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Real Troubles-Real Hope “The Nightmare Ends”

2 Corinthians 4:12-5:1

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A little girl comes running into her parents' bedroom in the middle of the night. She's crying over a scary dream. Mom and Dad snuggle her in between them for a while. Then, when she's settled down, Mom asks her, “Are you ready to go back in your own bed?” “I want to stay here,” the little girl says. “There's never any nightmares in here!”

Wouldn't it be nice to have a place where there were never any nightmares? I'm not just talking about the scary dreams we sometimes have when we sleep. Those nightmares end when we wake up. But there's another kind of nightmare, isn't there, that doesn't end so easily. Certain parts of our lives can be nightmarish. Certain aspects of the real world, and the real world's real troubles, can seem like a living nightmare.

Couples living in a rocky marriage ... parents with sick kids ... people who can't find a job ... families grieving a tragic death ... folks with terminal illnesses ... those living with chronic pain or fatigue ... individuals caught up in alcohol, drug, gambling, sex, or pornography addictions ... victims of natural disaster ... victims of crime, intolerance, sexual abuse, or domestic violence. The list goes on and on, doesn't it?

So many people in our world today burdened with real troubles. So many people right here contending with real struggles and major challenges. Sometimes it can almost feel like we're living in a nightmare. When's my nightmare going to end?

And even if you don't have any of these personal troubles, you can't help noticing the evils, the hardships, the corruption, and the immoral realities that surround us out there. We are living in troubled times, aren't we?

You know, back in the Bible days, there was a group of people living in troubled times, too. The ancient city of Corinth was a cosmopolitan, cultured city; but the culture was shifting. The people there were surrounded daily by corruption, lax morals, religious plurality, violence, and a pervasive "anything goes" mentality, just like we are. The Christians in Corinth had to contend with a lot of real-life troubles, too.

So the Apostle Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthian church, has a lot to say about the nightmares and the real-life troubles those people were facing. We're going to dig into his words from 2 Corinthians together for five weeks, because while we face real trouble in this world, God's Word gives us real hope!

Today Paul gives the Corinthians – and us, too – a powerful, much-needed, life-changing reminder. Our troubles and our struggles are real, they're tangible, and they're painful; but they will not last. Hang on to that. When life is feeling to you like a nightmare that's out of control, God's Word is telling us today -- to put it very simply, friends -- the nightmare ends.

How? Let's look closer at our text. Paul first talks about our faith in the risen, resurrected Lord Jesus. Underline verse 14 with me. He says, "*... knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.*" That's what's going to happen to us someday, down the road. Could be tomorrow. Could be 10,000 years from now. We're going to be raised with Jesus, and brought into God's presence.

But then Paul goes on. And here's today's main point. Underline verse 16 with me: "*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.*" He's talking here about our bodies, isn't he? He's talking about getting old, and breaking down. He's talking about how everything in this world – because it's sin-filled and sin-corrupted – is going to waste away, and bring us grief.

But don't forget, Paul teaches us today, there's more to you than what you see in the mirror. There's an inner self in you, too. You have a spirit and a soul that God is renewing and strengthening, shaping and molding, blessing and preserving day by day. God's grace is at work forgiving our sins, giving us new birth, and equipping us for Christian living every day. God's Holy Spirit is working on our hearts all the time.

In other words, don't lose heart when you're facing real troubles in this life. God is still at work in you. The world may be a mess, but God's plan is still unfolding in your life. God's mercies are still pouring out on you. We all have real troubles, but God gives us real hope. Because "*Our inner self,*" Paul reminds us today, "*is being renewed day by day!*"

And Paul adds one more thought. Underline verses 17-18 with me. "*For this light momentary affliction ...*" -- and let's just pause for a second here. Is Paul taking our hardships lightly? Is he blind to just how harsh life can be? No, he's simply putting all of that into true perspective for us. He says, "*For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*" (vs. 17-18).

Paul is reminding you here not to let your perspective get all out of whack. Sometimes all we see and notice are the things of this world. But God's Word is reminding you today that nothing you face in this world is permanent. Your trouble is real, but it will not last. God's promise to you today is that the afflictions of this life, whatever they may be, are impermanent, and inconsequential compared to the glory that is going to be yours in heaven.

Remember that little girl, who snuggled in between her parents? "There's never any nightmares in here," she said. Let's snuggle in, by faith, between the salvation God gives us through Jesus Christ, and the promises of God's holy Word. There, the nightmare ends. We face real troubles, but there in Christ we have real hope. Amen.