Sermon Notes by David E. Owen

“Affliction”

(2 Corinthians 4:17)

Introduction:

As your Bibles are open to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, I want to focus primarily on the 17th verse and speak to you on the subject of “AFFLICATION.”

According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the word “affliction” refers to the condition of pain, suffering, or distress.

The same Greek word that is translated in 2 Corinthians 4:17 as “affliction” is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “anguish,” “persecution,” “tribulation,” and “trouble.”

According to W. E. Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, this word “affliction” in verse 17 is translated from the Greek word thlipsis (NT:2347) and it…

Primarily means “a pressing, (or) pressure”; (or) anything which burdens the spirit.

Have any of you been under any pressure lately? I’m sure every person in the room has. That’s what affliction is. It is pressure and anguish and trouble; it is that which burdens our spirit, particularly as a Christian.

You know, the health & wealth and prosperity preachers would have us believe that only comfort and happiness and monetary gain is supposed to exist in the life of a Christian. The only problem with that is that it’s a lie. Affliction and struggles and trouble are consistently seen in the lives of God’s faithful people throughout the Bible.

As Kenneth Boa said, “God never promised that we would be exempt from affliction. Rather, suffering is part of our lot in a fallen world.” But thankfully, there is always divine comfort that alleviates earthly affliction!

For example, in …

(Exodus 3:7) And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

affliction – Hebrew 6040, ‘only, on-ee’; from H6031; depression, i.e. misery:--afflicted (-ion), trouble.

Elihu said in…

(Job 34:28) So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto Him, and He heareth the cry of the afflicted.

In Psalms, we read…

(Psalms 34:19) Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.

An even here in 2 Corinthians, Paul referred to God…

(2 Corinthians 1:4) Who comforteth us in all our tribulation (from the same Greek word as “affliction” in 4:17), that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

The English poet, John Donne said, “Affliction is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it.”

But Paul had certainly experienced his fair share of pressures and troubles and persecution and things that burdened his spirit in his life as a Christian. He had most certainly experienced affliction.
In fact, if you go to 2 Corinthians 11:24–27 you can see Paul’s list of some of the affliction that he experienced...

24 — Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.
25 — Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep;
26 — In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;
27 — In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Because of some of the things that Paul had gone through prior to the time that he wrote this epistle, Warren Wiersbe said that “As you read 2 Corinthians … you feel the burden and heartache of Paul, suffering both physically and emotionally.”

Back in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, let’s notice verses 8 and 9 for a moment. Paul says that we are “troubled.” And the word “troubled” in verse 8 comes from the Greek root word that produces the word translated “affliction” in verse 17. So in verses 8 and 9, he’s talking about that same type of pressure and anguish of spirit and (in some cases) persecution that he refers to in verse 17.

Paul said that we are…

- **troubled** – we experience difficult circumstances and antagonistic, hostile people “on every side”
- **perplexed** – though we can’t let it bring us to the point of “despair,” we sometimes feel confused by the things we go through, and we feel like there’s just no way out.
- **persecuted** – Chuck Swindoll said that this is an “aggressive word conveying everything from being intimidated to being assaulted, actually attacked.” And yet, through it all, Jesus has not “forsaken” us!
- **cast down** – this word has the idea of being knocked down, thrown aside, and rejected. But with Christ’s help, we refuse to be “destroyed” or ruined by that rejection. We may be down, but we’re not out. We get back up again.

Paul goes on to say in verse 11 that even though we are struggling and even dying (or “delivered unto death”) as we live for the Lord, our inward man is being “renewed day by day” according to verse 16.

And part of what renews us is the grand truth that we find in verse 17 where Paul wrote these words…

*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* (2 Corinthians 4:17)

Now as we look at this verse specifically, notice with me that…

**I. Paul Mentions The OCCURRENCE Of Affliction**

(2 Corinthians 4:17) *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;* 
Notice the commonality of affliction in the word “our.”

