INTRODUCTION

If you own a digital camera or a nice 35 mm camera you are no doubt familiar with the zoom lense feature.

The zoom lense allows you to zoom in when you want to photograph a specific subject or object or to zoom out when you want to include more subjects, objects or background.

In plain, simple English ZOOMING IN narrows your view while ZOOMING OUT broadens your view.

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When it comes to how you and I view life we often see a very narrow picture.

We tend to ZOOM IN on what is going on in our own little world. We ZOOM IN on our own trials and troubles. We ZOOM IN on our own problems and pains.

And when we look at life through such a narrow lense it is very easy to get discouraged and lose hope. How can you and I go on when we don’t feel like we can go on? How can we be AN ENDURING PEOPLE?

The secret is to always keep life in the right perspective!!!
The apostle Paul tells us how to do that in our scripture text this morning. In these verses Paul ZOOMS OUT and helps us see our lives from an ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE. In other words, Paul helps us Look At The Big Picture of Life.

In this passage Paul describes a THREE DIMENSIONAL view of life every Christian must have in order to endure faithfully to the end.

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First of all............

I. We Must Keep An Onward Look

vs. 16a Therefore we do not lose heart.

1. All of us have troubles don’t we? In fact, the longer we live the more troubles we seem to have.

   And sometimes it is easy to believe our troubles are unique to us. That no one’s troubles are as bad or as numerous as ours. But the truth is everybody here this morning has troubles and believe it or not some are dealing with things far more difficult than you.

2. The apostle Paul’s troubles, by any human measure, were severe far beyond anything you or I have ever known or will likely ever know in this life time.

   And because Paul’s suffering was so severe he becomes for us the best role model on how to endure even under the most terrible of circumstances.

3. To any Christian who is depressed, burned out, discouraged, ready to give up, ready to quit, ready to throw in the towel, just look at the example of Paul.
4. Throughout his writings in I and II Corinthians Paul talks openly about his many troubles.

I CORINTHIANS 4:9-13  Paul writes: For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as men. (He continues in verse 11…….) To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.

Anyone here this morning have those kinds of troubles?

5. In II Corinthians 1:8, 9 Paul reminds the Corinthians that the whole time he was preaching in Asia he lived with the daily danger of losing his life.

6. Earlier in this fourth chapter of II Corinthians in verses 8-10 Paul wrote:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our body.

7. And then there’s that very familiar passage over in II Corinthians 11 where Paul writes:

I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned…….
three times I was shipwrecked, I spent night and day in the open sea. I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food. I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

II Corinthians 11:23b-29 NIV

8. Oh brothers and sisters, Paul had more trouble……faced more danger……and experienced more awful circumstances than all of us together will ever know in our lifetime.

And yet this is the man who wrote these words in verse 16 of our scripture text:

Therefore we DO NOT LOSE HEART!

9. How did Paul do it? How did he endure all the terrible troubles that came his way? He kept looking at the BIG PICTURE……….He always kept an ONWARD LOOK.

The word “quit” was not in Paul’s vocabulary!

10. There’s a valuable lesson for all of us in Paul’s example. No matter how tough life gets…….No matter how big our problems may be…….No matter how many troubles come our way……….we must always LOOK ONWARD!

Like the apostle Paul, we must remove words like “quit”.....”give up”.....and “retreat” from our thinking! ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS.......ONWARD!
II. We Must Keep An Inward Look

verse 16  Therefore we do not lose heart. Though OUTWARDLY we are wasting away, yet INWARDLY we are being renewed day by day.

1. I will never forget something my High School biology teacher said one day in class. Mr. Reid said, “We start dying the minute we are born.”

   Now I don’t believe Mr. Reid was a particularly religious man, but what he said that day underscored a very fundamental scriptural truth. And that is these physical bodies of ours are not meant to last forever.

   The moment you and I left the protective surroundings of our mother’s womb and entered this world full of sin, sickness, disease and decay, we began our journey toward the grave.

   Now if we dwell on what is happening to us outwardly we will live life with this constant cloud of death hanging over us.

2. When Paul wrote this second letter to the Corinthians he was not an old man, but yet it is likely the numerous trials and troubles he went through had accelerated his aging process. His outward appearance was probably that of a man much older than his years.

   Outwardly Paul was “wasting away.”
3. Outwardly you and are wasting away aren’t we? We don’t like to admit that, but it’s the truth!

…….Our appearance is not the same as it was 20 years ago.
…….Our strength is not what it was 20 years ago.
…….Our energy level is not what it was 20 years ago.
…….Our stamina and endurance is not what it was 20 years ago.
…….Our memory is not what it was 20 years ago.

