

**Date:** October 21-22, 2023

**Title:** Look Up - "Look Up for Renewal"

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

**Speaker:** Kurt Bjorklund

One of the things that I consider often is how much to stay in the prepared text. And what I mean by that is here at Orchard Hill, we usually plan our series well ahead of time, months ahead of time. And so, because we teach through books or chunks of the Bible, this weekend's message and scripture Second Corinthians four was decided months ago.

So how much do we stay in that, and how much do we talk about what's going on around us in the world? And it's always an interesting thought because sometimes the passage will lend itself to say, oh, here's a tie to what's going on in the world. But a lot of times it doesn't. And most of the time, the decision is to say we're going to stay with the passage.

And the reason for that is because we don't want to always be chasing news stories and events and trying to say here's what maybe even is a biblical view on that. And so, a few years ago, we started a podcast that we call *Perspectives* and that's available at our Orchard Hill Plus Feed. That is a chance for me and some of our other staff members and others in our congregation just to talk about current things that are happening and to bring a biblical worldview to it.

And this week, we're going to release one on what's going on in the Middle East and questions about how that might fit with Bible prophecy. So, if you've had some questions about what's going on and if this is something that the Bible predicts or talks about, we'll answer every one of those questions in 20 minutes. That is a joke. It'll be a little longer and we won't attempt to answer all of them, but we'll point you in some good directions. So, that'll be available this week.

Let's take a moment and pray. God, as we're gathered today in Wexford, in the Strip District, Butler, Southpointe, Beaver, the Chapel, and Online, we come, and we pray for the peace of Jerusalem. We pray for peace in the Ukraine, and for peace on our streets. And Father, we ask that as we're gathered this weekend, that you would speak to each of us, that my words would reflect your word in content and in tone and in emphasis. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So, do you ever get tired or weary? Do you ever get to a point where you think you know what you want to do but you feel like you lack the resolve or will to keep doing the thing that you think you should do? Well, you're certainly not alone if that's you. And likely all of us have that experience from time to time with things that matter but don't matter in the largest scope of things. I mean, we all get tired of doing household chores or maybe we get tired of being kind in a way that is completely genuine instead of the I'll be kind because I'm supposed to be kind, you know what I'm talking about. And then there are some things that are maybe a little deeper.

And when we come to Second Corinthians four today, we've been in a series through Second Corinthians talking about looking up, what we find is that the Apostle Paul addresses the issue of losing heart. We know this because he starts in chapter four, verse one, and he says

because we have this ministry, we don't lose heart. And then in verse 16 for his concluding statement, 4:16-18, he says therefore we don't lose heart. So, he starts and he ends the chapter by talking about losing heart.

Now, Paul's context was church, and we know that because this letter was written to the church at Corinth, which was a church that was compromised in many ways. He had written a corrective letter in First Corinthians, and now he's writing a more encouraging pastoral letter. But the church was situated in a confused culture, and he's writing to them and he's written about this New Covenant Ministry, chapter three. And now he says but we don't lose heart. And he was facing criticism.

I saw some stats that the Barna Group released recently, and this is about pastors. Here's what they said. In 2015, 66% of pastors were questioning whether or not they wanted to stay in pastoral ministry or do something else. Do you know what that number was in 2022? It was 35%. 33% were confident, 66% were confident, and 31% confident. So basically, two out of three pastors today are saying, I'm not sure I want to stay engaged in church work at all.

And then they did this. They said in 2015, 53% were saying they were not sure that they wanted to stay at the church they were at. Today, through 2022 basically 38%. So almost half to a third. So, what that means, and it wasn't clear the way they wrote the survey, if the third was the same third or if it was a third of the third.

Either way, what it means is one-third of pastors in churches, church staff people, are saying I feel called by God, and I'm content where I am. Two-thirds, two out of three, are saying I'm not sure I'm called by God to do this anymore. Not sure I want to do this anymore. And if I do want to do it, I'm not sure I want to do it here. That's staggering by the way. Just so you know, I'm in the one-third that feels called by God and to this place. I just thought I better make that clear.

Now, here's why I find that staggering. If that's church staff people, my guess is they're not the only ones who are going, why should we do church? What's the point? One of the things that happened during COVID is people got used to saying, I can sit on my living room sofa, eat waffles, and push play. If I don't like it, I can hit delete and go to the next thing. And so, everybody's making a decision to say do I do church, or do I just consume a religious product on the weekend?

