

Making It Count

– by Greg Baker . My mind is just overflowing with thoughts today as I write this devotion. I have been meaning for a while to write this devotion to share my thoughts on having an eternal focus. Over the summer during my quiet times I studied Paul's final letter, 2 Timothy, and Peter's final letter, 2 Peter. Several months ago I wrote a devotion about 2 Timothy and learned so much from Paul's final words that I decided to study them even further and compare them to another apostle's final words, Peter. I learned so much from this study and I cannot help but share it with others. I hope these thoughts bless you and encourage you as much as they have encouraged me.

People desire to make some impact with their life and many want to leave behind some form of legacy. All of us have a limited amount of time on this Earth. Reverend Billy Graham often preached about how from the moment we are born we are dying. Isaiah 40:6-8 states: "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." We are temporary, but the Lord lives forever. Some of us will be remembered hundreds of years after our deaths, but the vast majority of us will be forgotten. Most of us desire to make those limited days count, and make the best of our time here. The big question is what is the best use of our time here? C.S. Lewis states: "If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this." The largest impact we can have in this life is living for the next life. It is living for those rewards in Heaven that Jesus promised to us. This is

exactly what we see in both Paul and Peter's lives as well as countless others in the Bible.

I do not know about you all, but it is so easy for me to get distracted by the things of this world. At times I am distracted by the wants I have. If I only had a perfect job or if I only had no debt or if I only had a house then I would be able to commit my life fully to Jesus. Then I would have nothing to worry about and could completely focus on Him. The problem is no matter what the world gives us we will always want more. I remember saying for years, "If I could pay off all my credit card debt and money I owe the IRS then I would be happy." A few weeks ago I was finally able to pay off that debt now I hear myself saying, "Lord if I could only have a house then I would be set." The truth is if I am seeking contentment and happiness from the world I will never be content and happy. I have been fooling myself for years. Before it was a job, then it was debt, now it is a house. I am sure if the Lord gave me a house I would find something else I wanted. In reality the whole world is just a sham and if you keep giving in to it and your flesh's desires, they will rob you of the life God has intended for you. It's not that there is anything wrong with buying a house, but if that is where I am looking for happiness and contentment, it cannot satisfy me. It will only leave me looking for more.

We all live such busy lives and have our struggles and wants. It is easy to think if the Lord would just take care of all of those wants, life would be better. That is just not true. In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul tells us where our mind should truly be focused. "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. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" 2 Corinthians 4:17-18. Do you understand that? What we see today is temporary. Our struggles, our materialistic things, all of it are temporary. The world we live in is dying and it will

all someday be dead, but what we do for the kingdom of God goes on forever. Forever. That is where our minds should be focused. The first step to living a life that counts is focusing on the unseen.

There have been many times in my faith that I have chickened out because of fear of man or decided not to obey the Lord because I was afraid what it would cost me. I remember times I would not tithe as much as I was supposed to; because I was worried about the amount of money I had in my account. The truth was, I was not willing to suffer without that money and I lacked faith that the Lord would provide. If we are going to live a life that counts we must be willing to suffer. Apostle Paul was willing to do just that. "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if I only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace." Acts 20:22-24. Can you imagine yourself saying this? If I am honest with myself I know it would be difficult for me to say, especially after you read on and see what happened to Paul in Jerusalem after he said this. If it wasn't for Paul's eternal focus he would not be able to say it either. If you are living for the world you will be unable to suffer for Jesus, because you will be too worried about losing what you have. Paul, however, considered his life worth nothing to him, and since it was worth nothing he was willing to suffer even if it meant death. If we are going to make our lives count, we must consider our lives worth nothing and in order for that to be possible we cannot be living for the things of this world.

If we are going to live for the second life we have to understand what awaits us. The Bible gives us many promises as to what awaits us in that second life and it was these promises that both Paul and Peter clung to. They both made

that very clear in their last letters. They made it clear that it was because of those promises they lived the way they did. Many in the world would have considered Paul's life as wasted. The world believes you only get one life on this Earth and you must live it to its fullest. As we read earlier in Acts 20, Paul considered his life worth nothing to him. How could that be? Well Paul clung to God's promises and lived his life according to them. In 2 Timothy he wrote: "This is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I believed, and am convinced He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him for that day." 2 Timothy 1:12. Paul was convinced that he was going to get everything that Jesus promised to him and that he was not at all ashamed of the way he lived his life. Just look what he wrote later in the letter: ""Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day." 2 Timothy 4:8. Just look at how confidently he wrote that. "He will award me" not "He may award me." Paul knew what awaited him and that is why he was able to suffer like he did.

Peter also believed in this so much that he wrote: "So I will remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body . . . And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things." 2 Peter 2:13-15. He knew that if the church was going to be effective, and be able to finish the race, they had to be able to remember God's promises. If you want to be successful in this life you must live for the second life. If we want our lives to count we must be working towards what has been promised to us, and keep our vision there. Otherwise we will be chasing the dreams of this world rather than what God has in store for us.

We can be encouraged that we are not in this alone. Paul wrote

in Hebrews: "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out before us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:1-2. Let us take a lesson from these men and look to the unseen just as they did. The path was laid out for us by Jesus. Jesus did not let the world dictate the way He lived His life. He knew when He came to this Earth He would die on the cross. Instead of worrying about the short life He lived and the hardships that were facing Him, He looked to the Heavens and what was promised to Him and completed the mission God sent Him here for. We too, like Paul and Peter, must fix our eyes on Him and His example. We must obey the Father and the Father's will like Jesus, and live for the next life. What the Father has to offer is far greater than anything in this world. If you want to make your life count, look to Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

"But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." 2 Timothy 1:8-9. So let us all focus our eyes on the unseen and remind ourselves of those precious promises the Lord has given us. Encourage one another in them every day and fix our eyes on Jesus. Then someday we will leave this world behind with all its pain and suffering, and we will receive what the Lord has entrusted to us. "For if you do these things you will never fall, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:10-11.