

Caleb Evans (10)

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Date: 17 June 2018

Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. So I think the babies in our midst feel compelled to preach as well this morning.

I give Lucy the dad look, and she just smiles back at me. It doesn't work. So, the great poet, who also happened to be an Anglican priest, John Donne, once wrote these words.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee, mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so. For those whom thou thinkest thou dost overthrow, die not for death, nor yet canst thou kill me.

John is saying, death is not really proud. Death is not really mighty. Death is not really dreadful.

Death thinks, hey, I'm winning this thing, but death is the loser.

[1:19] For those who are in Christ, we know that death will never have the victory over us. Praise God. But death can still be a difficult thing, can't it?

There's no getting around it. It's so difficult that many times, I think this is true of our culture in 21st century America, we do everything we can to avoid thinking about death.

Keep it pushed into a dark corner where we don't have to look at it. Why do we do that? Well, I'd suggest there are two reasons why we don't want to think or talk about death.

One, death actually hurts. We might face our own death with courage, but it is so much harder to face the loss of people that we love with courage.

The other is that we might not know or believe or fully trust that Christ has defeated death and taken away its sting, and that being with Christ is great beyond anything that we could imagine.

[2:21] So, in light of that, I want to encourage us with two gospel truths this morning from 2 Corinthians 5. One, heaven is actually real, and it truly awaits those who are in Christ.

And two, the resurrection of the dead is also real. When Christ comes again, we will be physically raised from the dead, and it will be glorious.

So let's look at 2 Corinthians 5, beginning with verse 1, where we read, Now, that is a precious promise, is it not?

Now, we only see that as good news if we're aware that our earthly tents, our earthly bodies, are going to be destroyed. If we're able to face up to that fact, then that strikes us as good news.

If we're trying to avoid that fact, we might think that Paul is being a killjoy for daring to bring it up.

Not something you talk about in polite company. These bodies of ours are going to wear out, and they're going to die, but the promise that we have eternal life in Jesus, who defeated death for us by rising again, means that we have victory over the grave.

[3:45] Our earthly home may be gone, but we have a dwelling place with God. It will never be destroyed. Now, mention that you firmly believe in heaven and our culture, though, and you might find yourself being ridiculed.

I certainly have. Ever been there? C.S. Lewis, who was an Oxford professor and scholar, unsurprisingly had that problem when he mentioned his belief in heaven.

Lewis writes, We are very shy nowadays of even mentioning heaven. We are afraid of the jeer about pie in the sky, and of being told that we're trying to escape from the duty of making a happy world here and now, into dreams of a happy world elsewhere.

But, either there is pie in the sky, or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric.

If there is, then this truth, like any other, must be faced, whether it is useful at political meetings or not. Again, we are afraid that heaven is abroad, that if we make it our goal, we shall no longer be disinterested.

[5:00] It is not so. Heaven offers nothing that a mercenary soul can desire. It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.

There are rewards that do not sully motives. A man's love for a woman is not mercenary because he wants to marry her, nor is love for poetry mercenary because he wants to read it, nor is love of exercise less disinterested because he wants to run and leap and walk.

Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object. So Lewis reminds us that either there is pie in the sky, if you want to put it that way, or there isn't.

And there is. And that great joy that we look for in heaven is in seeing the Lord, who, to quote Lewis again, will look to us like our first love because he is our first love.

And that actually changes the way that we live, doesn't it? And not in the sense of trying to escape this world, as some critics would pose, to make a happy world elsewhere, I would actually say the exact opposite is true.

[6:14] We believe, don't we, that this life that we live is actually of eternal significance. This life we live now won't last forever, but it certainly will matter forever.

Compare that for a second to the worldview that says, there is no God, there is nothing beyond death, all we have is now. Now, all that we have is now might sound appealing and inspirational until we stop and consider.

That means that all that I have ever done, all of the people I have ever loved, all of the things that have ever mattered to me, all of that will be gone forever and won't ever matter again when I die and when the memory of me fades.

I cannot find myself holding one of my little girls and she smiles at me and find myself thinking, there is nothing of eternal significance about this.

To think that both of us are going to die and just be gone forever, to think that life on earth is just going to eventually, over the centuries and millennia, fade out to be replaced by vast nothingness.

[7:28] It's not all I have is right now that I'm thinking when I hold Lucy or Mia in my arms.

It's a reminder, it is a sign of the kind of love that we can look forward to forever. All of the best things in the life of a Christian are, aren't they?

