

Hey everyone! My name is Tom, and I'm one of the pastors here at The Creek. In this season of online services, we've had so many join us in worship for the first time. If that's you, we simply want to say "Welcome!" We are so glad you're with us. If you want to follow along in your bible this morning, we'll be in 2 Corinthians 4, starting in verse 16.

Before we dive into our text, I want to tell you about my recent trip to the eye doctor. I hadn't been to the eye doctor in a while, so after testing my vision for distance - which is why I needed glasses years ago - the doctor had me hold a book close to read. And I found myself moving the book further and further away until the words finally came into focus. The doctor smiled and said: "Yup, you're ready for progressive lenses!"

Now, I only knew two things about progressive lenses: One, I knew they're predominantly worn by people who are older (great). And two, they would help me see up close *and* far away. What I *didn't* know is that progressive lenses actually have three distinct focal points: the top of the lens to see far away, the bottom to see up close, and one thin area in the middle to see middle distances - about an arm's length away.

So, a week later I picked up my new glasses and drove straight to the grocery store to get a few things for dinner that night. As I stood in a particular aisle, I really struggled to see clearly. As I looked at one shelf, everything above and below was way out of focus, and even my peripheral vision was fuzzy.

To say I struggled over the next several days is an understatement. As I tried to look around...and walk around...I felt disoriented, dizzy, even nauseous, *all because my vision was unclear, and my next steps felt uncertain.*

Does that sound familiar? Can anyone else relate to feeling disoriented right now?

Friends, we continue to live in uncertain times. Our social distancing restrictions are lessening a bit, but still, our "new normal" is frustrating to say the least. We have so much information coming at us all the time that we don't know what to believe! Our way ahead seems unclear and our next steps feel uncertain.

That is why we're in this sermon series called "Take Heart." Over the last few weeks we've learned we can *take heart* in troubled times because Jesus has overcome sin and death. Jesus is bigger, greater, and more powerful than anything we are facing or will face. We learned to take our anxieties to God in prayer and exchange them for a peace that surpasses understanding. Last week Darnell reminded us that even in crisis we are sent on mission. And this week we're going to read words of hope from a man named Paul.

Paul was trying to encourage a church, uncertain of their future, when we pick up his letter in 2 Corinthians 4:16:

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling (skip to vs. 5) Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

Here's the first thing we learn from these verses that gives us hope: *this life is temporary*. Paul starts off reminding us that once we've "taken heart," the way we keep from "losing heart" is remembering that this life is temporary. In fact, Paul describes all the challenges we face with two words: "light and momentary."

Now, I don't know about you, but I bristle a bit at those two words being used to describe the challenges we face in this life, particularly in light of this global crisis.

So many lives have been lost. So many are battling serious illness.

Maybe you were furloughed, or worse, let go altogether. Or maybe you were the one who had to do the furloughing or letting go.

Maybe you're one of our amazing health care workers, and you're worn out!

Maybe you've lost special moments in recent weeks: not getting to say goodbye to a loved one, wedding plans changed or postponed, final moments of a graduation year taken away.

Parents have become instant homeschool teachers, some marriages are struggling, some addictions have been reignited, anxiety and stress are at levels we didn't think possible.

This season has not felt "light" at all, and it sure hasn't felt "momentary." Church family, it's been *two months* since we've been together, in person, to worship. Two months of facemasks and terms like "social distancing" and "PPE" becoming normal vocabulary. Two months that we haven't been able to hug extended family and friends.

And even with restrictions lessening, we have no idea if, or when, we'll ever get back to what we knew as "normal."

This season has felt heavy, and it's felt like a *long* time!

So, who's this guy Paul, and where does he get off saying our troubles are "light and momentary?"

Later in this letter, Paul summarizes the struggles he faced as a disciple of Jesus trying to spread the gospel: five times he was whipped to within an inch of his life. Three times he was beaten with rods, once pelted with stones and left for dead, three times he was shipwrecked. He was in constant danger. He often went without sleep and without food.

And friends, the *only* way Paul was able to endure all of that, and continue on mission, was because he remembered that *this life is temporary*.

James 4:14 says that our lives are "a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." In the Psalms, David wrote: "My entire lifetime is just a moment. At best, each of us is but a breath, a fleeting shadow.

I believe we can take heart, *if* we remember that this life is temporary. Which leads us to our second takeaway from the text: *eternity is real*.

Now, I have something that I hope will illustrate the point Paul is making, and I need you to use your imagination for a minute.

