

Living in two worlds

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[0:00] Well, please keep this passage open before you. Those of you who receive an email from me every week, I looked at 2 Corinthians chapter 4 in that email.

! Confident of this, that I will see the Lord in the land of the living.

And Paul uses that same expression here. So, we are confident. Verse 8 of chapter 5, we are confident. Verse 6, he says the same.

We're always confident and know that as long as we're at home in the body, we're away from the Lord. What a wonderful gift that is. God gives us, by his grace, that we can be confident in the things that he says.

Confident in our faith. Confident in what God is going to be doing in our lives. Confident in the future that he's prepared for every one of his children. That's a precious thing, isn't it?

[1:17] And I pray that every one of us would know that measure of confidence so that we would not be a doubting people, but rather confident in him. Confident in our faith. This is an interesting passage because it's very personal.

And it's also very particular to Paul's experience. so he's writing very personally about the things that he's endured chapter 4 he speaks about the fact that he was very very aware that in his particular ministry there are big struggles you look at verse 7 of chapter 4 and onwards up to verse 12 he talks about this even as a kind of a death experience that he experiences daily he takes up his cross he follows the Lord Jesus Christ and he dies because of the burden that is placed upon him to be a minister of the gospel and it's very very costly for him we are hard pressed we're perplexed we're persecuted we're struck down well there's a dying there and he identifies that dying with the same dying that Jesus Christ endured throughout his life and in chapter 6 which we're not going to be looking at this morning he speaks also of the many difficulties that he's faced from a human perspective sorrowful under bad report well troubles and troubles and troubles that he faced and because of that we might be tempted to feel that what he has to say here is only really relevant for him it's a kind of a particular hope that he himself has because of his faithfulness in following the Lord Jesus Christ in his particular ministry but that cannot be the case because he's not just writing a diary here he's speaking to the Corinthians as a people as a whole church he wants this to be read out and these letters were not to be restricted just to one church but to be passed from church to church that all might benefit from what is said and of course we know that it is not just the Corinthians and the first century churches that were to receive this message but us today because this is in the Bible and all of these words are given to us for our encouragement and strengthening and real help so we need to very firmly engage personally with what Paul has to say here and to know that it's said for us there are particularities about his ministry his experiences which we can't necessarily identify with but there are broad principles that Paul lays out here that offer our deep encouragement for every Christian to be encouraged by to be confident in so we're going to look at each verse in turn and just to help you with what's on the screen so on the left hand side we're going to go verse by verse by verse and I give on the right hand side some sort of key pointers so those who take notes or want to remember certain things can take these to heart but not to be hidebound by what you see on the screen so let's look now firstly at chapter 5 verse 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 and you might find something you do find something extremely similar to that in the book of second letter of Peter chapter 1 verses 13 and 14 where Peter says I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body because I know that I will soon put it aside as our Lord Jesus Christ has made

clear to me it's an interesting picture and the idea of a tent the tent of this body that's right that's what Paul is talking about here he's talking about his own body that's what Peter is referring to there and there is a time coming when we will die or be taken by the Lord as he comes again but this existing body will drop away in another place he talks about it being destroyed Paul was a tent maker you know that and he did that in order to gain a living and he knew about tents and the people who bought tents and what tents were made of and how fragile they are and it's a blessing I don't think any of us is having to live in a tent today aren't we we have a house which has a degree of permanence but tents are not permanent dwellings bless the poor people in Bangladesh in those massive camps who are living in tents what a what a temporary and unsatisfactory way to be living and Paul and Peter are the same mind that the body that we have is a temporary a temporary thing and one day we will have it no longer it will be gone Paul says we know he's assured of this he's very confident about this it's a personal statement how lovely it is as John 1 14 reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ came and tabernacled amongst us he tented amongst us he was prepared to be in the place of fragility and need and transience so he identifies with us so beautifully as our carols remind us he was not born in the palace though he deserved it but everything about his life reflected a tenting existence if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed it's a bit of a strong phrase here it could equally be taken down just as you might take a tent down so at some point our bodies get dismantled those of us of a certain age know what it is for our bodies to be dismantled piece by piece aches and pains they're all little reminders that one day this body will just fail and it will be gone

