

Embodied Hope

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[0 : 00] Good morning again, and welcome to Church of the Advent. If you're joining us for the first time, my name is Jeff, and I'm one of the pastors here, and I would love to meet you after the service and get to know you a little bit.

I'll be outside on the steps. Please come say hello. Brian Johnson is a billionaire tech entrepreneur and venture capitalist whose mission in life is to reverse the aging process of his own body and to be able to live longer than human beings have ever been able to live.

Every day, Brian Johnson follows a strict regimen of diet and exercise, taking over 100 supplements a day, having blood plasma treatments, skin treatments, and strict sleep protocols.

This is a project that costs him over \$2 million a year. Back in January of this year, Fortune magazine reported that Johnson had hosted Kim Kardashian and other members of the Kardashian family and influential people, lots of other influential people, for a don't-die dinner.

It sounds like I'm making this up, but I'm not. The article said that Johnson has hosted bi-weekly Don't Die dinners for the last few years, and he has welcomed hundreds of guests, including politicians, astronauts, artists, scientists, and he says the impetus for the dinners is to provoke conversations about what it means to be human.

[1 : 38] Don't Die is the punchline of the dinner, he says. The article goes on to say that guests enjoy a meal of broccoli, cauliflower, black lentils, and nutty pudding, a concoction of various nuts and berries.

And in true Johnson fashion, because sleep needs to be optimized, the dinner wrapped up at 7.30 that evening. Most recently, it was reported on multiple news outlets, you can look this up, that due to Johnson's progress, he now celebrates his biological age every 19 months.

Now, to many of us, I think this probably sounds a bit extreme and honestly a little silly, but I think you've got to give it to him. This is someone who has taken the human problem of human mortality very seriously, a problem that most of us would honestly prefer not to think about on a daily basis. The fact that there are over a thousand ways that our bodies can break down and get sick and suffer and die.

Some of us right now know this better than others, but even for the healthiest among us, it's just a matter of time. Given enough years and days and months and minutes, our bodies will eventually break down and stop working.

[3 : 06] And you have to give it to him. Brian Johnson is trying to face this problem of human mortality with incredible hope and optimism and discipline, and he's trying to inspire others to do the same.

But is there a better way to think about and respond to the human problem of mortality and frailty and weakness? The Apostle Paul is someone who not only thought about these things a lot, but he faced them head on and experienced a great deal of suffering.

He was imprisoned. He was beaten. He was shipwrecked. His life was threatened countless times. And he had critics who questioned his credibility, critics that he's speaking to here in this letter in 2 Corinthians.

And his critics believe that if he really was an apostle from God, he wouldn't experience this kind of bodily frailty and weakness and suffering. And yet in the middle of that, he has this incredible hope and optimism.

Far beyond the hope and optimism of somebody like Brian Johnson. And the question is why? What hope does Christianity offer the world as it relates to human frailty and weakness and mortality?

[4 : 26] And what difference does that make in our lives? And that's the question that I want to look at this morning, this question of hope. That's what we're going to look at as we look at our passage in 2 Corinthians 4 and 5.

We're going to look at the hope of present transformation and the hope of future glory. The hope of present transformation and the hope of future glory.

So first of all, the hope of present transformation. In verse 16, at the beginning of our passage, Paul says this. So we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. The fact that our outer self is wasting away, this reality of mortality, has the potential to drive us to discouragement and even to despair.

And many people have been driven there. On the other hand, it can drive others like Brian Johnson to, not to discouragement and despair, but to greater discipline. To have greater discipline and mastery over his body.

[5 : 36] But Paul isn't discouraged about his mortality. He's not driven to despair. Nor does he say that the solution is greater discipline or mastery over our bodies.

No, he's filled with hope and encouragement. He says, for we do not lose heart. Why? Why? Because though our outer selves are headed towards a trajectory of breakdown and decay, our inner selves are headed in precisely the opposite direction, towards transformation and renewal and healing.

Listen to how Paul describes this inner transformation just a couple chapters earlier in chapter 3, verse 18. And we behold the glory of the Lord. As we behold the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

From one degree of glory to another. Outwardly, our bodies are being changed from one degree of mortality and weakness to another. But for the Christian who's been filled with the Spirit, we are inwardly being transformed from one degree of glory to another to look more and more like Christ. This is a kind of glory that no amount of discipline could ever achieve. And it's the glory of spiritual transformation and moral beauty.

