

Revelation 7: Those Who Stand in the Day of Trouble

Two Encouraging Visions

Who Can Stand?

As you may recall, chapt. 6 ends with the question, “*Who can stand*” the day of God’s wrath?

The answer is found in chapt. 7. Those who can stand God’s judgment are the martyrs and all whom they represent. God’s people — those who have trusted in Christ — despite hardships, persecution and even death, will ultimately be victorious. This is the welcomed message of Revelation 7.

On the other hand, those who have failed to trust in Christ cannot stand the day of God’s judgment. They will suffer from the various plagues and disasters detailed in Revelation and will ultimately be condemned to hell.

Good News

Rev. 7 is considered to be an interlude between the opening of the sixth seal in chapt. 6 and the opening of the seventh and final seal in chapt. 8.

Chapt. 7 contains good news for the persecuted church. Sandwiched between the gloom and doom of chapters 6 and 8, it is easy to imagine John’s original audience was drinking up this good news. “*Enough with the tales of judgment, John! Can’t you tell us something hopeful? We need a reason to keep going!*”

The Holy Spirit, through John, gives the church great encouragement in the form of two awesome visions in chapt. 7. One vision is of believers being marked with the seal of God, and the other is of believers standing before God’s throne in heaven.

One vision of security and one of eternal blessing. Not bad!

“*Ahhh! Now, John, that’s more like it!*” the believers must have thought.

The Seal of God

READ Rev. 7:1-3

¹“After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. ²Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: ³‘Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.’

The meaning of this passage seems fairly obvious so let's move on...(just kidding!).

- “four corners of the earth”?
- “the four winds”?
- “the seal of God”?
- and what's with the “trees”???

Let's try to figure all this out.

Four Corners and Four Winds

In John's vision, he saw four angels in charge of the “four winds.” The imagery of angels being in charge of the elements was common to Biblical apocalyptic literature. For example, in Rev. 14:18, there is an angel “who had charge of the fire.” And in Rev. 16:5, there is an angel “in charge of the waters.” Remember, angels are God's servants who do his bidding. The power to control the elements is ultimately God's.

There are four winds because they correspond to the “four corners of the earth.” Does that mean that John is telling the church that the earth is literally a rectangle? No, of course not. In fact, in John's day people most likely conceived of the earth as a round disk.

When John says the “four corners of the earth” he is simply using a figure of speech. We use a similar expression in our day when we talk about someone sailing to “the ends of the earth.” So, in other words, John means the angels are standing in all four directions and the winds are blowing from all directions.

The winds were agents of God's judgment bringing further destruction upon the earth, in addition to the disasters we read about in Rev. 6.

The Trees

Why are the “trees” called out? It's hard to say. Some commentators think it's because trees are particularly vulnerable to high winds. So they may represent the precarious nature of life on earth in the face of the oncoming storm of judgment.

Others note that trees are interpreted as being people in some passages in Isaiah (2:13; 14:8; 61:3) so perhaps John means the trees represent people.

It seems to me that by referring to the “land,” “sea,” and “trees,” John is simply saying that the whole world will be subject to the destructive power of the winds. Nowhere on earth will escape this judgment.

A Seal of Ownership and Protection

John mentions something in these verses that must have been very encouraging for his readers. He saw that another angel commanded the first four angels not to unleash the power of the winds until the Christians had been sealed on their foreheads. We later read in Rev. 14:1 that the seal consists of the names of God and of the Lamb.

Interestingly enough, just as Satan often counterfeits God's ways, the followers of the beast will have the beast's name or the number of his name on their foreheads or on their right hands (Rev. 13:16-17; 14:9, 11; 20:4). However, whoever receives the mark of the beast will ultimately be marked for eternal torment.

This is in contrast to God's seal upon his people. This seal is a sign of God's ownership. In ancient times, an owner would use his signet ring to stamp its imprint into melted wax on some object. This communicated his ownership of whatever was so stamped.