Paul's daily work was to him as a parable and as his hands were making the temporary shelter for those who were travelers on earth he thought of the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens there's a lovely hymn which we're going to sing at the end the original words go like this here in the body pent absent from him I roam but nightly pitched by wandering tent a day's march nearer home the people of God are wanderers so much of the bible pictures this community of God's people as wandering wandering through the desert they don't have any permanency on this earth they're looking forward to something better as I came to this passage

[10:26] I was thinking I'm going to really enjoy doing this because I love this passage but here is a big problem and it's found in verse 1 and the problem is this or the challenge is this what is Paul referring to when he talks about an eternal house in heaven not built with human by human hands is this heavenly structure the resurrection body or is it a physical dwelling of some kind I think automatically as we read this passage we think it must be referring to the resurrection body but here's the rub Paul is speaking about those who die now he's speaking about the fact that he's ready for that moment just as

Peter was what is the situation of those who die in the Lord now before the Lord Jesus returns what is sometimes called the intermediate state we know that Jesus will return and when he returns he will bring those who are with him in heaven with him and the dead should be raised and those mortal bodies we've just been talking about will be made incorruptible death shall be swallowed up and we will have these new bodies but when does that happen well the scriptures say to us that this happens on the return of the Lord

Jesus Christ but here we're challenged by this thought that even though Paul may it appears have had some expectation that he would still be alive when Jesus returned and indeed it is a sort of a prayer and an expectation which is granted to the whole church in every generation an awareness that they may well be alive when Jesus returns we don't know when he will come but what we do know is there's been 2000 years of church history since the day of Pentecost where people have died their bodies are in the ground their earthly bodies are decaying but they are present with the Lord as he puts it at home with the Lord so what is the situation for all those people well the word is actually remarkably silent on this particular point it almost jumps ahead to the future glory the new heaven the new earth where God's people will be comprehensively changed but that's not the present moment so I look at the commentaries and they often refer quite naturally and understandably to the idea of the tent of the body the new body but but here's the problem we won't get that new body until

Jesus returns so I just keep making that point and even though the language here so often seems to speak about a clothing a covering an encasement which is to do with sort of body language so I

think I think this may be referring to something rather different it's helpful to be reminded of what the Lord Jesus said when he was comforting his disciples just prior to his death he says in John 14 verse 1 do not let your hearts be troubled trust in God trust also in me in my father's house and many rooms if it were not so I would have told you

I'm going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am Jesus is going to prepare a place authorised version talks about a mansion many mansions which I think is completely the wrong impression because actually the wording means something like a residence or a room a place a physical dwelling interesting the Greek word which is used in John 14 verse 1 is oikos which means an abode and by implication a family a place where a family can dwell and it's exactly the same word that's used in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 for the eternal house and the distinction that Paul makes throughout this passage is he compares the temporary residence that we have here with the permanent residence that we will have there the earthly here the heavenly there the fragile here the solid there dwelling places be with him open door he's gone to repair that place we're very blessed to have four days away together as a family group recently in

[17:33] Wilkshire ten of us and my brother has a house that accommodates that how kind of him he didn't charge us a penny he's freely given they've moved to South Africa they're far away it's so kind of him in the midst of their move which is in December and we were going there end of December not only just to make that available for us but there were so many little touches about that express their thoughtfulness so there were there were toys on the beds for the children there were books put in particular rooms that my brother thought he'd find interesting entertaining so it's a book about railways for me and you know those latest Lady Bird books about famous five go Brexit or whatever so I had a whole part of those to read through as well

I don't know what that says about him or about me but there were so many touches and a hamper arrived on the day from Fortinam and Mason you know what's in those they're wonderful aren't they how kind and thoughtful that was to my dear brother to do all that in the midst of all the other cares and things that he had on his mind how loving is the Lord Jesus Christ that he says to his disciples each one of them I'm going to prepare a place for you his touches will be appropriate to our needs the place where we will be will be completely suited to us and it will have just the hallmarks of our precious Lord Jesus Christ upon them it's interesting figure that in that