But if we didn't believe what we do about Jesus, if we didn't believe what we do about His resurrection, about eternal life, we'd find ourselves saying, let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die. But that is not what we believe. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And because I believe that, I am free to believe that love matters forever. I am set free to believe that every person that I meet matters.

[8:39] I am set free to believe that what I do in this life actually has an ongoing significance. I am free to love others sacrificially because I don't have to cling to my life or the stuff that I'm driven to accumulate.

Right belief in heaven actually makes for a better world, not a world where everyone is checked out. That being said, we should be clear.

This life is often difficult, and life in the nearer presence of God is better. Indeed, Paul continues, for in this tent we groaned longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.

If indeed by putting it on, we may not be found naked. And while we were still in this tent, we groaned 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 light.

So we groan in expectation because life is difficult, because we want to be free of the burdens that we carry, most especially sin. Anyone else want to be free of sin?

[9:55] Yeah. Sometimes it has you groaning, doesn't it? And sometimes it's literal groaning, right? Some mornings I wake up with joints that are so stiff that I'm walking around the house like Frankenstein.

Surprised I don't terrify the children. Now, as some of you probably know, that'll make you groan. It's not easy for me to forget that my body is mortal.

And maybe it is easy for you. I know for many of you it's not. But maybe it is easy for you to forget that your body is mortal, you're in perfect health. But don't worry, you'll be getting reminders of it soon enough.

But notice, Paul actually isn't saying that our hope is to be unclothed, to cast aside our bodies forever.

No, not at all. What we call heaven, actually, will find its culmination in the resurrection of the dead. Now, I've always been surprised when I've talked to professing Christians, and this has happened over and over again, and I find out that they don't believe in the resurrection of the dead.

[11:09] It happens more often than I would expect. And usually it's not because of any refusal to believe in the resurrection of the dead. A lot of times when I have that conversation, and it's like, hey, here's what the scriptures say about that.

They're like, oh, that makes perfect sense. Why did I never hear that before? But it's just that some people really aren't taught it. So let me be clear this morning.

When Jesus returns, we are looking forward to an actual resurrection from the dead, a physical, bodily resurrection of the dead. And those who are in Christ will receive perfect and undying bodies. It's not, as many people mistakenly believe, just a metaphor for spiritual rebirth. Now, don't get me wrong. Spiritual rebirth is important, but it is not what the scriptures mean by the resurrection of the dead.

Now, that digression aside, life is hard. We groan because we long to put on immortality. Ultimately, the resurrection is what we're longing for, to dwell with God forever on a new earth with new bodies in his presence, seeing his face.

[12:26] And we are of good courage. We read in verse 5, He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee, so we are always of good courage.

We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage. And we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

I think we see a couple of very good reasons for good courage in these verses. First of all, when God gives you His Spirit as a guarantee, you can be sure that He is going to follow through.

First, in sanctifying us, in making us holy, in setting us apart in this life so that we grow to know and love Him more.

And then, in the life to come, glorifying us, giving us a complete and final victory over death and sin. We are guaranteed that because God has given us His Spirit.

[13:31] That is a good reason to be of good courage, isn't it? There is another reason shown in these verses we are called to be of good courage. And that is the fact that we don't have to be afraid of death.

And not being afraid of death is such a weird thing for human beings, isn't it? By nature, we run from it. By nature, we do everything we can to ignore it. By nature, we shut our eyes to avoid looking at the reality of death.

But, the Christian can stare death right in the face and say, I am not afraid.

I am of good courage because it is better to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. We are, by nature, terrified of death.

And that is one reason why the work of Jesus means so much. It says of Him in Hebrews chapter 2, Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[14:53] Thank you for the amens back there, little ones. Jesus defeated death.

And we live in a world that's petrified of death. That is in slavery because the devil is keeping it captive through the fear of death. How many people do you think are living in fear?

Guessing that's a pretty high number. Wouldn't you? And that's why, as we think about mission, as we think about evangelism, we need to find the opportunity to shout, perhaps not literally, but so that those who are in slavery can hear, Christ is risen, and death is defeated, and you don't have to be afraid, you don't have to be in bondage, do not fear, simply believe.

believe. You know, Mia tells me all the time at five years old that she cannot wait to go and be with Jesus.

Now, I love that she will be going to be with Jesus and that she's looking forward to it, but I tell her that I hope we can wait for a long time first. But I can understand where Mia's coming from.

[16:25] As Martin Luther once put it, I would not give one moment of heaven for all the joys and riches of this world, even if it lasted for thousands and thousands of years.

Yes, going to be with Jesus to bask in the glow of God's love forever where there's no more sin or pain or fear or death is really that great.