**A. When Affliction Occurs, It Is Light In Its Difficulty**

*our light affliction*

The United Bible Societies New Testament Handbook Series says that this word “light”…

Serves to underline their **pettiness** or **insignificance**. It gives the idea of “lightness” or lack of “weight.”

Vine’s Expository Dictionary says that “light” is the Greek word…

*Elaphros* (NT:1645), “light in weight, easy to bear.” And the word is used to refer to “affliction” here in 2 Corinthians 4:17, and it also used to refer to the burden imparted by Christ in Matthew 11:30.

Cf. Jesus said… (Matthew 11:30) *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is LIGHT.*
1. It Is Light For Our Strong Companion
The lightness of the load is relative to the strength of the one who is picking it up or carrying it or bearing up under it. I have friends who lift weights on a regular basis, and they are able to easily lift barbells that I would have difficulty lifting because they are stronger. Christ said that His burden is light because He is the one who is lifting the brunt of the load.

Thomas Brooks said, the “Assurance (of Christ) makes heavy afflictions light, long afflictions short, bitter afflictions sweet.”

2. It Is Light In Our Scriptural Comparison
We might say something is “light” in relation to the strength of the one lifting it. Or we might say something is “light” compared to something else. And that is really the message here in 2 Corinthians 4:17. Our “affliction” is light when compared to the weighty wonders ahead for us in eternity.

As Albert Barnes said…

The trials which Paul endured, to many persons would have seemed to be anything else but light. They consisted of want, and danger, and contempt, and stoning, and toil, and weariness, and the scorn of the world, and constant exposure to death by land or by sea.

Yet these trials, though continued through many years, and constituting, as it were, his very life, he speaks of as the lightest conceivable thing when compared with that eternal glory which awaited him.

B. When Affliction Occurs, (not only is it “Light In Its Difficulty,” but) It Is Limited In Its Duration which is but for a moment
There are a couple of ideas that been suggested in the meaning of this word “moment.”

1. Our Affliction May Last For The PASSING Moment
The Greek word from which we get this word “moment” is defined in Strong’s Concordance as that which flows by or carelessly passes.

moment – Greek 3901. pararrhoeo, par-ar-hroo-eh’-o; from G3844 and the alt. of G4482; to flow by, i.e. (fig.) carelessly pass (miss)-- let slip.

The UBS (United Bible Societies) New Testament Handbook Series says that in one version (REB), the phrase is rendered…

“Our troubles are slight and short-lived.” … Two words are used to emphasize the relative unimportance of the sufferings experienced in this life. The first is an adjective which indicates that they do not last long or are “transitory” (Phps).

Albert Barnes said…

The Greek word used here parautika occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. … Here it seems … to be used in the sense of momentary, transient. Bloomfield renders it, “for the at present lightness of our affliction.” Doddridge, “for this momentary lightness of our affliction, which passes off so fast, and leaves so little impression that it may be called levity itself.”

2. Our Affliction May Last For The PRESENT Moment
A. T. Robertson said of this word “moment” that it is…

Literally, “for the moment” (an old adverb parautika, here only in the New Testament).

Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words says of the word “moment” (NT:3910 – parautika) that…

The meaning is not, however, simply that of brief duration, but that which is present with us now or immediate.

Consider Paul’s words in Romans 8:18…

(Romans 8:18) For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

Thomas Watson said, “Affliction may be lasting, but it is not everlasting.”
Not only does Paul Mention The OCCURRENCE Of Affliction, but …

II. Paul Mentions The OPERATION Of Affliction
(2 Corinthians 4:17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

A. There Is A Fruitful Achievement In This Operation
worketh

1. Let’s Think About The MEANING Of This Work

worketh – Greek 2716, katergazomai, kat-er-gad-zom-ahee; from G2596 and G2038; to work fully, i.e. accomplish; by impl. to finish, fashion:--cause, do (deed), perform, work (out).

Marvin Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament says…

Worketh (katergazetai) means … Works “out: achieves.”