I have a long rope here, and I want you to imagine that this rope I have goes on forever. In reality, it's about 50 feet long, but use your imagination for a moment. Picture in your mind that as I stand here on the platform at The Creek, that this rope runs down to the ground in a huge coil, then runs down the center aisle of the church, out of the sanctuary doors, down the long hall past the café, out the front door of the church, and east...all the way to Ohio, to Pennsylvania, all the way to the Atlantic Ocean, and beyond – it goes on forever.

Can you picture it? Now, imagine that this rope represents a timeline of your existence. Like the rope, you exist forever!

Now, see this green part of the rope? (Tom shows about two inches covered with green tape). This represents your time on earth. We've got a few short years in this life, and then we've got *all* of eternity somewhere else.

Just about every religion has some belief in an afterlife - an existence beyond our time on earth. The Bible speaks of two possible destinations after this life: a place called heaven and a place called hell. Heaven is an eternity in the presence of God, which Paul said outweighs all the suffering we could ever face on earth. And a place called hell: eternity apart from God, without love, without hope, full of darkness, sadness, weeping, and isolation forever.

When I was 8 years old and just learning about God, I remember lying in bed one night, staring at my hands and saying over and over, "I am going to exist forever...I am going to exist forever...I can't stop it, no matter what I do...I am going to exist forever."

Friends, that's true of every single one of us! We will exist forever! Time and again, the bible confirms that *eternity is real*.

But something happens between this life and eternity, and Paul mentions it in the last verse of our text, 2 Corinthians 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

Another key takeaway is that *judgement is coming*. That word, judgement, is used 68 times in the bible from Matthew to Revelation, or in what we know as the New Testament. *68 times!*

Now, a few times this word refers to whether or not we should judge another person’s actions or motives. But most of the time, it’s used in context of *us* standing before God.

Hebrews 9:27 says, “People are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”

Romans 14:10 says, “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.”

And John recorded a vision given to him by God when he wrote in Revelation 20:12, “And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and a book was opened, the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.”

You know, just about everyone who works has a yearly evaluation from their boss; a time when they sit with their supervisor and receive feedback based on how they performed the previous year. Essentially, you’re being judged based on how you worked. Friends, the bible speaks of a time, at the end of this life, when we’ll stand before God and be judged on how we lived.

And if about now you’re thinking, “Tom, you said this was a message of hope...this doesn’t sound very hopeful,” it’s because you’ve already forgotten the first message in our series: that we can *take heart* because Jesus overcame sin death by taking our place on the cross, so that those who believe in him might gain eternal life with God in heaven!

You see, God made a way to give us hope and prepare us for the truth that *this life is temporary, eternity is real, and judgement is coming*.

Which begs the all-important question: until then, what now? Until that day comes, when we stand before God, what do we do now? Listen, we can’t change the reality of eternity, but we can choose *where* we’ll spend eternity and *how* we will live until we get there.

And the great thing is, Paul tells in our text how to live: look again at chapter 5 verse 7, where Paul says, “We live by faith, not by sight.”

So, what does it look like, to live by faith and not by sight?

Maybe walking by faith is trying to build an intentional relationship with a neighbor who, by all appearances, is closed off to Jesus. Or maybe walking by faith is turning down that promotion - and more money - so you can make family a priority. Or maybe it’s praying for healing in a marriage, when all hope seems lost. Or continuing to give generously of time and resources, even when things get tight.

Friends, please hear me on this. Doing these things doesn't get you into heaven, but they do show a life lived by faith, and not by sight.

It's the age-old question: when you die, if you stand at the gates of heaven and are asked, "Why should you get in?" - the simple, one-word answer is JESUS! He's our only hope. And until that day comes, we live confidently by faith, and not by sight.

Then Paul wrote in verse 9: "We should make it our goal to please God, whether we are at home in the body or away from it." Until eternity, we should live this temporary life to please God.

You know what's amazing to me is how much of our lives are consumed with this green part of our existence (Tom holds up the rope again). For some of us, this green part is *all* we think about. Some of us think, "I'm going to work hard, and save, save, save so I can really enjoy this last little bit right here". Right? And we forget all of this! (Tom begins winding up the rest of the rope.)

Or some of us think, "Well, life is short, so I had better do everything I want while I can. Enjoy every pleasure, indulge, indulge, indulge," and we forget about all this (Tom continues to wind rope).

Or some of us get so bent out of shape when we have a bad hair day, or don't have enough likes on social media, or a TV series gets canceled. We get consumed with accumulating as much as we can - money, the next vacation, stuff, status, and we forget we'll exist for eternity!