And I believe that church is not optional for a Christian, for a follower of Jesus. And by that, I don't mean consuming an hour of online content a week. I mean being engaged in the community of the church and in the mission of the church. That's something God has called us to do. Now, you may be saying, well, I'm not sure that I'm a committed follower of Christ who that applies to. But in all likelihood, you have some areas of your life where you know or you feel that God has called you to something, and you may still be losing heart.

Maybe it's a marriage that's struggling and you're saying do I need to keep trying? Maybe it's something with your kids where you've been trying to swim against the culture for years, and now you're just saying we'll just go with the flow of culture. We don't need to try to try to teach our kids anything different. Maybe it has to do with just serving or giving, or it has to do with an ongoing sense of taking care of somebody in your life. But we all lose heart at some

point and you're not alone. It's not a new issue. In Jeremiah nine, the prophet Jeremiah says something about his desire to continue.

Now, Jeremiah's known as the weeping prophet, and he's known as the weeping prophet because God sent him to do a mission that God told him was going to be very difficult and challenging. By the way, in the Bible, there are no instances that I can find of God giving people easy, cushy assignments. So, Jeremiah goes to the people that God calls him to, and he has bad results. At one point he says this, Jeremiah 9:2, "Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people."

So, he says this is hard. I want to go open a bed and breakfast. And when you or I feel like saying, is this worth it? Is it worth being engaged in whatever it is God's called you to? You have a couple of options. You can resign or quit. Just say I'm done. You can become resigned, which is a way of saying I haven't officially quit, but I'm done giving the best of myself to this. You know how this works in marriage and parenting and relationships where you can say, I'm going to resign. I'm going to recommit to what it is that I believe God has called me to. And I believe that church is one of the things that God calls Christians to be engaged in.

Today we're going to look at two reasons you might be tempted to quit your calling, and then three reasons that you cannot lose heart. By the way, this phrase, lose heart, in the original language, in biblical Greek, means to lose heart, and in the secular Greek of the day. In other words, in the broader Greek context, this word meant to behave poorly. So, what that means is that there's a sense when we lose heart that we're going to be most vulnerable to do things that we don't actually want to do.

You know how this works. You are on a diet for a little while. You're watching everything you eat. You're eating all lean meats and vegetables for weeks or days or hours and then it's like chocolate cake, I must. Because all of a sudden, you say I've lost heart. And so, you dove into what it is you want to do. And all of a sudden, because you lost heart, you make a choice that's not good. And the same thing happens morally and spiritually. What we can do when we lose heart is all of a sudden say I'm just going to do what feels good because I want to feel good and feeling good is what I must do. And this is what Paul addresses here. Here's what we see. And that is the first reason that we're tempted to lose heart because of unbelief.

Now, for Paul, this was in his own unbelief. This was the unbelief of those in the broader culture, maybe in the church. But certainly, I think it can apply to our own unbelief as well. Here's what we read in verses one through four. "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

So, here's what He's basically saying. He's saying we've been given this ministry, but there are people who don't see it, don't get it. And then he talks about the God of this age, the God of

this age in scripture is Satan. You may say, well, wait a second, how is Satan the God of this age? That doesn't make sense. Isn't God in charge? And we just sang about how great our God is, how he's lord over everything. So, how is Satan the God of this age?

Well, here's maybe a goofy way to think about it. Did you ever ride the bus when you were a kid back and forth to school? Chances are you were one of two kids on the bus. You were either the kid who was the god of the bus or part of the group that was the God of the bus. Or, you were the group that wasn't part of that. And here's what I mean. There's a group even though there's an authority, there's a bus driver, there's a school principal, and there are things on the bus, and it became its own little kingdom for a little while. A few of the kids would dictate who sat where, who said what, and who could laugh out loud. They became the God of the bus, so to speak, the god of the age. They weren't the ultimate authority. They didn't have constituted authority, but they had practical sway over how things worked.

And what this passage says is right now, there's a God of this age who has practical sway over what happens. This means that the world that you and I live in is not the world that should be. And because of that, there are times that we get disheartened. There are times that we say, shouldn't believers behave differently? Shouldn't my husband? Shouldn't my wife be different? Shouldn't this person not have disappointed me? Shouldn't there be more generosity from people to other people, more generosity of spirit even? But what we see is that it's the unbelief because God has veiled the Gospel to some, and He's opened the eyes of others.