Barnes said this word “worketh” is derived from the idea of…

Energetai, is at work, is active, or operates; it is constantly employed. … Worketh means “It will produce; it will result in. The effect of these afflictions is to produce eternal glory.”

2. Let’s Think About The MOVEMENT Of This Work

In the context of this verse, the affliction is moving us towards the glory. But we find examples in the scripture that remind us of how affliction also moves us towards GROWTH…

(Exodus 1:12) But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

Affliction can also move us towards BLESSINGS…

(Exodus 3:17) And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.

Affliction can also move us towards A DEEPER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD’S WORD…

(Psalms 119:71) It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.

Affliction can also move us towards A GREATER EFFECTIVENESS IN MINISTERING CONSOLATION AND THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION TO OTHERS…

(2 Corinthians 1:6) And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Charles Spurgeon said that affliction can also move us towards GRATITUDE…

“Afflictions, when sanctified, make us grateful for mercies which aforetime we treated with indifference.”

God accomplishes things in our lives through AFFLICTION that might not be accomplished otherwise.

B. There Is (not only a “Fruitful Achievement,” but also) A Favorable Advantage In This Operation for us

1. Let’s Consider The OBVIOUS TENDENCY

These are two very small, seemingly insignificant words in the text. But I believe that they are very important words, because it doesn’t say that the afflictions are working “against us” as we might be tempted to believe.

This is the obvious tendency of human reasoning. We tend to get a “victim mentality” when affliction takes place in our lives. When we are dealing with hostility from others, when we are facing something difficult; my goodness, when we get caught in a traffic jam; we see the circumstances and life and other people as always being out to get us, as if we are being singled out.

2. Let’s Consider The OLD TESTAMENT

We might feel at times like Jacob of old. When Jacob’s sons went down to Egypt to get grain during the time of famine, Joseph was operating in anonymity and he accused them of being spies and he told them that they had to leave Simeon behind in Egypt and bring young Benjamin back with them on the next trip or they could buy no more food. They got back home and reported what had happened…

(Genesis 42:36) And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

But the afflictions are not working “AGAINST US.” Rather, they are working “FOR US”! They are producing something that will be beneficial and blessed to the believer.
We say that things happen for our good and God’s glory, but Paul tells us here that these things are happening for OUR glory too! Which brings us to the final point of emphasis.

Not only does Paul Mention the OCCURRENCE Of Affliction and the OPERATION Of Affliction, but…

III. Paul Mentions The OUTCOME Of Affliction

(2 Corinthians 4:17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory:

The great missionary David Livingston said…

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger … all these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us.

There is groaning; Yes! But Paul said that there will also be glory! And as we consider this truth…

A. Notice The Comparative Measure Of The Glory

a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory

1. It Is Not Merely A SUPERLATIVE Glory

In explaining the phrase “far more exceeding,” Albert Barnes wrote…

There is not to be found anywhere a more energetic expression than this. The word huperbole, used here (whence our word “hyperbole,” meaning exaggeration or overstatement used for effect) means properly a throwing, casting, or throwing beyond. In the New Testament it means excess, excellence, eminence. … This expression would have been by itself intensive in a high degree. But this was not sufficient to express Paul’s sense of the glory which was laid up for Christians. It was not enough for him to use the ordinary highest expression for the superlative to denote the value of the object in his eye.

2. It Is Now More A SURPASSING Glory

John Phillips said that…

Paul seems to be struggling with the limitations of language to convey the idea of a glory that is beyond all thought, which stagers the very imagination. The glory that awaits us exceeds all limits.

So Albert Barnes continued by saying that Paul, faced with the limitations of language…

... therefore coins an expression, and adds eis huperboleen. It is not merely eminent; but it is eminent unto eminence; excess unto excess; a hyperbole unto hyperbole - one hyperbole heaped upon another; and the expression means that it is “exceeding exceedingly” glorious; glorious in the highest possible degree - Robinson. Mr. Slade renders it, “infinitely exceeding.”