John 14 verse he says if it were not so I would have told you why does he say that does he say that because some of them were fearful about missing out they may not meet the mark they weren't in the same category possibly as John or James or Peter but he will hold me fast and I think Jesus is saying to each one of them I'm going to hold you fast there's going to be a place for you a place for you for everyone who belongs to him there will be a place there's plenty of room plenty of room in heaven for all of God's people well there are truths in both cases of resurrection body or a physical dwelling but I think in terms of his particular hope at that particular moment we'll go down the route of the physical dwelling when I say physical I mean it has tangibility this isn't just a sort of a mirage but there's tangibility about heaven and it should be enjoyed verse 2 meanwhile we groan longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling we groan not because of sorrows there's plenty of reason for groaning because of sorrows the whole creation is groaning because of its sorrowful condition but because of a strong desire and yearning and longing for the heavenly dwelling isn't that precious that's the way he thinks about his current situation a lot of us know about groaning because of difficulties groaning because of our troubles and that's human that's understood and so forth but Paul groans because of his longing for what lies ahead the heavenly home is far more than a practical provision just a convenience but his expression of family closeness to God and his people I think we need to put a lot of weight on that idea of the heavenly home it's not a nothing it's something very personal and precious and something that we are to look forward to so here's the challenge how much do we long for the heavenly dwelling how much do we long for the heavenly dwelling dear brothers and sisters it is our calling and we can make it a prayer heavenly father I want to long for the heavenly dwelling it's my spiritual ambition this year to really long for the heavenly dwelling this isn't a function of age or health this is a function of being a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and a longing for that heavenly dwelling not for the dwelling itself but for the fact

that we will then be with the

Lord Jesus Christ which is quite clear from Paul's writing he always counted as far better far better than anything he was enjoying on this earth and I suppose if it's my spiritual ambition to long for that heavenly dwelling the deeper prayer is I want to know Jesus better I want to appreciate him I want to know him personally better I know a lot about him I want to know him deeply so that quite naturally I should want to say I want to be in that place where Jesus is Paul is strong on this point he says if we're here on this just in this place here we are away from the Lord apart from the Lord this sounds an extraordinary thing to say how could a believer be apart from the Lord he's saying yes we have a relationship with him now by faith but we look forward to a relationship with him which will be by sight because when we are clothed we will not be found naked whatever blessing [25:26] Paul is expecting occurs immediately upon dying we are to be comforted by the knowledge that we will be clothed with our heavenly dwelling this is clearly something very special and well worth looking forward to the suggestion from this verse is that if we didn't have that hope about us we would be in a very sad situation but God has given us a specific comfort something to definitely look forward to while we're in this tent verse 4 we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life so Paul's concern is not just to be relieved of pain and suffering and sorrow something very positive here the vestiges of God's very good creation are going to be beautifully refreshed and renovated in the heavenly dwelling and in resurrection bodies heaven is not about only the loss of certain things that plague us now but the gain the gain the wonderful gain of all that

God intends of his beautiful creation and I draw your attention to the phrase at the end there so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life death is typically seen in the Bible as the swallower of life but Jesus Christ by his death and resurrection has reversed this process so Paul himself writes in 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 54 when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality then the saying that is written will come true death has been swallowed up in victory no one else has done that it's only Jesus can do that Jesus has done that and as we are identified with him then we find the reality of that to be true that the mortal is swallowed up by life isn't that a glorious expectation now the one who has fashioned for us for this very purpose is God who has given us the spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come the whole work of God in the past redemption the new birth the gifts and graces of the spirit is looking to this as its result this is the purpose of God this is the destiny of every Christian we are God's workmanship and he is preparing us for fellowship with him we have the spiritual pleasure of this by the gift of the indwelling spirit I don't know if this subject excites or even bores you but if we have the indwelling holy spirit part of his work is to give us a sense this world is not my home I'm just a travelling through my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond blue as part of the work of the indwelling spirit within us to know that we don't have a permanent place here this is not our real home we're strangers and pilgrims and aliens in this world

God's work is to bring us to be with him in his glory he will not leave any of us down here as it were he wants us to be with him which is our true home our true belonging the purpose the ultimate purpose of our being is to be with him forever therefore we are always confident there's that word again and know that as long as we're at home in the body we are away from the lord we're always encouraged and strengthened because we know that the only indefinite alternative to being here on earth is to be with the lord in heaven so Paul had very bad days and you and I have very bad days as well difficult days struggling days unhappy days upsetting times but we're always confident we're always confident we're always got a reason for encouragement and strengthening because we know that the days here are not the real test not the sort of benchmark mark of our true existence the solid hope for every believer whatever your week is whatever your week is will be is to be with the lord in heaven and that was sufficient hope for Paul to be able to carry on in his ministry that is sufficient hope for us as well we live by faith and not by sight now we believe in him without seeing him hereafter we shall see him face to face our life and conduct and our walk in the world rest in our belief in the unseen blessed are those who have not not seen but believed that's the condition for all of us isn't it we do not see the lord Jesus we read of him we set our spiritual eyes on the unseen

