

LESSON 282

COURAGE OF FAITH

Related Scripture: II Corinthians 4:1-12

KEY VERSE: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16: 33b.

Lesson Scripture: II Corinthians
4:13-5:8

Introduction:

"Fight the good fight of faith," Paul commanded Timothy. (I Tim. 6:12.) Life is a continual struggle, and this is especially true of spiritual life. It can be received only through faith as a gift from God, and it is retained and developed just as it was received, by grace through faith. As shown in a previous lesson, ultimate victory is assured. This lesson reminds us that in the midst of the struggle we gather courage for the present from contemplation of the past and future.

Faith therefore looks backward to the Christ of history, upward to the Christ of heaven, and forward to the Christ our hope, Who even now abides within. (Col. 1:27.)

Outlining the lesson, we note:

1. Effects, II Corinthians 4:13-15
 - a. Rational testimony, 13
 - b. Resurrection triumph, 14
 - c. Redounding thanksgiving, 15
2. Excess, II Corinthians 4:16-18
 - a. Of renewed power, 16
 - b. Of rewards promised, 17
 - c. Of real perspectives, 18
3. Eternity, II Corinthians 5:1-4
 - a. House dissolved, 1
 - b. House desired, 2-4
4. Earnest, II Corinthians 5:5-8
 - a. Present pledge, 5-7
 - b. Personal presence, 8

Notes on the Printed Text:

Effects, II Corinthians 4:13-15.

Certain causes are followed by certain effects. In saving us from the eternal consequences of sin, God does not nullify or suspend the law of cause and effect; He simply introduces new causes. So our legal justification necessarily follows from the substitutionary death of Christ, and so with other aspects of salvation.

Rational Testimony, 13.

No doubt the reason many professed Christians have no vital testimony for Christ is simply that they do not believe what they have professed to believe. Normally and rationally, a man speaks from the contents of his own mind, "out of the abundance of the heart," according to what he believes. Thus genuine believers in Christ "believe, and therefore speak."

Resurrection Triumph, 14.

That Jesus Christ arose from the dead is a historical fact; that those who know Him as Lord shall be raised up also by Him is an inevitable consequence; that all believers shall be presented together "faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24) is no more than we are told to expect. To know His resurrection triumph is also to know ours.

Redounding Thanksgiving, 15.

If we are truly children of God, then we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," (Ro. 8:17; see also Gal. 4:7.) Here again is a chain of cause and effect: abundant grace makes many thankful, and through their thanksgiving redounds to the glory of God. That is, God is glorified by the thanksgiving of His redeemed people.

Excess, II Corinthians 4:16-18.

Christians are not yet free from all weaknesses, troubles, and sorrows; our courage comes not from ignorance of present problems, but from knowledge of grace that exceeds them all.

Of Renewed Power, 16.

We might well faint, or rather we should surely faint, if we tried to walk in the strength of the outward man. Our own strength fails; the outward man perishes; yet as God's children we find the inward man "renewed day by day." Our power is not of ourselves, but of Christ Who strengthens us. (Philip. 4:13.)

Of Rewards Promised, 17.

Afflictions seem heavy until we think to compare them with glory to come (Ro. 8:18); they seem unending until we think to compare our moment of earthly life with an endless eternity. In view of promised rewards, the affliction becomes lighter and more tolerable.

Of Real Perspectives, 18.

Material things of this world will soon cease to be; let us look away to the invisible things of the Spirit of God, which shall endure forever. Men's hearts indeed fall them for fear, "and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Lu. 21:26), but with the real perspectives of faith we take fresh courage.

Eternity, II Corinthians 5:1-4.

Reflections on time and eternity are most profitable when we relate ourselves to these mighty themes. Great Bible truths are meant to be applied to life. So the question is, what are we now and what shall we be in eternity?

House Dissolved, 1.

Death and dissolution of these mortal bodies is a fact we know from direct observation. For a little while we dwell, so to speak, in an earthly house; or, since it is so transitory an abode, we may better call it our tabernacle or tent. No doubt about it—at the appointed time we must strike tent and move out. But on the testimony of His word, we know something else: God has another building for us, a "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

House Desired, 2-4.

Possessing title to an infinitely better home, who would wish to stay always in the run down ruins of this mortal clay? It is natural to flesh and blood to cling to life while it can; but as we groan under the burdens of earthly life we learn to long for a better place to live. To change the figure and think of the body as a garment, it is not that we desire to be "naked" or without a body; but rather that we desire to put on better, more comfortable, more beautiful, and more enduring clothing—the body of a glorious resurrection to the likeness of our risen Lord.

Earnest, II Corinthians 5:5-8.

However, our experience of salvation is not all in the past or future. We already have a foretaste, an earnest, a pledge, a down payment or first installment, of what God has provided for us in Christ. So we are encouraged not only by the memory of a past experience, and not only by anticipation of future glory, but also by the reality of present possession.

Present Pledge, 5-7.

God "also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." As the apostle wrote elsewhere, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Ro. 8:16.) Our literal resurrection is still in the future, but the personal indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit with His testimony is a present reality. From Him we receive the confidence of spiritual knowledge; from Him we learn to "walk by faith, not by sight."

Personal Presence, 8.

Yet we realize that our risen Lord in His glorified body is in heaven, and while we remain in these mortal bodies we are in the natural sense absent from Him, though He is within us in the person of the Holy Spirit. The true Holy Spirit does not satisfy us with Himself, but points us to Jesus; and so we are "willing" or think it good "rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." If we had no other scripture on the subject (though we do), this text would be enough to tell us where the saved person goes at death. When we depart from the body we shall be in the personal presence of Jesus.

Key Verse:

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."—John 16:33b.

Besides other troubles, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Tim. 3:12.) But our victory is in and through our Lord: He has overcome, and through Him we shall overcome (I Jn. 5:4); and with this assurance we can indeed "be of good cheer," glorying even in our tribulations. (Ro. 5:3.)