Commentators also think God's seal implies God's protection of his people. They point to Ezek. 9, where God marks the righteous remnant to protect them from his judgments. God's seal is also reminiscent of how the Israelites marked their doorframes with blood before the Exodus. They did this to mark their homes so that the Lord would "pass over" them when he went to destroy all the firstborn of Egypt (Ex. 12). They were thus protected from God's judgment of the Egyptians.

Yes, believers will experience the disasters we read about in chapt. 6. In John's day and in our day they will continue to experience persecution for their faith. Believers may have to live through the other plagues and disasters described in Revelation.

So what does it mean to say they are "protected" by God's seal? It means they are protected from being the direct objects of God's wrath, unlike unbelievers. More importantly, it means nothing can separate them from God's love, not even the death of martyrdom.

As Paul wrote to the Romans,

³⁵"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:35-39)

Despite all they were going through, the ultimate consolation for the church in John's day was that nothing could separate them from the love of Christ.

They were owned by God and they were protected by God.

The 144,000 Sealed

READ Rev. 7:4-8

⁴"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

⁵"From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, ⁶from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, ⁷from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, ⁸from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

Here John tells us that 144,000 people received the seal of God on their foreheads. But just who are these 144,000? That is a question that scholars have debated for a long time.

- Some believe the 144,000 are literally 12,000 Jews from each of the tribes of Israel. They contend that although the Jews today have been dispersed throughout the world and no one knows who is from which OT tribe, certainly God knows.
- A second view is that the 144,000 are a select group of Christian martyrs. This view is supported by God’s message to the martyrs in Rev. 6:11. They are told that their vindication will have to wait until the full number of their fellow believers are martyred as they had been. This view also seems to have some support in Rev. 14, where the 144,000 are mentioned again. There John writes that they “*were purchased from among men and offered as first-fruits to God and the Lamb*” (Rev. 14:4).
- A third view — and the most plausible to me — is that the 144,000 symbolically represent all true believers in Christ, Jew and Gentile alike. What supports this view? Allow me to cite three reasons:
 - a.) First of all, the 144,000 can’t literally be the tribes of Israel because all of the tribes except Judah and Benjamin disappeared through assimilation during the Assyrian captivity in 722 BC. And Judah and Benjamin lost their distinct identities after Jerusalem fell in 70 AD. Revelation was written about 25 years later, in 95-96 AD.
 - b.) Secondly, it makes sense within the context of Revelation that the number 144,000 is symbolic because so many of the other numbers in Revelation are symbolic. In particular, this number seems to be symbolic because it is a multiple of the number 12. As we have said earlier in our study of Revelation, the number 12 is the number of God’s people. For example, the 24 elders (2 x 12) around God’s throne may be understood to represent all of God’s people throughout the Old and New Testaments... 12 tribes referring to the people of Israel and 12 apostles referring to the Church.
 - c.) Thirdly, note that the 144,000 are referred to in verse 3 as “servants” of God. Everywhere else in Revelation, “servants” refers to all believers or witnesses, without ethnic distinction (Rev. 1:1; 2:20; 6:11; 10:7; 11:18; 19:2, 5, 10; 22:3, 6, 9).

The Martyrs Before the Throne

John’s second vision begins with verse 9.

READ Rev. 9-17

⁹“After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’

¹¹“All the angels were standing round the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying: ‘Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!’

¹³“Then one of the elders asked me, ‘These in white robes — who are they, and where did they come from?’ ¹⁴I answered, ‘Sir, you know.’ And he said, ‘These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’”

These verses remind me of going to the movies and watching the previews of coming attractions. A good movie trailer will get you psyched to see the actual movie. When I saw the trailer for *300*, I thought, “Man, I have got to see that movie!”

In these verses, God grants John a glorious preview of coming attractions. When John’s audience heard this, they must have thought, “Man, I have got to see heaven!”