[7 : 11] It's the glory of holiness. It's the glory of becoming more and more like God. But even as we think about this, as we think about our own transformation, it's easy to get discouraged about that.

The older that I've gotten, the more I've wondered, can people actually change? Can I change? Can broken relationships be healed? Can leaders in the public square live just and morally beautiful lives?

A younger version of myself would probably have been more optimistic about the answers to these questions. And I wonder about you. As you've gotten older, have you become more encouraged or discouraged about the possibility of change?

About the possibility of change in your own life and in the lives of others? Wherever you're at, Paul would remind us today that we, of all people, should be optimistic in the face of these questions.

[8 : 23] Because of the power of the Holy Spirit that is available to us to transform us inwardly, even as outwardly our bodies have the appearance of wasting away.

By God's grace, people can change and live lives of moral beauty this side of heaven.

Just in the past month, I have seen this. I've seen a change happen in my extended family that, to be honest, I had lost hope could ever happen.

After years of no communication whatsoever, I received a text message from an extended family member who I thought would never talk to me ever again.

Now, this might sound like a really simple, unglorious thing, but some of you have the kind of broken relationships where you know that there is a depth and there's a degree of brokenness where to receive a text message from somebody would mean that God has done a miracle.

[9 : 36] And this is exactly what happened. I saw real change. I saw real transformation happen in somebody in my extended family that I have a relationship with. Brian Johnson is seeking outer transformation.

He's seeking the reversal of his age. But Christianity offers us something far greater and deeper and profound, the inner transformation of our humanity into moral and spiritual beauty, into Christlikeness, the reversal of our sin nature.

And this isn't a transformation that just lasts for the present. It's a transformation that lasts for all of eternity. And Paul is clear that the transformation that we experience in this life is evidence, is directly linked to the fact that we also possess the hope of eternal glory.

And that's what I want to look at next, is we not only have the hope of present transformation, but we also have the hope of future glory. And we see that in the next verse and the verses preceding. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 17. Paul says, For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

[11 : 05] However we imagine the beauty and glory of heaven to be with our finite brains, our best projections, our best imaginations pale in comparison to what it will actually be like.

Consider what Paul says elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 2. He says, No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.

We are actually not given a lot of intricate detail in Scripture about what heaven will be like. We do have some glimpses in some places, like the book of Revelation.

But actually what we're given more of and what Paul emphasizes here in this passage and in other places is that we will have resurrected glorified bodies.

In chapter 5, verse 1, he compares our current bodies to a tent. And he says that we have, in these tents that we have, we have this promise of a greater house, a greater dwelling, a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

[12 : 22] And then in verse 4, he mixes these metaphors of dwelling and clothing. And he says, For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Paul is mixing metaphors here of home and clothing to make the point that our transition from this life to the next one isn't going from being clothed to being naked.

It's not from having a body to being without a body. Rather, it's transitioning from a lesser body to a greater, more glorified body.

From a tent to a home. From being clothed to being further clothed. From a weak, frail, mortal body to an immortal, indestructible, glorified body.

Now, even though he doesn't go into great detail about what this body will look like, and sometimes I wish that Paul did, this actually helps us to imagine how beautiful and glorious heaven will be.

[13 : 50] Think about all of the best experiences and pleasures that you have experienced in your body. Think about the best meals that you have ever eaten.

Well, heaven is described like a great feast, a wedding supper, the wedding supper of the Lamb between Christ and the church. Think about the most beautiful experiences outdoors in nature that you've had, whether it's a sunset or a hike in the mountains or a day at the beach.

Our future is the renewal of all creation, the marriage of heaven and earth. Think about the best night's sleep you've ever had. Heaven is the ultimate Sabbath rest.

Think about the best experiences of art or music that you've ever experienced. Heaven is described as a place of beauty and glory beyond all comparison. The point is that the promise of future glory isn't a glory apart from our bodies, but an embodied glory that transcends all our best bodily experiences in this life and fulfills the deepest longings that we have.

And this is why Paul is filled with hope. This is why he repeats multiple times in this passage, we are always of good courage, we do not lose heart because the promise of future glory is more beautiful than any of us could possibly imagine.

[15 : 29] And this not only gives us hope for the future, but it transforms how we think about our bodies in the present. On one hand, the hope of the resurrection of the body gives us the greatest possible affirmation of the dignity of what it means to be human and to have a body.

