confers upon us it is so extravagant this extravagant weight of glory and I shall not analyze it for you by speaking of the glory of the body that one day God will give us or the environment that one day God will give us or the joy that one day God will give us or the character that one day God will give us of course we might go down those roads and see the extravagance of the glory of that body the extravagance of the glory of her joy the extravagant glory of the new heavens and the new earth the extravagant glory of the character of Christ but I shall put it to you some other way and I shall say to you this you remember that glory will be as weighty as the love of God and as weighty as the power of God and as weighty as the wisdom of God and above all as weighty as

Christ deserved for his people the glory at last will be commensurate with a price well I love to think of God at this moment with all the resources of his goodness love and power trying to work out a glory that will really express his love for his people I love to think of the power of God the omnipotence of God saying what is the best glory I have it in my power to make for my people I love to think of the wisdom of God saying what is the best plan my mind can compile all the intelligence of God and all the power of God and above all all the love of God working at building glory for his people we know that when this tabernacle is dissolved we have a building of God and house not made with hands but made by the love of God and by the power of God and by the wisdom of God

[35 : 21] I wouldn't want to leave it there all the riches of his glory by Christ Jesus I believe that the real measure of the glory is what Christ deserves and the real measure of the glory is the price that Jesus paid and the price he paid was his own blood which he gave for the church what kind of glory do you think could be bought with the blood of the son of God the whole point at last is this you know what does God think of Calvary what does God think of the achievement of his son on Calvary God loves God is thrilled by it and God wants to show his appreciation of what the son did and so

God will give his son the kingdom and people to have a glory that will really express God's appreciation of the achievement and of the triumph of Calvary and that's why Paul says our light affliction by comparison with the weight of the glory that shall be because that glory shall be as solid and as heavy as Jesus deserves while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are unseen for the things which are seen are temporal but those which are not seen are eternal well there too is a great challenge why we fix our gaze not on the things which are seen can we say that do we fix our gaze on those things which are seen is it not one of the great problems of the

Christian life today that we so easily lapse into a materialistic vision and our gaze is fixed on life's glittering prizes on pleasures on earth well you know if your gaze is fixed on those glittering prizes then an illness is a disaster emotional space is a disaster because it threatens your whole career you can't get the prize and the slightest hiccup the blood pressure rises and you can't see at all that's a light affliction no because your gaze is fixed on a prize that is jeopardized by your blood pressure and Paul is asking me that is my gaze fixed on one of the glittering prizes if it is then

I can never speak of affliction as a light affliction but it isn't only the prizes but there is this problem too that sometimes their gaze is fixed on the sufferings themselves and there are some Christians I'm afraid they've kept a record of every pain and they have a great almanac in which is listed all the difficulties and they they're so conscious of the forces ranged against them and all the obstacles these the apostle says are the seen things and Paul's whole contentment and triumph is based upon the fact that he is not fixing his gaze upon the troubles he is not obsessed with the difficulties you remember the disciples on the lake in the storm their panic this little boat it's bobbing up and down like a cork pitching and rolling and taking huge masses of water aboard and all they're seeing is the frailty of their craft and the size of the way and they hear the sound of the storm and that to them is no light affliction how can you call this a little storm you remember

Peter walking on the sea and suddenly he looks at the waves the difficulties and down down he goes and his faith fails we have to school ourselves not to look at the waves we don't fix our gaze on life's glittering prizes and we don't fix our gaze upon troubles and afflictions as we call them well and what do we fix our gaze the things which are not seen that's what we fix our gaze upon Christ whom having not seen we love that Christ who is the model of our suffering unless Christ who endured the cross despised the shame we look to him we look at the invisible ministry of the

[41 : 54] Holy Spirit that's unseen too but above all Paul is saying this to us we are looking at those things that God has prepared for those who love we really are heavenly minded we're not looking at the earthly prizes we're not looking at the earthly troubles we are looking at what God has prepared for them that love us we are really thinking about that body that one day God is going to give us and that peace in which one day we shall enter and we are thinking of what it will be like to see God in Jesus Christ to see the world in the midst of the throne to see Abraham and Paul to see those beloved who today Abraham and

Paul to see those beloved who today are asleep in Jesus we long to see the new heaven and the new earth and maybe above all I long for that moment which John describes so exquisitely when God shall wipe away all the tears from her eyes ah but they say a man who thinks like that a man who isn't really living in this world with statistics and reports and programs and analyses and so on that man is no earthly use and Paul is saying to us look I owe all the strength and all the resilience and all the stamina and all the durability I have I owe to the fact that my mind is always on the invisible things on that place to which

I'm going I am a citizen of heaven and I am thinking of heaven that is what Paul is saying to us today in our own earth centred and earth obsessed form of disciples we can only have this great composure that Paul has because we're not looking at earth's prizes we're not looking at the problems we are looking at the great things that God has prepared for us why why why for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal well we say it's the visible and the tangible that's real it's what you can touch and what you can weigh that's what's real that is what's solid that's what has weight no

Paul these are not the things that have weight these are not the things that are going to last don't you think for a moment that this body is the real body you only have it for 40 50 maybe 70 years that's all you have you know after 10 thousand years you'll hardly remember it it's only a flash this physical condition and this present world with its structures its violence its nature red in tooth and claw isn't that the real thing isn't that the enduring thing oh no no no one day God will cause the elements to melt with fervent heat and God give us a new heaven and a new earth

God will change the clothing and the fashion of this universe give us a new one a real one a solid and an enduring one must grasp that must grasp that the present is not during must grasp that the visible is not the real and that the visible is not the weighty and is not the important I remember the great words which John handed Newman us to be inscribed on his tombstone and they were these words out of shadows and imaginings into the truth they weren't his own words but the great words out of shadows and imaginings into the truth that is all

[47 : 17] I have here shadows and imagines images of reality and the ambition of Christ that one day I shall have the truth I shall see him as he is not a shadow in the world not an image of him in my own mind but that greatest of all him as he is out of shadows and imaginings into the truth next Lord's day as we sit at the Lord's table as all God's children must because the Lord said do this and we shall sit because he so says and we shall take those symbols that bread and that wine and we shall say to ourselves these are shadows and imaginings but they point to the one thing that is real and the one thing that is durable and the one thing that matters they point to the reality of Christ shall I say to myself that moment my

Lord is as real my Lord is more real than this bread and my Lord's kingdom is more real than this table and this group and this building which are stood for over a hundred and forty years what is that shall we say that shall I bribe speak to me of that which alone is real and which alone is durable take eat this is my body we do it until he comes and when he comes we shall go from this world of shadows and imagines into that other world of the truth may God bless his word to his praise oh

Lord we pray thee to use thy word for thy glory to meet us in our need to nourish and to encourage our souls for Jesus sake of name who is of the who never know you are