As Paul says, outwardly we are “wasting away”……. Our bodies are showing the wear and tear of a lifetime of trials and troubles and stresses and heartaches.

4. Now if our focus is ZOOMED IN on the outward…….if we stay ZOOMED IN on what we see happening to us in the mirror…….we will mope around with our chins dragging the ground all the time won’t we?

5. That’s why it is so crucial that we KEEP AN INWARD LOOK.

Paul says, “Yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.”

6. What does Paul mean by that? He is referring to our SOUL, our SPIRIT, the eternal part of our being.

While these physical bodies are wearing down and wearing out…….OUR SOUL, OUR SPIRIT…….that part of us that will continue on after these physical bodies have been laid to rest…….OUR SOUL, OUR SPIRIT is growing and maturing into Christ-likeness!!!

7. Our SOUL is being RENEWED…..REVIVED…..REFRESHED and RE-ENERGIZED as the Lord prepares you and me to make the transition from mortality into immortality!!!
Analogy: Think of a rotting apple. The outside of that rotting apple is obviously decaying. It is soft and mushy and discolored.

But inside that apple there are seeds. Seeds of NEW LIFE…….Seeds of HOPE…….Seeds of PROMISING FUTURE!!

8. Now I’m not calling you “a rotten apple”……..but I think you get my point. Just like a decaying apple, our “outer man” is wasting away……..but inside of you and me is the SEED of NEW LIFE…….the living HOPE…..through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us!

9. So the next time you look in a mirror and you find yourself fretting over those wrinkles and age spots and gray hairs…..TURN YOUR THOUGHTS INWARD and remember your spirit is being renewed day by day!!

If we are to stay focused on the BIG PICTURE we must always KEEP AN ONWARD LOOK and an INWARD LOOK………..

But there’s one more dimension and that is………

III. We Must Keep An Upward Look

verses 17, 18  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.

1. Paul is painting a word picture for us here. It is the picture of a set of SCALES.
2. On one side of those scales Paul tells us to WEIGH our EARTHLY TRIALS.

Paul refers to our earthly trials as “light and momentary troubles.”

-When JOB lost all his earthly possessions, all his children and his health, do you think he thought of his troubles as light and momentary?

-When JOSEPH was sold by his own brothers into the hands of the Midianites and wound up in exile in Egypt, do you think he thought of his troubles as light and momentary?

-When MARY and MARTHA were grieving over the death of their beloved brother LAZARUS do you think they thought of their troubles as light and momentary?

3. When you and I are going through a tough time in life our troubles hardly seem LIGHT and MOMENTARY at the time do they?

Instead of LIGHT, our troubles seem very heavy. Instead of MOMENTARY, our troubles seem as though they will never end.

4. You see, when we put our EARTHLY TRIALS on the SCALES all by themselves, they look very heavy.

5. But now Paul tells us to put our ETERNAL GLORY on the other side of the SCALES.

verse 17  For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an ETERNAL GLORY that far outweighs them all.

6. Paul is not minimizing our present troubles. But rather he is telling us when we WEIGH what we are going through now with what WE WILL GAIN IN ETERNITY, it makes all the troubles we go through now worth it.
7. Paul is telling us to put our earthly trials and troubles in perspective. One hundred years from right now you and I will not be dealing with one single trial, trouble or problem we are now dealing with.

    In eternity, we won’t be dealing with the aches and pains and suffering we may now be going through, because we will have new eternal bodies that will never experience any kind of pain or suffering.

    In eternity, we won’t be worrying about any financial problems or stressing over paying our bills, because we will have the riches of heaven at our disposal.

    In eternity, we won’t be wrestling with any relationship problems or dealing with people who make life miserable because we will be surrounded by those who have nothing but the deepest love and concern for us.

8. For now our trials and troubles may seem anything but light and momentary. But if you and I will learn to always weigh our EARTHLY TRIALS with our ETERNAL GLORY, we will always have the faith and resolve to go on.
**CONCLUSION**

*The Divine Weaver*

*My life is but a weaving, between my Lord and me;
I cannot choose the colours He worketh steadily.*

*Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget that He sees the upper, and I the underside.*

*Not till the loom is silent, and the shuttles cease to fly,
Shall God unroll the canvass, and explain the reasons why.*

*The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver’s skillful hand,
As the threads of gold and silver, in the pattern He has planned.*

If you and I are to faithfully endure to the end, we must never lose sight of the BIG PICTURE!

May we always LOOK ONWARD never giving in to the temptation to quit!

May we always LOOK INWARD realizing that though our outward body is wasting away, inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

And may we always LOOK UPWARD, realizing that our troubles of today will become our trophies of tomorrow!