But on the other hand, it also cautions us not to place our ultimate hope in these bodies, in these tents.

We might not be billionaires like Brian Johnson with \$2 million a year to spend on our physical health and reversing our aging process and hosting don't die dinners with celebrities.

But we all to some degree experience the temptation to treat these bodies as our home and not as a tent. It's easy for us, I think, that we live in the culture that we live in this culture to base our sense of self-worth, to base our ultimate source of hope in our physical beauty, in our health, in our fitness.

We're surrounded by images in marketing and media and TV and movies that offer a vision and a particular vision of what it means to be human that can lead us to a certain kind of idolatry where we give physical beauty and health and fitness a place of worship in our hearts that only God deserves. [17 : 03] One of the main problems in a culture like that, in a culture that worships beauty and physical fitness, is that it has little to no resources to help people face the realities of physical weakness and suffering.

The solutions we come up with are only for the elite and for the rich. See, if you worship physical beauty or health or fitness, you'll never be able to see how physical suffering or weakness or even death could make you more beautiful, could make you more glorious, could make you into a person of greater spiritual beauty.

Instead, it will always drive you to despair and discouragement. But if you see Jesus Christ, what you see in Jesus is that you see a God who took on a body.

Think about what it means for our weak, frail, suffering, dying bodies that are outwardly wasting away.

Think about what it means that God took on a body, a body that was weak, a body that was frail, that had limits, a body that suffered, a body that died.

[18 : 31] Think about the fact that because God himself experienced in his body all the weaknesses and frailties that we experience. He can use those things in our life to transform us to be more like him, to become more glorious.

And what can bring us more hope for our bodies than the fact that we are promised the same transformation that Christ experienced in his own resurrection, a transformation far beyond what supplements and skin treatments and gym memberships and mascara could ever achieve, a transformation that doesn't downplay or minimize or ignore our suffering and our weakness, but that in comparison, in comparison, makes our suffering look like what Paul calls a light and momentary affliction.

And far from being a hope that is only available to the rich and the elite and the healthy, the hope of the resurrection of the body is a hope that is available to everyone. And this is why Paul is full of optimism and hope in the midst of his own mortality.

This is why he says we are always of good courage, we do not lose heart. In these tents we groan. But in our groaning we are always of good courage because we have the hope of present transformation, that by God's grace we can be transformed by the Holy Spirit to live lives of moral beauty this side of heaven.

And that this present transformation is evidence that we also possess the hope of future glory. And our groaning is evidence that one day our groaning will end.

[20 : 31] That our earthly tent will become a heavenly dwelling. That our tattered rags will become robes of splendor. That what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

as I was reflecting on all this this past week I couldn't help but continue to think about Brian Johnson's don't die dinners.

Partially because I thought it was funny to imagine the Kardashian family sitting around the table with their makeup and Botox eating cauliflower telling each other to not die.

but more so because I couldn't help but connect it to the meal that we receive each week at this table.

Now maybe that's because I'm an Anglican priest and because I think about these things a lot. But also I think there is something that is connected to this universal longing for what is offered and made available in the Eucharist.

[21 : 35] That in our decaying frail mortal bodies we have this longing for present healing and transformation and also this longing for future glory and immortality.

And somehow we know on an intuitive level that what we eat and what we drink is where we find assurance that those longings will be fulfilled.

And if I was there at that dinner table at Brian Johnson's house if you can imagine me and my collar sitting next to Kim and Courtney what I would want to invite them to and what I want to invite us to is this that the hope of healing and immortality that they are longing for that we are all longing for isn't in what we do to our bodies it's in what Jesus does to our bodies and nowhere are we assured more of this than in the Eucharist where Christ gives us his own life his own body broken for us his own blood shed for us offered mystically and sacramentally in bread and wine the hope of healing

and transformation both now and forever given and offered freely to bodies that are frail and weak and sick and suffering that through the suffering and weakness of his own body through the indestructible glory of his resurrection

Jesus is the one who reverses our aging process forever through the power of the Holy Spirit and to the glory of God the Father and I'd want to remind the people at this table of these words therefore we do not lose heart though our outer self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal let's pray God and Father we thank you that in the midst of the weakness and frailty and mortality of our own bodies that we have this hope that we have this embodied hope of the resurrection of the body Lord I pray that that hope would fill us with faith right now in the present to know you and trust you and worship you thank you that you promise healing to us both now and forever and thank you that you offer your own body to us at the table we pray this in the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen