

## **A Mere Breath**

**Sermon Text:** Psalm 39

**Study Texts:** 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

**Sermon Recap:** The main idea of this week's sermon is this: Knowledge of the eternal, holy LORD gives perspective to temporary, sinful people. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

**Sermon Connection:** Psalm 39 is a confrontational text in that it confronts a false view of life that we often hold. In our humanity, we tend to push our frailty and thoughts of death out of our minds, preferring not to think about such things. This inevitably leads us to think more of ourselves and of our own lives than we should. We forget that suffering and hardship, sickness and need are meant to point us to our need for Christ. In Psalm 39, the point of highlighting the psalmist's suffering is to remind us of how fleeting human life is. As the Psalmist notes, "*Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!*" The good news is this is not where the Bible leaves it. In 2 Cor. 4:16-18, Paul helpfully shows how the suffering and brevity of our human lives remind us to trust in Christ's provision day-by-day. We are not meant to live apart from God, and the sufferings of this life are reminders of that truth. The beauty of the gospel is that even as our frail and temporary lives pass on, we are renewed and held fast in God.

### **Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To see that our earthly lives—our sufferings, hardships, and struggles— are temporary, but God's salvation is forever.

#### **Lesson Points:**

**Point 1: The Lesson in Suffering** (v. 16)

**Point 2: The Prize of Suffering** (v. 17)

**Point 3: How We Endure Suffering** (v. 18)

**The Context:** The central theme of 2 Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the Holy Spirit in Paul's life, ministry, and message.<sup>1</sup> Paul had suffered persecution and slander at the hands of false teachers. They had argued that Paul suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled follower of Jesus, much less, an apostle. Yet, Paul shows through the letter that it is his ongoing suffering and hardship that demonstrate his connection with the cross of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it is Paul's gracious attitude and unwavering hope that shine forth the resurrection power of Jesus' gospel. 2 Cor. 4:16-18 brings us face-to-face with Paul's unwavering hope.

**Point 1 - The Lesson in Suffering** (v. 16)

- How is Paul's statement, "*So we do not lose heart...*" connected with what has already come before?
- Read 2 Cor. 4:8-9. How does this help explain Paul's words in v. 16, "*Though our outer self is wasting away...*"?
- Read 2 Cor. 4:7, 10-11. How does this help explain Paul's hope that, "*...our inner self is being renewed day by day*"?
- In v. 16, how is Paul's hope of the coming resurrection and eternal life with God in view?

**Point 2 - The Prize of Suffering** (v. 17)

- How can Paul call the sufferings and hardship of this life, "*...light momentary...*"?
- What does Paul say our sufferings and hardship are doing for us?
- How does this verse teach us to think about our lives here on earth and the life to come in heaven with God?

**Point 3 - How We Endure Suffering** (v. 18)

- What is Paul referring to when he says, "*...we look not to the things that are seen...*"?
- What is Paul referring to when he says, "*...but to the things that are unseen*"? How does 2 Cor. 3:18 factor into 4:18?
- How does this promise and this call to action help us to endure suffering with joy?
- How does recognizing that our lives are but "mere breaths" help us in suffering and hardship?

**The Big Picture - A Mere Breath, yet Life Eternal**

Psalm 39 brings us face-to-face with this truth: Knowledge of the eternal, holy LORD gives perspective to temporary, sinful people. When we encounter the eternal God of the Bible, we encounter that which gives right perspective to everything. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and thus He is the measure of all things. 2 Corinthians 4 reminds us that God is the Creator, but it also comforts us knowing that although we experience hardship, suffering,

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to 2 Corinthians, *ESV Study Bible*, 2219.

and decay, God is actively at work sustaining His people, renewing our spirits, and teaching us to long for heaven. With a right perspective on Who God is, we gain a right perspective on who we are, and thus, how we ought to live. Our earthly lives are a mere breath, and yet God will grant His people life eternal with Him.

### **Application Questions**

- How do you normally handle suffering? How does that compare with Paul's word in 2 Cor. 4?
- Considering the normal way you deal with hardship and suffering, what does this teach your children, your spouse, or your closest friends about God?
- Undoubtedly, there are people in your neighborhood who are suffering. Most are probably suffering without the hope found in 2 Cor. 4:16-18. What can you as a GG do about this?