

Glory Grounds the Work

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 4:13-18 | Pastor Brett Toney | April 19, 2026

The Weight of Suffering

Eighty-two years ago, J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a letter to his son who was serving as an air force pilot in WWII. Amidst all the suffering of those years, Tolkien wrote, “I sometimes feel appalled at the thought of the sum total of human misery all over the world at the present moment If anguish were visible, almost the whole of this benighted planet would be enveloped in a dense, dark vapour, shrouded from the amazed vision of the heavens!”¹ It’s a grim reality Tolkien describes. It resonates on a personal level as well. The consuming presence of suffering threatens to eclipse the amazed vision of the heavens. Yet it is by gaining a glimpse of the heavens that suffering is put in its place.

As we continue in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul presses on to explain why he needs no letter of recommendation to prove his apostleship—why his suffering does not *discount* his ministry but *confirms* it. There is the ever-present threat of losing heart in the long road of gospel ministry. But Paul leads us to speak with confidence *because* of the resurrection and the goal of the glory of God. He has a vision of the heavens! There is no challenge, no anguish, no affliction that can cause him to lose heart—what are such things compared to glory, to the unseen things of eternity? The deceptions the Corinthians believed (cf. 11:2-3) about Paul and the gospel ministry do not quench his ministry nor discredit his message. So, as we come to v.13-18, what afflictions or lies hinder or dishearten *you* in the work of the gospel? Look here as Paul describes how glory grounds the work so that you speak and take heart. Look first for how to speak with gospel confidence and, second, how to take heart in gospel ministry.

How to Speak With Gospel Confidence (2 Cor 4:13-15)

We begin in our passage seeing in v.13 that Paul is quoting from Psalm 116:10, “I believed, and so I spoke.” At first blush, it looks like just a rhetorical quotation. Paul wants to express how faith motivates his speech, so he pulls this line from the psalm. He is going to explain how he can speak with gospel confidence. But this is not just a throw away quote. No Old Testament quotation is. He’s not just dropping in this line for eloquence. No, if you read Psalm 116, as we have this morning, you recognize that the psalm is a parallel context to Paul’s point here. The psalmist lists his sufferings in v.1-9, just as Paul has done earlier in v.7-12. These lists are then followed by the quoted portion, “I believed, and so I spoke.” Just as God had delivered the psalmist by faith, so he has done for Paul and all in Christ. The response of the psalmist to God’s deliverance is to lift up the cup of salvation, calling on the name of the Lord. And that’s where Paul goes in v.14-15—the means of salvation and overflowing thanks. He can speak with gospel confidence because glory grounds such work. And so can you, Christian.

How do we do this though? It’s easy for Paul—he saw the resurrected Christ. What about us? How do *we* speak with gospel confidence? Afflictions abound—maybe you’ll lose your job if you speak out about your faith in Jesus. Lies may be spread about you if non-Christians say you’re not doing what they think Christians ought to do. You can easily be disheartened when you do speak but don’t see the fruit of conversion. How can you speak with confidence? Paul directs us to know two things and motivated by a third.

First, v.14, you speak with gospel confidence knowing the One who raised the Lord Jesus. The resurrection is not just for Easter Sunday; it is for every day. What will you speak if you do not *know*, do not believe that God raised Jesus by the Spirit? If the tomb was empty, and Jesus is risen, everything is different. People can slander you all they want. They can mock you,

cancel you, fire you, divorce you because you know the One who raised the Lord Jesus. And you persevere speaking with confidence because if this “God is for us, who can be against us” (Romans 8:31)?

Second, you speak with gospel confidence knowing this God *will* raise you with Jesus and all his disciples into his presence. Christian, just as sure as Jesus is raised, so sure are you that God will raise *you*. Even if one day you are killed for Christ, or die a quiet old lady after decades of steady witness to Jesus—what of it? You will be raised *with Jesus*. If that is what you have to look forward to, what suffering would shroud the heavens to keep you from speaking the gospel with confidence? And you won’t be alone. Paul says God will bring him *and the Corinthians* into his presence. This relationship is rocky. It is tense. Yet he directs us to the unity we have in Christ and in his resurrection. “Church hurt” is not a new experience; it happens as redeemed sinners live and labor together in close proximity. It can undermine gospel confidence. Yet Paul refuses to let it because we all together will be raised into God’s presence.

