

May 3: 2nd Corinthians 3-5

Chapter 3

Paul is arguing that Christ has inaugurated the “new covenant” promised by God in Jeremiah 31: 31-34. The new covenant is not written on stone tablets like Moses received, but rather on the heart of the believer as God in Jeremiah promised. Paul experiences the letter of the law on stone tablets as death, but the new covenant of the heart as life. One must be cautious when reading this passage not to slip into supercessionist thinking. The people of Israel are still God’s beloved people, but Paul is writing as a Jew to a mixed audience about his own experiences of faith. Paul has experienced a radical transformation in faith and his own lived expression of that faith (glory) through the work of the Spirit in his own life. This is why he states that he has no need for a veil, but rather boldly proclaims the work that God has done in his life! All of his confidence and indeed all of his competence comes from the Lord, who is the only letter of recommendation and honor Paul needs. Those who view God with unveiled faces gradually acquire God’s glory as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Chapter 4

The ministry of the church means becoming slaves to one another in Jesus’ name and for Jesus’ sake. Faith is the “treasure” and fragile human bodies are the “clay jars” Paul is speaking about. We humans are mortal, fragile, and prone to sin, but breakable as we are, God has entrusted to us the story of our faith –the good news of Jesus Christ-, which is the greatest treasure the world has ever known. The treasure that is within us gives us the strength to endure whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, for the cornerstone of our faith is the suffering and death of our savior. Christ’s victory over death gives us the courage, strength, and hope that we need to face any affliction, perplexing incident, or persecution. Our ministry is to tell the story, to carry the reality of Christ’s death within our own bodies so that Christ’s life will shine through us into the world. We do not lose heart, for we put our hope and trust in the promise of the resurrection. Paul writes that while our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. Christ’s Spirit is the one who works inner renewal in the hearts of the believers.

When have you experienced this passage of scripture as true in your life?

Chapter 5

The perishable body is now compared not to a clay jar, but to an earthly tent. This is Paul's own euphemism for death "if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed." Paul urges us not to fear death, for what we receive from God is stable and eternal (a skyscraper rather than a pup tent). Through the storms that rage in this life, we long to be clothed with the durable and comfortable building we know we will receive from God. This isn't to say that we wish for death so that we can be with the lord (we don't want to be made naked, as Paul puts it), but rather we long to be further clothed and sheltered by God. The resurrection does not replace our temporary tent, but rather swallows up what is mortal altogether.

"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." We receive new life in Jesus Christ and need not worry about our former life, for our confidence is in our present life as a believer. God reconciled us to God's own self through Jesus Christ, so too our ministry's core responsibility is to reconcile the world to God and to one another. Reconciliation (forgiveness and restored relationships) is a key component of our work as the church, especially in today's world where so many have been hurt by the church and alienated from God. Our mission is to seek out the lost and to love them and listen to them as God draws them back into community. We are ambassadors for Christ, sent out into the neighborhood on a diplomatic mission to build and strengthen relationships with one another and with God.