Now, there's something else in this idea of veiling that's important. Charles Taylor's written a large book, *A Secular Age*, on the age in which we live, and he talks about "The Age of Authenticity." By the way, this book takes about three and a half hours to listen to on Audible. I'm going to give you the best part. This is considered by many to be the definitive work on the secular age in which we live. Here's what he says. He says, "I mean the understanding of life which emerges with a romantic, expressivism of the late 19th century that each one of us has his or her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it's important to find out and live out one's own as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside by society, the previous generation, or religious or political authority."

And here's what he's saying is the God of our age. And that is finding our own identity and saying I must find it. I must find my authentic self apart from political ideology, religious ideology from the previous generation, or any societal norms. But biblically, there's a sense in which we should come to say, I surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And sometimes when we live around people, and even in a church culture where not everyone surrenders to it, it can be disheartening. And Paul says, and even still, I don't lose heart. So, there's unbelief. There's also hardship.

And this is in verse seven and following. Here's what he says. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." So, he says we have this treasure, the gospel, the thing that God has made us to be. And He says we have this in a jar of clay. And jars of clay were really common. They were cheap, they were disposable, and they were breakable. And what he's doing is he's not saying your body is disposable and cheap, but he's saying compared to the treasure, it isn't all that much.

And even though he's going to say later in verses 16 and following, that outwardly, we're wasting away, our jar doesn't continue to thrive. There's something inside that does. And so, in this, he's saying although we have this treasure in jars of clay, he says it's to show the all-surpassing powers from God and not from us.

Then he says this. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." And what he's doing as he's taking these words, this idea of hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, and saying there is a sense in which in this world if you are a follower of Jesus, will experience hardship. Jesus said this in John 16. He said in this world you will have trouble.

See, there's a whole way of thinking sometimes in the church that says if you follow Jesus, then you will be spared pain and suffering and difficulty. If you just have enough faith, if you just pray the right way, if you just are obedient enough, then God will spare you from whatever discomfort you want. But if you read your Bible, that's not the way the Bible reads. Here's Paul, a follower of Jesus, saying, we're hard pressed, we're perplexed, and we are experiencing what it is to live and not encounter what feels like the favor of God. And so, sometimes when you're saying, God, I'm trying to do the right thing, I'm trying to follow you, and my finances are still hard, somebody I love is having a health crisis, I'm having a health crisis, there's a relationship that's in turmoil, we say, why God? Where are you in the midst of this? And we start to lose heart.

So, why shouldn't we lose heart? Well, in verses 16 through 18, Paul answers this. And here's what he says. He says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Notice what he says. He says, first, our troubles are light. Now, I don't know about you, but when I hear that there's a piece of me that says, okay, probably. But it's kind of like telling somebody who's going through a medical issue, you know, what's the old line? When I have a medical issue, it's major surgery. When you do, it's a procedure kind of a thing. It's a little bit like saying your troubles are light, compared to whom. I mean, our own troubles feel immense to us. And yet Paul is saying these troubles that you have, he wants us to understand they are light. The word that's used here in the original language is the word *thlipsis*, and it's used 45 times and means to be squeezed or to be pressured. So, he's actually not minimizing the sense of being pressed here. What he's doing is he's saying that compared to what God is doing, this is light.

And then he doesn't just say that, but he says that our troubles are temporary. Notice this phrase here. He says these light and momentary troubles. He says this because in verse 14, what he said is that there will be a resurrection. He says it this way. "...because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself." And what He's doing is he's saying, there's coming a day when whatever it is that you're enduring here and now, you will look back and say that is short.

Sometimes when we're in the middle of something, it doesn't feel short because we don't see what's ahead. If you were living in a horrible job situation and every day was a grind and your boss came to you and said I'm going to cut your pay down to 10% of what you've been making because that's all we can do right now, that job would feel just oppressive. But if she came to you and said I know the job's been hard lately, we're going to increase your pay by ten times, all of a sudden, you would be able to just mentally say, you know what, this is a little cruddy right now, but I can do it for a while because I know what's coming. I know I'm going to be rewarded. A little bit of what Paul is doing here is he's saying your troubles, they're light and momentary.