We speak with gospel confidence knowing the One who raised the Lord Jesus and that he will raise us together with Jesus. And third, we speak with gospel confidence motivated by the glory of God, v.15. This is striking. Paul says, “It is all for your sake.” All of his suffering, his bearing the death of Christ in his body, his confidence in the resurrection—it is all for the sake of the Corinthians. Paul is like a mother with her child. A mother endures the suffering of childbirth, the anguish of sleepless nights, the anxieties of her child’s foolish decisions. All she endures and labors at is for the child’s sake. But Paul, like a faithful mother, does not set the child or the church as the ultimate goal. He speaks so that the grace of the gospel would extend to more and more people, people like the Corinthians and you and me. And that grace goes forward to multiply thanksgiving to the glory of God. Paul is driven by maximizing God’s glory

as the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus shines forth through all of his brokenness and persecution and affliction. He can endure all things for the sake of the redeemed, like those in Corinth and Crystal. When you are so motivated, you too can speak with gospel confidence.

How to Take Heart in Gospel Ministry (2 Cor 4:16-18)

And because he speaks with such faith-formed confidence, he does not lose heart. He said back in v.1 that he does not lose heart because he has this gospel ministry by the mercy of God. There must be a real danger of losing heart in the work of making disciples that he repeats this claim. Affliction, perplexion, persecution, subjection—suffering of any kind wears you down. It is disheartening and despairing to slog on in such trials. We are certainly aided by gospel confidence. But how can we take heart? Can we really be of good cheer in this world of tribulation (cf. John 16:33)?

We can if we are being renewed day by day, v.16. Even if the outer self is wasting away—what Paul goes on to refer to as a tent, our earthly home (5:1)—even if this mortal body is failing, if we are being renewed daily, we do not lose heart. Why can we have any assurance of such renewal? Because of affliction. Verse 17, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” When glory grounds the work and you are zealous for thanksgiving to increase for God’s glory, affliction is a servant for your joy. God deploys affliction to labor or work for, to make ready glory. It’s glory through weakness, Church. Affliction serves your daily renewal so you do not lose heart. It is preparing glory!

Paul describes this in terms of a scale. Don’t think of a digital one in your bathroom. Think of an old school one captured in some old statue. Think of a scale with a tray on either side. On one side is affliction—it isn’t just light like a feather, but it is momentary. Affliction is

like breath on one side of the scale. And on the other side? “An eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” How heavy is an “eternal weight”? I was thinking of this in terms of deep sea water pressure. If you’ve dove down in a pool ten or twelve feet, you’ve felt the pressure of all that water above you. Your ears pop. But if you were able to go down 6,000 feet and open the door of your submarine, you would feel 2,600 pounds of pressure on every square inch of your body. Every inch, add another 2,600 pounds. But here’s the catch. You wouldn’t feel it. That much pressure would liquify you in 1 millisecond. It takes longer for your brain to register pain. So how heavy is an “eternal weight” that is beyond comprehension?

Christian, the glory we will one day enjoy would crush us today. And affliction is preparing for us such glory. Your suffering is real. It is hard. It feels unbearable. But when you are outfitted for glory, it will be as nothing to you. Therefore, don’t fixate on what is seen but what is unseen, v.18. The cruel words of your atheist uncle, the rebellion of your child against your times of family worship, the “Minnesota nice” refusal to read the Bible—such opposition threatens to dishearten you. Such visible things shroud the glory of the heavens. We too easily fixate on the seen realities of our suffering. But, brothers and sisters, the key to taking heart in gospel ministry is instead to fixate on the unseen realities of eternity. Fixate, v.15, on the glory of God. Or—get this—“with unveiled face, [behold] the glory of the Lord” (3:18), fixate on “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4). We see him only with the eyes of faith shining forth from his Word. The splendor and excellencies of Jesus is the eternal unseen reality we must rivet our souls upon if we will take heart. When you are being renewed day by day like that, you can bear up under all kinds of suffering and affliction. The opinions of others just don’t sting as much. That inconvenience you get so worked up over fades in importance.

Lift Up the Cup

Church, the Lord Jesus has delivered our souls from death, our eyes from tears, our feet from stumbling; we will walk before him in the land of the living. We have believed, therefore we shall speak. In the midst of our affliction and the lies spoken of us, the Lord hears and delivers. So, what shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits to us? We will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord! We will speak with confidence in the face of lies knowing that the One who raised Jesus *will in fact* raise us with him and with one another. We will make the life of Jesus known even as death is at work in us because *then*, then grace will extend to more and more, increasing thanksgiving to God's glory! We will take heart in this gospel ministry we have been charged with in our homes and communities. We take heart because we fixate on the unseen and eternal—on the weight of glory. We look upon the splendor of Christ and consider any affliction, any suffering, any hindrance as nothing in comparison to when we will have him for ages upon ages. O Church, may glory ground your gospel work so that you too would speak with confidence and not lose heart.

¹Tolkien quoted in “[Tolkien’s Guide to Defeating Evil](#)” by Evan Amato. See in full at: J.R.R. Tolkien to Christopher Tolkien, April 30, 1944. Tolkien Estate. Accessed April 14, 2026. <https://www.tolkienestate.com/letters/christopher-tolkien-30-apr-1944/>.