The expression is the Hebrew form of denoting the highest superlative; and it means that all hyperboles fail of expressing that eternal glory which remains for the just. It is infinite and boundless. You may pass from one degree to another; from one sublime height to another; but still an infinity remains beyond. Nothing can describe the uppermost height of that glory; nothing can express its infinitude.

It’s almost like Paul is using three separate terms to emphasize the intensity and magnitude of glory: “far,” and “more,” and “exceeding.” Think of the most glorious and wonderful environment imaginable. And the glory that awaits us excels that in an exceedingly excessive way.

It is an Exceedingly Excessive Glory! It is a Beautifully Beautiful Glory! It is a Magnificently Magnificent Glory! It is a Gloriously Glorious Glory!! It goes far beyond our grandest expression and highest imagination!

Have you seen the AT&T commercial with the kids who are asked what the biggest number they can think of is, and after several answers are given, the guy says, “We are looking for infinity plus infinity.” And then one of the girls says, “What about infinity times infinity?”

THE GLORY AHEAD FOR US IS LIKE INFINITY TIMES INFINITY.
B. Notice (not only “The Comparative Measure,” but also) The Considerable Meaning Of The Glory

**eternal weight of glory**

1. **There Is A BIGNESS That Is Seen In These Terms**

   **eternal** – Greek 166. aionios, ahee-o’-nee-oh; from G165; perpetual (also used of past time, or past and future as well):--eternal, for ever, everlasting, world (began).

   **weight** – Greek 922. baros, bar’-oh; prob. from the same as G939 (through the notion of going down; comp. G899); weight; in the N.T. only fig. a load, abundance, authority:--burden (-some), weight.

   **glory** – Greek 1391. doxa, dox’-ah; from the base of G1380; glory (as very apparent), in a wide application (lit. or fig., obj. or subj.):--dignity, glory (-ious), honour, praise, worship.

   Albert Barnes said…

   [Of glory] doxees. The Hebrew word kabowd denotes weight as well as glory. And perhaps Paul had that use of the word in his eye in this strong expression. It refers here to the splendor, magnificence, honor, and happiness of the eternal world.

   This word “glory” is a wonderful word that suggests brightness, excellence, preeminence, majesty, and dignity. It has to do with the transcendently exalted state of the believer in heaven.

2. **There Is A BALANCING That Is Seen In These Terms**

   A. T. Robertson said, there is a…

   Careful balancing of words in contrast.

   - The “glory” is in contrast with “affliction.”
   - The “weight” is in contrast with “light.”
   - The “eternal” is in contrast with “but for a moment.”

   AND Paul says in verse 18 that we must remain focused on those eternal, unseen things that await us rather than on the temporary trials that we may see in our lives now.

**Conclusion:** Max Lucado said…

Your pain won’t last forever, my friend, but you will. Whatever we go through now is less than nothing compared with the magnificent future God has planned for us! (From his book You’ll Get Through This)

In order to illustrate this truth, for a moment let’s consider how the temporary trials of Joseph (13 years – Genesis 37:2; 41:46) compares to the 8 decades of his glorious position as Prime Minister (Genesis 50:26 – from 30 to 110 – 80 years).

(Deuteronomy 3:1) These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.

(Deuteronomy 41:46) And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

(Deuteronomy 50:26) So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

I heard the story of a man driving towards a town one day on a very rough road, and seeing a little boy on the side of the road, he stopped and asked if the road was that rough all the way through town. The little boy said, “Mister, it’s this rough till you get to the graveyard. But they’ve paved the road from the graveyard on through town so it’ll be a smooth ride after that.” That’s how it is with us. It may be rough till we get to the graveyard, but after that … there is glory ahead!

As Esther Kerr Rusthoi wrote years ago…

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. … Life’s trials will seem so small when we see Christ;

One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase, … So bravely run the race till we see Christ.

And may I say to you dear child of God, one of these days it will be worth it all. One of these days, “life’s trials will seem so small … when we see Jesus.” One of these days, our groanings will give way to His glory!