where jesus is this is the life of the christian one peter one eight turn this up though you have not seen him though you have not seen him you love him and even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the goal of your faith the salvation of your souls present continuous as we go through our life looking to the unseen savior who we read about in his word in a most marvelous way we can be filled with inexpressible and glorious joy because god is refreshing us with the knowledge that he loves us that we belong to him and that there will come a day when the goal of our faith will be achieved which is the full salvation of our souls it will be completed and we will be like him for we shall see him as he is we're confident says Paul I say would prefer to be away from the body at home with the lord and you'd be reminded of that passage in philippians where he speaks of that same tussle that he has in his spirit and paul compares two possibilities on the one hand I could depart now and be with christ or I could remain in the body and he resolves it in the case of the philippians by saying I think it's the lord's will that i stay on earth that i can minister to you even though he says it'd be better by far if i was with christ well that's an interesting struggle isn't it interesting tussle we resist death we hate the thought of it we don't talk about it christians are in that same place as people in the world we think that dying is the least desirable option for any of our lives but paul doesn't see it in that way he sees it as a close run thing if i die i'm going to be with the lord which is far better than anything that you could say about my present existence if i stay what's the one reason he wants to stay is so that he could be a blessing to others that's interesting isn't it interesting to think about that i look at our seminar and i think of the nhs and i think of the billions billions poured into to a system which strives to make us well that is good we are to be as well as god wants us to be but dying is no mean thing for the christian it's actually a very beautiful and precious thing to take us to be with him we need to have courage and bravery in this matter don't we to be fed and instructed by the word of god we're in a complete minority in this matter but here is the word and here is the comparison to be with christ is better by far and this thought came to me the experience of those who are now with the lord jesus christ is far better than the experience of any christian in their living on earth the youngest believer the one who has failed but has received forgiveness is still in a far more blessed place than those who have been faithfully and strongly following the lord jesus in their lives now it's a fantastic thought really isn't it because they see him they see him they're in the tangible presence of jesus he's close to them in a way that possibly none of us have ever experienced in our lives now i say this for the comfort of those who have lost loved ones and many of you have and if

[37:31] they're the lord's people he's held them fast then they're in that place where jesus is very pleased to call them his own to speak to them directly and to be close to them in heaven so we make it our goal to please him whether we're at home in the body or away from it whatever state we're in earth or heaven our calling is to labour to please christ it's interesting isn't it make it our goal to please him whether we're at home in the body or away from it in heavenly places it's still the business of christians to be pleasing the lord jesus christ to be serving him to be blessing him be praising him we never lose the right and the role of being happy servants of jesus paul says we make it our goal to please him oh definitely because we don't want to stand before him ashamed do we we don't want to have reason on the last on that day when we die to be sorrowful for unconfessed sin or anything like that oh we want to be in a pure and a clear place where we've made it our goal to please him our lives are marked out by such a desire for him such a desire that he should be blessed that he should be pleased with us it fulfills our calling and here's our final verse we must all appear before the judgment seat of christ so each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body whether good or bad there is a day of reckoning when jesus returns and on that day christians will find themselves declared righteous and without blemish because of the work of jesus christ on their behalf but still experiencing the rewards of god well done good and faithful servant it's a hope it's an expectation and we should not dread that day because as christians we have been made right in god's sight and he's pleased pleased to look upon us glad to look upon us and that we can well receive with great surprise well done good and

faithful servant isn't that astonishing he has a perfect standard could still say of us well done good and faithful servant whereas we say we've just done profitable servants he says never well done good and faithful servant that's beautiful isn't that this is not a happy day for those who do not know the lord jesus christ i said beautiful things about jesus the word speaks beautiful things about him but he comes on that final day not just to raise his people from the dead not just to give resurrection bodies but also to be the judge all the deeds done in the body well that's a very very serious matter isn't it he comes to be the judge there will be a judgment made and the word makes it very plain a separation how important it is to run to the judge now and to find him to be our saviour find him to be the saviour embrace him as a saviour this is