John is permitted to look into the future, to see what life in heaven will be like after the tribulation of the present age is over and done with. As the earth and all who live on it were about to enter their darkest hour, God gives John this vision to share with the church so that they might find reason to endure till the end.

John sees in this vision that far more than the 144,000 will be in heaven. In fact, the number of saints who will be in heaven is beyond counting. This multitude is thought to be all the believers who have ever lived — past, present, and future. Because they are from all nations and groups, it demonstrates that the gospel will reach all peoples.

They are all arrayed in white robes, symbolizing both victory and the fact that they have been clothed with the righteousness of Christ.

The palm branches represent the joy of the redeemed in the triumph of Christ. Remember how the crowds carried palm branches when they went out to meet Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem? Then they cried out, “*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!*” (Jn. 12:13). Here in Revelation that prophetic scene is fulfilled.

The multitude in heaven shows its gratitude for their salvation by bursting into exultant praise of God and the Lamb. They are joined by the angels, elders, and four living creatures in a scene of worship that is reminiscent of the worship in Rev. 4. (For more comments on what worship in heaven is like, see Craig’s sermon notes on Rev. 4 on our website.)

Next, we read about those who have come out of “the great tribulation.” What does that term mean? The topic of the tribulation has generated heated debate and I don’t want to add to that today. Let me just give a summary of the two most common views and leave it at that.

- One view focuses on the fact that the definite article “the” is used here. To those who hold this view that is important. To them “the great tribulation” indicates a specific period of unequalled distress and trials that will come upon the whole world immediately before the return of Christ. They see this as the great tribulation prophesied by Daniel and alluded to by Christ in his gospel discourses on the end of the age (Dan. 12:1; Mt. 24; Mk. 13).

- A second view thinks that “the great tribulation” refers not just to one particular time of tribulation, but to the tribulation the church has faced throughout history. Those who hold this view note that the Greek word for “tribulation” is used 45 times in the NT, usually to describe what the church was already going through. The church in John’s day was aware that Christians had undergone persecution from the beginning of the church up to and including their own day.

Those who hold this second view would also point to the fact that the church is still experiencing severe persecution in our day. It is happening even now in Sudan, China, Iran, and Turkey, to mention just a few countries. There and elsewhere Christians are being tortured and even murdered for their faith.

Moving on to verses 15-17, we read that John is shown a glimpse of how wonderful life in heaven will be. He is told by one of the elders that we believers will be directly before God’s throne and privileged to serve him day and night. What kind of service can we possibly render to God in heaven? It is difficult to know for sure, but because the service is said to be in the “temple” this is possibly a reference to the service of the levitical priesthood. In Biblical times, the temple was the place of worship and the priests were in charge of that worship. Because elsewhere in Revelation (1:6; 5:10) the saints are described as a “kingdom of priests,” it may mean that we will “serve” God through our worship in heaven.

The rest of the passage is a picture of God’s great care and comfort for those he has brought to live with him in eternity. The elder reports that believers in heaven will not hunger or thirst, perhaps an allusion to the famine described in Rev. 6. It may also be the heavenly fulfillment of Christ’s promise that those who come to him “will never go hungry” and “never be thirsty” (Jn. 6:35).

The saints in heaven will not suffer from scorching heat, perhaps an allusion to the intense heat unleashed when the angel poured out his bowl on the sun in Rev. 16 (v. 8).

They won’t ever experience sunburn again! Hey, that alone would make heaven worth it to me. I mean, look at my complexion! Personally, I don’t think there will be any hot, sandy beaches in heaven. Just nice, cool mountains.

Finally, we see how tenderly Jesus will shepherd his people, leading them to refreshment and comforting them from the remnant of any earthly sorrows.

That all sounds great, but how does it apply to us today?

Application: Standing in Life’s Troubles

Trouble Is to Be Expected

None of us may be called on to give our lives for Christ like the martyrs in Revelation. Yet, we all go through our own form of tribulation during our lives, don’t we? Life is tough, isn’t it?

