

A dialogue sermon with Pastor Nubako Selenga, from Congo

Introduction:

- A. [Introduce Pastor Nubako Selenga and Dr. Tom Cairns. A brief background on the Free Church of Congo, and the suffering the church has gone through.
- **What was it like for the church in Congo 10 years ago?**
 - **You told me about a woman who asked you a serious question the last time you were in the States.**
- B. We have been studying the first chapters of 2 Corinthians to learn how Christians under pressure can draw our strength from the resurrection power of Christ. Our brothers and sisters in Congo have learned this lesson in far more profound ways than we have here in the U.S. Today, Pastor Selenga and I are going to try to preach together. I will show you what our passage says, verse by verse, and I will ask him to help us see how that truth has worked out in the life of the church where he serves, and in his own walk with Christ.
- C. Turn to **2 Corinthians 4:13-18**. Last week I told you how Paul may have had more reason than just about anyone to lose heart as a Christian. He wrote later in 2 Cor. 11:23, reluctantly comparing himself to his critics, *“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and be exposed to death again and again.”* So when in the passage before us he says not once, but twice, *“we do not lose heart,”* well, that is a man we need to listen to! What did he know that kept him from losing heart under such disheartening conditions? Last week I pointed out two reasons he didn't lose heart from vv.1-12:
- It is God's mercy that we have such a great message.
 - Our very weakness showcases the treasure of Christ's life in us. It is through the experiences that kill us, that drain us, that weaken us, that the powerful life of Jesus shines out.
- I think the message of vv.13-18 could be summed up this way: **We do not lose heart because we live by faith.** That comes out in two ways in these verses.

I. OUR FAITH IN GOD'S DELIVERANCE IS WHY WE TALK ABOUT CHRIST (4:13-15)

- A. Paul begins in v.13 by quoting a phrase from Ps. 116:10, *“I believed; therefore I have spoken.”* It would help us to look at that psalm. This is a psalm about someone who went through terrible hardships just like Paul had before he wrote this letter to the Corinthians. **Ps. 116:3-11...** That's a very familiar pattern in the Bible. When believers are in great trouble we cry out to God, *“O LORD, save me!”* Then, in one way or another, God does deliver us. In response, we praise God and tell others what he has done for us. Paul is just saying here that he is only doing what that psalmist and countless other believers before him had done.
- B. But believers now have something that the psalmist did not have: **vv.13b-14... We have the resurrection of Jesus as our assurance that God will absolutely deliver us from death just as he delivered Jesus.** Even when we die, we still will live. That is what we believe, and that is why we speak of our faith to others.
- **Did you see this pattern in Congo? What is your story of God's deliverance and power?** (During war, many discouraged, but experienced God's protection; the church grew. Crisis opened the eyes of people.)
- C. **When we speak of this resurrection hope—when we tell others about our faith in Christ—we launch God's economy of grace – v.15...** Sometimes it seems that Christian suffering is like losing all your money. There's nothing left when we suffer. It breaks us; leaves us empty, with nothing to show. But actually, it is just the opposite. When Christians suffer and draw upon the life of Christ, God's grace is released. First, we who suffer experience his grace. Then that grace spreads to others as they see the living power of the gospel, and some who see put their faith in Christ and they are delivered—saved—

from their sin. And then, as the gospel of grace spreads to more and more people, thanksgiving overflows from all those people *and* those of us who have shared the gospel with them. And all that thanksgiving to God brings glory to God. That is the miraculous economy of grace.

- **How did God's grace spread through the suffering of believers in Congo?**

SUMMARY: So we don't lose heart in hard times because those are the very times that strengthen our faith in God's resurrection power both *now* and when we die. God's resurrection power not only shows in *our* lives, but it spreads by the miraculous economy of grace to save more and more people. Isn't God great!

II. WE DO NOT LOSE HEART BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY SEEM (4:16-18)

In vv.16-18 there are three contrasts between what things *seem* to be and what things really *are*.

- A. It may look like death is taking its toll on us, but we are actually being renewed inwardly every day- v.16... How are we "renewed daily"? By faith that God will deliver us, just like the psalmist said. "*I believed; therefore I have spoken.*" Each day we refresh our faith in the risen Christ—that he will forgive us and strengthen us.
- **When you took on the presidency of the church, it was a very dark and discouraging time. You must have felt like this—"outwardly wasting away." How did God renew you inwardly day by day?** (Stories about prayer—personal, elders, you & your wife.)
- B. It may look like troubles are crushing us, but they are actually working out for an eternal weight of glory – v.17. Do you remember Paul's catalog of all he had suffered in **11:24-29**...? Yet Paul here calls all that "*our light and momentary troubles*"! How can he say that!?! Because he puts them on one side of a scale, and on the other side he puts the weight of the glory that will come to him forever as a result of those sufferings. And the scale nearly tips over with the weight of glory! What he means is that when a Christian suffers and trusts in God, drawing on the resurrection life of Christ, there is a change in us. We become more like Jesus himself, and that is a glory that we will bear forever. What's more, the Bible teaches that God *rewards* believers in the heaven and the glory of those rewards far outweigh the pain of any suffering now, no matter how bad. The everlasting heroes of heaven are Christians who bear suffering by their faith in Christ here and now.
- **When you're going through hard times it is hard to believe this, isn't it? Could this kind of scale really work?**
- C. It may look like the world and its pressures are going to last forever, but actually our unseen hope is what is eternal – v.18. The resurrection of Christ really happened. And we also will really be raised from the dead. And even now, in all the things that drain and kill us, we have resurrection life that renews us day by day. So don't stare at the troubles, don't stare at the hurts and hardships. Stare—fix your eyes—on our unseen hope of living forever with the Lord.
- **How do our fellow believers in Congo remember this?**

Do you have a final word for us?