

Today, as we listened to the testimonies of those who were baptized, we are reminded that the water of baptism itself holds no power. Rather, it is a symbol of the faith that preceded baptism. What does this faith mean for us? A brand of so-called Christianity known as the health and wealth gospel would suggest that stronger faith leads to health and wealth in this present life, and conversely that sickness and financial hardship are results of inadequate faith or even inadequate generosity toward the church. My sister recently went through health problems, and I think to myself that it would be nice if having faith could bring health. But that isn't what the Bible teaches. Instead, it tells us that when we believe in Jesus, we realize that in this world things will continue to get worse, not better. Everyone is tied to their decaying bodies until they die. It all seems to be heading toward a final tragedy. However, those who have faith gain perspective on all this suffering. For us the story doesn't end in tragedy but in glory, because we have the hope of eternal life, the hope of resurrection through Jesus Christ.

Paul tells us many times that life is difficult, and that faith doesn't remove the difficulties from our lives. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says that our treasure (which is the message of salvation) is contained in fragile jars of clay, which are our frail bodies. Again in vv. 8-9 Paul tells us that we are pressed on every side, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down. Verses 10-11 tell us that in our bodies is the same death that Jesus experienced, the inevitable death caused by the curse of sin. We see in v. 16 that we are wasting away. This is not health and wealth. Faith in Jesus won't change the broken state of our current bodies. Pastors frequently have to help walk brothers and sisters through passing away and mourning, especially in the Chinese congregation, which has more elderly members. Even those who are young will eventually become old and die. Things may be smooth now, but it's only a matter of time before we experience the inevitable suffering that comes from living in this world. Jesus didn't come to make this life perfect.

However, the gospel gives us a different perspective about this suffering. In v. 7 we learn that the treasure must be kept in jars of clay because in our weakness, God's strength is demonstrated through us. In v. 8-9 we see that despite the hardships, we are not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed. How can this be? It is because of the power of God,

and the life we have in Jesus. We have to experience difficulty of this world, because as we do, Jesus' strength lives through us. This is not strength that manifests itself as health and wealth, but it is same power of God that raised Jesus from the dead, which gives us a new life in Him. When my mother died, my life and those of my father and siblings changed permanently. If you live long enough, you will also experience some major issue like this. We have to experience hardship so that through our brokenness and weakness God's power can work.

We see that the gospel also gives us perspective by telling us that this life is just a moment compared to eternity. In v. 17 Paul calls these troubles light and momentary when compared to the eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Paul uses the word *hyperbole* twice in a row to describe how surpassing the weight of eternity is compared to this life. When we experience hardship, it feels like it's just the worst. But we must step back and look at it in light of the resurrection. Paul tells us in v. 18 that we must fix our eyes on what is unseen, on that which is eternal. Focus on the invisible, on the spiritual. This is the benefit of our faith. It gives us perspective about our suffering because it provides hope for eternity. Jesus gave up His life to save you. But He was resurrected on the third day, so that if you have faith in Him, you will be forever changed by His life in you, and you will have the hope of an eternity that far surpasses all the troubles of this world.