But why does life have to be so hard? “Hey, I gave my life to Christ. I thought things were supposed to get better.”

Where does the Bible say that?

Of course, salvation is priceless and makes all the difference in our eternal destiny and in the meaning of life now. But salvation in no way promises the redeemed the proverbial “rose garden.”

If anything, life is more difficult for Christians than for non-Christians. Why? Because we cut against the grain, we go against the tide, we swim upstream in a river of molasses. In other words, if we are truly following Christ, then we are going against almost everything our culture values. On the other hand, non-Christians just go with the flow. So who’s got it harder?

In fact, the Bible actually tells us that life will be tough for Christians. Jesus promised his followers, “*In this world you will have trouble*” (Jn. 16:33).

So why are we surprised that we encounter trouble in this life? It’s to be expected. Jesus warned us in advance that we would have trouble. It’s normal!

Troubles happen every day to ordinary people:

- People lose their jobs
- They go bankrupt
- They have their hearts broken in relationships
- They get addicted to booze, drugs, and sex

Horrible things happen to innocent people:

- Newborn babies are left in dumpsters
- Little old ladies are run down by hit-and-run drivers
- Friends get sick with cancer and die

Random tragedies occur:

- Two firefighters die in a fire at the Deutsche Bank building in lower Manhattan
- Three college kids are executed for no apparent reason in a schoolyard in NJ
- Six miners are trapped and presumed dead in a Utah coal mine

Disasters happen:

- A bridge collapses in Minneapolis, killing a dozen people
- Hurricane Katrina hits Louisiana causing incredible damage and loss of life
- Two jetliners are piloted directly into the World Trade Centers, killing 2,823 people

Jesus said, “*In this world you will have trouble.*”

Why Do We Have Trouble?

I understand that these terrible things happen, but why do they happen? Why do we have such trouble in this world?

We live in a fallen world

One reason is because we live in a fallen world, one infected by sin in every way. People are full of sin and what do sin-full people do?

Sinful people cheat, they lie, they treat one another badly. Sinful people look out for “number 1,” so if you’re “number 2 or 3,” watch out! Not to mention that sinful people do the “biggies” like rape, rob, and murder.

By the way, those “sinful people” I’m talking about...that includes all of us! Not just unbelievers. Granted, Christians have been delivered from the power that sin had to run our lives, but we still give in to it more often than we’d like, don’t we?

Why else do we have trouble in this world? What other explanations are there?

We live in the “not yet”

In terms of kingdom theology, it is because we live in the “not yet,” before God’s kingdom has come in its fullness with the return of Christ. We live all our lives in a war zone. People get hurt and killed in a war zone. It’s not pleasant. It’s downright dangerous. Our enemy targets us every day.

Okay, so it’s a fact of life that we have trouble in this world. We all encounter difficulties on a daily basis. I’ve got it. But if Christians and non-Christians alike experience similar troubles, then what’s the advantage of being a Christian in this fallen, “not-yet” world?

Three Truths to Help Us Stand in the Day of Trouble

There are a number of obvious advantages Christians have over non-Christians to cope with this world. For example, there are these obvious resources to help us through the tough times:

- the wisdom, strength, and comfort found in the Bible
- 24-hour access to God through prayer
- the support of fellow Christians
- the exhilaration of worship
- Etc., etc.

But today I want to focus on three less obvious sources of support that God has given us. In addition to those things I just mentioned, these three truths can be of immense encouragement when we are faced with troubles. They are the same three things that the servants of God in Rev. 7 relied on to get through their tribulation.

These truths are that:

1. We are owned by God.
2. We are protected by God.
3. We will live with God forever.

Earlier, when I quoted Jesus from Jn. 16:33, I only gave you the first part of the verse. It’s a bad news/good news verse. I only gave you the bad news, that in this world we will have trouble. Here’s the good news in the rest of the verse:

Jesus said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (Jn. 16:33).