the day for it because it's still a day of grace jesus hasn't come back here you don't want to be unclothed and naked and exposed on the day of judgment no please don't be in that place please do not be in that place i choose rather to seek him to call upon him to embrace the knowledge that he loves us so much and he went to the cross at calvary to pay the price of sin so that we would not face terrible judgment but rather experience wonderful precious joy that's the place that's the place you need to be this is the day for it may god by his spirit grant that to you it's a solemn moment i want to make six applications first is this christians live in two worlds the world of the seen and the world of the unseen we are temporarily planted in the world of the seen we will by god's grace move to the world that is currently unseen but will then be vigorously and gloriously visible this is our destiny also we are now genuinely in the world of the seen and the world of the unseen it's curious that we think so little about this within 100 years nearly every one of us in this building will have experienced death and the life to come and none of us knows whether that experience will be within years or in days yet weeks and months may go by without any personal reflection and prayer on this topic the strength and depth of our

Christian life now is dependent on a vital relationship with the unseen Lord Jesus Christ this was definitely Paul's focus and longing we're encouraged by God's word to set our hearts on things above Colossians 3 since then you have been raised with Christ set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your minds on things above not on earthly things for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you will appear with him in glory even the wonderful heavenly dwelling and the resurrection body they're very precious are not to be compared with being with Jesus this is where the unseen! but living Christ is this is for us a life of faith not sight not please note a life of conjecture and uncertainty but of reliance on the personal work of Jesus Christ as he is sufficiently and richly revealed to us in the words of the Bible the scriptural antidote to trials and suffering weariness fear grief and discouragement is to look forward to what lies ahead please take this to heart the scriptural antidote to trials and suffering weariness fear grief and discouragement and any other words that you might want to describe the negatives of life is to look forward to what lies ahead that's exactly what the Bible says that's how we are to deal with our present difficulties it is the prime method dealing with our current struggles is to look forward to what lies ahead God will give grace for what we face in this life but our biggest help is the knowledge that one day this will end and we shall be with the Lord and with his people forever the Bible is sufficiently clear about the unseen world now and in the future to enable us to be well informed although Paul appears to have had special experiences of heaven he writes about it later whilst on earth he doesn't talk about these things he talks about the things which the Holy Spirit reveals which are now recorded for us in scripture we don't go beyond!

[46:22] but we must go as far as that goes we must embrace the things that the word of God puts before us about the world to come and sort of milk it for all it's worth he talks about the things which are there in scripture these are just what we need to know and to be nourished by the seen world is so powerfully present that we need to soak ourselves in bible teaching of the unseen world we're so indoctrinated as to the evil of dying that our energies are devoted to resisting that reality and unrealistically thinking that we can live forever rather than giving head and heart space to the eternal blessings that lie ahead for the believer

because until Jesus Christ returns there's only one way into that future world and that's by dying this is completely understandable from the perspective of the unbeliever for whom death is a terrifying blank but it should not be so for the

Christians do you remember that great passage in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 where he says I don't want you to be ignorant concerning those who have fallen asleep I don't want you to be unknowing about what's really happened here I don't want you to blank it out and he gives them the teaching about the Lord will return the trumpet shall sound the dead shall be raised and he will come and he says at the end of that passage therefore encourage one another with these things encourage one another with these things we need to sing the songs we need to read the scriptures we need to pray the prayers we need to get alongside one another and not be embarrassed about these truths but to say these are the truths this isn't in doubt we have one mind on these matters this is what God intends what he has in mind we have a responsibility to encourage each other especially those who have had close encounters with death and dying and these matters are not secret knowledge they are there for all to notice whether you are a

Christian or not much of what we've looked at this morning seems positive some looks challenging but the common factor in all of this whether in this life or the one that meets us after death the common factor is Jesus Christ and it's our relationship with Jesus which will determine whether death is the door to blessing or disaster the question is whether we will love or loathe him run to embrace or try to hide accept or reject but why would you reject the one who died on a cross to provide forgiveness for sin acquittal on the day of judgment mercy and kindness in abundance why would you do that why would you spurn God's grace why would you do that why not reach out to him today and ask him to be your saviour and your lord and if you know you're in a place which is too far away from

Jesus Christ even though you may have made some commitment towards him in the past well isn't today a great day for you to be re-establishing your relationship with the Lord Jesus I have some helpful books little booklets with the title Facing Death with Hope I'd love to give those to you pick one up just ask me for it if they run out I hope they run out then we'll get more Facing Death with Hope ending