How we live in this tiny green part will determine where we exist for millions and millions of years - forever! So why would we spend this short time trying to be as comfortable as possible, enjoying much as we can, and forget about all this? (Tom continues to wind rope).

I'm not saying don't save for retirement, I'm not saying don't take care of yourself, and I'm not saying don't find joy in this life God's given us. But there's huge a difference between living for this life, and living for the next. Between living for ourselves, and living to please God.

CS Lewis said, "If we aim at Heaven, we will get earth thrown in, but if we aim at earth, we get neither."

Which life are you living for? This one or the next? Where do you consider home? Here, or with God?

Which brings us to our next "until then, what now?" It's just one word: *repent*.

It's the first word Jesus speaks to begin his ministry. It's a word used many times in scripture when someone comes face to face with truth, and it's a word that means more than admitting we're wrong or deciding to change! It literally means to turn from the direction we're headed and walk a different way. In this instance, we stop living for this life, and we begin living for the next. We invite God to help us *change the pattern of our thinking*. You see, while God's

forgiveness is instant and complete, allowing God to mold how we think and live into the image of Jesus is a slow work! Changing the way we think takes time.

A few years ago, I switched offices here at church. I moved right across the hall from where I was, and Emerson Kennedy moved into my old office. I can't tell you the number of times over the following weeks I unconsciously walked into my old office, usually scaring Emerson in the process! It took a while for my brain to be retrained, and then to communicate to my legs, "Nope, that's not your office anymore." But in time, it became natural.

Then something weird happened. All this coronavirus stuff started going down, we got word our daughter Megan's junior year was going to finish at home, our son Josh was coming home from college early, church was going to change for a while as we knew it, and my stress levels were at an all time high. And I did something I hadn't done in months - I walked right back into my old office! Luckily Emerson wasn't there that time. I literally laughed out loud and said, "What am I doing here?"

And some of you know *exactly* what I'm talking about.

During this season we've seen generosity work in amazing ways, we've seen heroes rise to serve, we've seen people start attending church online who've not stepped foot in a church in years. But we've also seen alcohol sales up 55% nationwide, pornography use up 20% worldwide, and searches for family and domestic violence help up a frightening 75%. And maybe recently, you've found yourself back in inappropriate but familiar places and you're thinking, "What am I doing here?"

Friends, under stress, our brains will revert to old habits! Whichever direction we're facing when life pushes us, that's where we walk in stress! And so the call for some of us is to *repent*. To change the direction we are facing and to run back again into the arms of a loving God who sent his son to pay the price for all our sins. Run back to the who wants to show us that this life is full, not when we live for ourselves, but when we bring others to see his good grace!

And now our last "until then, what now?" *we fix our eyes on Jesus*.

My grandfather, whom I'm named after, died when I was 12. He knew Jesus and I believe he's in heaven, but I miss him! Some of you know Laura and I lost our second child, Sarah, 8 months into the pregnancy. We got to hold her body for a little while, but we knew that in reality, she was already in the arms of God.

And there are days that I long to be clothed in my heavenly body, were I won't have to worry about things like progressive lenses or body aches as I get older...or viruses, loss, pain, or death. I long for the day when I can see my grandfather, when I can hold my daughter, and most of all, when I can run into the arms of Jesus who died so I can be free!

But until that day, I fix my eyes on him. Walking one step at a time, remembering that this life is temporary, eternity is real, and I can have confidence on the day of judgement because of Jesus. Instead of using God's forgiveness as a "get out of jail free card" to do whatever I want, I live to please him, helping others know his love and grace along the way.

Friends, that's your invitation! Fix your eyes on Jesus. Realize we have one chance at this life, and it can end in a moment for any of us. God invites us to walk, one step at a time, to the only hope we have now, and forever – Jesus!

Some of us have never said yes to that invitation. You've never admitted your need for a savior and surrendered your life into God's hands. If that's you, we're going to put a link on the screen (thecreek.org/next-steps). There you'll find ways to introduce yourself to us, tell us about your decision to begin or renew a walk with God. You can also find ways to connect to intentional community or sign up to attend a welcome or baptism class.

We also get to enter into a time of communion. Every time we take communion, we proclaim Jesus death as true, and his resurrection as our future hope. In just a moment you can take whatever elements you have to use for communion and spend time with God.

As you take communion and then we continue to worship together, remember: "We should not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Let's fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is *eternal*."