You see, it’s because Jesus has overcome the world — not to mention Satan, sin, and death — that we are owned by God, protected by God, and assured of living forever in God’s presence. This is worth celebrating, especially in the day of trouble.

1. We are owned by God.

We are equipped to stand against all that the world, the flesh, and the devil throw against us because we are owned by God.

We don't have God's name written on our foreheads like the saints in Rev. 7 do, but we have something equally great. God expresses his ownership of us by sealing us with the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote in II Corinthians, ²¹“*Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, ²²set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come*” (II Cor. 1:21-22).

Paul makes the point even more explicitly in his letter to the Ephesians, ¹³“*Having believed, you were marked in him (Christ) with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit...*” (Eph. 1:13).

The word “troubles” occurs nine times in II Corinthians. Paul spends much of his letter, especially in the first chapter that I just quoted from, trying to comfort the Corinthians in their troubles. So his message to them is very applicable to us as well.

One of Paul's primary means of comforting the Corinthians is to remind them that they have been sealed at salvation with the Holy Spirit, who indwells every believer. The presence of the Holy Spirit within us marks us as God's property.

Cattle branding illustration:

On cattle ranches in the American West, ranchers put their distinctive brand on every one of their cattle. If any of their cattle should stray onto someone else's property, that person cannot claim the stray cattle because one look at the brand indicates to him that the cattle is owned by another.

Satan would love to own us. He uses all his wiles — accusation, deception, lies, etc. — to try to draw us to his ranch. However, he can never really own us because we already belong to Christ. We are marked with the brand of the Holy Spirit. When Satan tries to claim us as his, he ultimately has to back off because we belong to God. He may harass us, as he did Job, but he can never possess us. We are owned by God as evidenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

When the troubles of this life threaten to overwhelm us, that is when Satan often does his worst to try to claim us. He exploits the anxiety and fear that such troubles arouse to try to lure us into his clutches. To the degree that we surrender to such emotions, he succeeds. At times like that, through earnest prayer it helps to remind ourselves that we belong to God. Through prayerful affirmation of God's ownership of us, in essence we are telling Satan to back off.

To paraphrase Christ's words in the Gospel of John, Jesus is the “Good Rancher” who knows, owns, and has laid down his life for his “cattle.”

In the day of trouble we can find great comfort in knowing that we are owned by God, having been purchased by Christ and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

2. We are protected by God.

A second truth that helps us stand in the midst of life's trials is this...knowing that we are protected by God.

To understand how we are protected by God, let's look at what follows the verse I quoted from John's gospel, Jn. 16:33, "*In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*"

Immediately following Jn. 16:33 is Jn. 17:1, the beginning of Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer." That is Jesus' final recorded prayer before he faced his own greatest trial in Gethsemane.

In this prayer, Jesus intercedes for his disciples and for us. So immediately after Jesus tells his followers to take heart because he has overcome the world, he prays for us who still face trouble in this world.

Among other things, Jesus prayed, "*I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. ¹²While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me."*

¹⁵"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." (Jn. 17:11-12).

Notice what John records here, that Jesus prays we would be protected by the power of God's name. "Protection"... "God's name"...ring a bell? What did we learn about the nature of the seal that God places on his servants? That it is a seal of protection and consists of the name of God the Father and God the Son!

This was Jesus' prayer for us. And how many of Jesus' prayers does the Father answer? 50%? 75%? Maybe even 90%? No! 100%!

Jesus prayed that God would protect us so there is a 100% assurance that God will protect us!

The point is that in the midst of life's troubles we can draw strength from knowing that God protects us. It may not always seem like it when things are rough, but imagine how much worse things would be if God didn't protect us!

Protected through Christ's intercession

The lesson here is that one of the primary ways we are protected by God is through Jesus' intercession. Not just Jesus' intercession 2,000 years ago, as effective as that was. The Bible tells us that Jesus is on his throne in heaven interceding for us, for you and me, day and night 24/7! How awesome is that?