But then here's the real push. He says, not only that, but the troubles are working out an eternal glory for you. Do you see this? For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. The resurrection Jesus talks about is a time when those who have been followers of Jesus Christ will find their way to have God's presence in such a way that everything that has been broken will be redeemed and restored. And the troubles that you and I walk through here and now, Paul says, are achieving for us a glory that far outshines them all.

C.S. Lewis wrote a book called *The Weight of Glory*, and probably one of the most famous quotes in the book is this. He was talking about this idea of glory coming. He says, "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward, promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

You see, what we tend to do is say I want to feel good now. I've lost heart and I'm going to do something that makes me feel good now. And we're far too easily pleased because we're not seeing the glory that is coming. And what Paul says is that the way through this is to focus on what is unseen. Now that feels like an oxymoron because how do you focus on what is unseen? If I can't see it, how do I see it? How do I focus on it? And what he's doing is he's saying, I want you to see the spiritual reality. I want you to know that when you are in a moment of losing heart, there is something more at work. And if you can see what is unseen, then you will be able to say my current trouble is light, it's momentary, and it's working for me an eternal glory.

So, if you are in a place where your health is a problem or somebody's health that you love is a problem, and you're saying, I don't know how we can navigate this, I don't know if I want to continue to do the right thing, you can say this health crisis today is a light and momentary trouble that is achieving for me a weight of glory that will far outweigh what I'm currently going through.

If you're experiencing heartbreak, the breakup of a significant relationship, or watching somebody you love make destructive choices, you can lose heart, or you can say I know that this is hard, but this is a light and momentary, temporary trouble that's achieving eternal glory. When you give yourself to something over and over and it seems unappreciated, you can say this is a light and momentary trouble that is achieving for me the weight of eternal glory.

When it seems like people who don't name God, who have the Gospel veiled to them succeed, or they make choices that are contrary to what God would want, and it seems as if there's no recompense, you can say this is a light and momentary trouble that's achieving for me an eternal weight of glory that far out exceeds what I'm going through. This is to focus on what is coming.

If your marriage is struggling, if your kids are in a space where you wish that they were different, you can either say I lose heart, or you can say this is a light and momentary trouble that is working for me an exceedingly great glory of God.

If your church experience has been less than you hoped and you say there are people who have let me down, have disappointed me, you can become one of the people who say I'm a follower of Jesus who doesn't do church, or you can say I'm not going to lose heart because I'm going to focus on what is unseen. And this is light and momentary trouble that's achieving for me the weight of glory.

And if you're lonely and you're in a place where you say I just want to be with somebody, to feel the warmth of somebody, and even if it means that I do it in a way that isn't the way that God's word talks about, you can either say, I'm doing that, or you can say I'm going to continue to trust God in this season of my life. And I know that this trouble is light and momentary and working for me the eternal weight of glory.

And when you see people struggling because of a lack of belief to name what's right and wrong. Isaiah five, verse 20 says woe to those who call right, wrong, and wrong, right, who call darkness, light, and light, darkness. Notice even in this passage, the light and darkness up in verses one through six. And when you're disheartened because it feels like people who should know the truth don't live the truth, don't speak the truth, you can say, I'm not going to lose heart, because what is unseen tells me that this is light, it's temporary, and it is working for me an eternal weight of glory.

I don't know where you're tempted to lose heart today. But my guess is, you do. My guess is the Holy Spirit has unearthed a little area in you, and maybe you've tried to push it out of your mind. You've tried to say, you know what, that's not my thing today. But chances are, even at this moment, you've had a moment of just saying, I know what's right, but I kind of don't want to follow that right now.

Maybe it's addressing a sinful habit in your own heart and life that nobody else knows about. Maybe it's an attitude thing. Maybe it's a commitment thing. It could be anything. And what Paul has done here is he's just laid out a case to say we don't need to lose heart because of who God is and what he has promised in the days ahead.

God, I ask today that you would help me, help each person who's part of the gatherings of Orchard Hill, to know fully that the gospel message is what you have done through Jesus Christ for us. And because of that, to not lose heart. God, for those who are struggling with family issues, jobs, finances, friendships, spiritual things, and church things, I pray that you will bring renewal because we look to what is unseen. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Thanks for being here. Have a great day.