The writer to the Hebrews states, ²⁵"Therefore he (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Heb. 7:25).

As if that wasn't enough, Paul tells the Romans, ²⁶"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Rom. 8:26-27).

So whenever we are feeling life is too much to take, whenever life's trials seem too great, let's remember that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are interceding for us.

There are times when they have prayed, "*Father, help Clint through this difficulty. Grant him strength. Don't let the enemy discourage him.*"

Wow! Talk about protection! Jesus himself has got my back! Jesus has got your back, too!

We are protected in the day of trouble by the powerful, personal intercessions of Jesus.

3. We will live with God forever.

A third truth that helps us stand in the midst of life's trials is knowing we will live with God forever.

We all tend to be so focused on the here and now that this is perhaps the most overlooked Biblical truth of all. Yet, ultimately, the greatest encouragement of all is the hope of heaven.

We tend not to think of heaven because to think of heaven is to think of dying. And dying is something we avoid thinking of like the plague.

Baseball in heaven story

Two baseball-loving friends agree that whichever one dies first will come back and let the other know if there's baseball in heaven. The first one to die contacts his friend and says, "*The good news is that there is baseball in heaven. The bad news is that you're pitching Friday.*" (from *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* by John Ortberg)

This is a funny story but it points out a fact of human nature, that even Christians don't like to think about dying and going to heaven.

But for our purposes today, let's try to separate the unpleasant prerequisite of dying from the glorious prospect of heaven. You see, if we really believe we will go to heaven and we really understand how indescribably wonderful that will be, then none of the trials we face here on earth can diminish that future hope.

On the contrary, that future hope can diminish the unpleasantness of our present trials.

Think about it: We are going to hang with Jesus forever! Face to face, no longer separated by heaven and earth.

The only way we can communicate with Jesus before heaven is through prayer. Now, don't get me wrong, prayer is great but it reminds me of those old telephone ads...

"Long-distance calling is the next best thing to being there."

Well, prayer may be the next best thing, but being there in heaven is the best thing!

When we are in heaven, we will experience what John describes in Rev. 7:

We won't hunger or thirst. There will be no pain or sorrow. We will at long last be free from sin and all the horrible effects of the Fall! We will be full of joy and worship.

How does knowing and believing this help us here on earth now? By altering our perspective on our current troubles.

The apostle Paul probably had a harder life than any of us will ever have. Yet, he found the hope of heaven was the secret to not being beaten down by the worst that life in this world could throw at him.

After listing several of his various hardships, Paul tells the Corinthians, ¹⁶“*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So 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.*”

^{5:1}“*Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (II Cor. 4:16-5:1).*

Or, as Paul wrote to the Romans, ¹⁸“*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).*

Paul was strengthened in present sufferings by maintaining a heavenly perspective. He looked on his frequent and truly painful circumstances from heaven’s perspective. Current difficulties are temporary. Life in heaven will be eternal.

If we can remind ourselves to maintain a heavenly perspective during our own present sufferings, it won’t make the pain go away. But it will make it more bearable. It will feed us hope when our circumstances feed us only discouragement and worse.

We are strengthened and given hope in the day of trouble by contemplating the future joy of living with Jesus forever.

Final exams illustration:

When I was in college, I dreaded final exams. They were so hard and the studying they required was like torture. And even though they only lasted a couple of weeks, they seemed like they lasted forever.

The main thing that kept me going when I was in finals was the prospect that after they were over, summer would begin! No more school! No more classes or homework! Just the joy of summer!

So every time my studies or the exams themselves would get me down, I would pick myself back up by thinking ahead to summer. I first had to get through finals to get to summer but it was worth it!

Trials on earth are kind of like final exams. They’re a pain, but they can be made more bearable if we look ahead to summer in heaven!