

2 Corinthians 5:1-4

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[0:00] Let's pray together. Almighty and ever-living God, we ask you by your grace to help us to set our hearts on you! Now as we come to the preaching of your word, Lord, open our ears and our hearts and transform us more into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

So Frank worked at GEICO for 40 years. He had a wife. He had two kids. He loved them, of course. But all of his greatest effort, all of his emphasis of his time revolved around his job.

He was absorbed with his work. Always getting into the office early. Always available for overtime. Even on vacation, while the rest of his family was enjoying their time, he would constantly be answering emails, having meetings, having calls come up.

His identity was wrapped up in his job. And so finally after 40 years, Frank was retiring. There was a sheet cake in the break room. A few people say some kind words.

His boss even gives him a plaque to commemorate his hard work given to the company. And people clap. They hug him. They say goodbye. And so Frank drives home in the middle of the day for the first time in his whole career.

[1:15] And the house is quiet. The next morning, he wakes up early, out of habit, but there's nothing to do. There's no meetings. There's no emails to answer. The main focus of his life is suddenly gone in the blink of an eye.

And he realizes he doesn't know what he was really striving all those years for. The meetings and the calls, they felt so important in the moment. But as he looks back on them, they seem small. What lasting impact did he make? Would he even be remembered by his co-workers a year, five years, ten years from now? And one of the basic realities for all of us in life is that we all live for something.

We all have something in our life that absorbs our focus. And whatever it is, it impacts the day-to-day, the moment-by-moment decisions that we make.

For Frank, he lived for work. And so when there was an important deadline, he worked overtime, even if it meant missing his son's birthday for the third year in a row. For some, the goal of life is pleasure and relaxation, video games and vacations.

[2:26] For some, the goal of life is money and accumulating possessions. And for others, the goal of life is safety, never taking any risks. But we all strive for something in life.

Something is that overarching principle that guides our day-to-day decisions. But in the end, every goal, save for one, leads us to disappointment.

They leave us in the same place as Frank, looking back and realizing that we have wasted so much of our time, even our entire lives. And in the end, there is one thing to live for that leads to satisfaction.

Living for eternity, for our true home in the presence of God. And what we'll see today in our text in 2 Corinthians is that Christ has secured our eternal home.

And our longing for eternity must shape the way that we live today, with courage and with faith to be pleasing to God.

[3:25] So look with me at verses 1-4. Paul says, And so God's Word tells us here that our current bodies, in this life, are like a tent.

And what's a tent like? A tent is a temporary shelter, right? It's a helpful way to get out of the elements, but it's a bad situation if living in a tent is our long-term plan.

And that's how our body is now. It does an okay job, but it's soft. It's weak. It's easily breakable. We're prone to sickness. I know over the last month, it seems like half the people I know got knocked down by the flu, at least in Buffalo, where I'm from.

Our bodies wear down. Our hair turns gray. It falls out. The smooth beauty of our skin slowly grows more and more wrinkled. Our bodies stop working the right way. Our knees hurt. Our back hurts. And more than that, these bodies are burdened by the weight of sin. Right? We are constantly tempted to do what is wicked. It's a body ruled by sin.

[4:51] And because of the curse of sin, each of our bodies will die. We are dust. And to dust we will return. And so these temporary tents, they are weak and they leave us longing for something more permanent.

Now, a few years ago, I was at a three-week-long training exercise with the army. And so we were outside for three weeks. And the first entire week, it rained every single day.

And by God's grace, I did have a tent. I had a little one-man tent just big enough to lay down in. And every night, I'd climb in, soaking wet into my tent with water seeping in the sides and dripping off the top.

And every morning, slide on my soaking wet boots. And in one way, I really was very grateful to have a tent. It made it manageable at least a little bit. It was way better than having nothing. But oh, how I longed to again be in a home with four walls and a roof over my head. And just as I was longing to be free from my tent and to go sleep in my house, in the same way, in this life, we are groaning and longing for a body that does not wear out.

[6:02] In one sense, we want to be done and finished with this tent. We want to escape the brokenness and the dysfunction of the body. But at the same time, we're also afraid.

We are afraid of being unclothed, of dying and losing our body. The thought that one day that this very hand will be the hand of a skeleton.

It's haunting to us. Losing our body. I don't know if you've heard of Brian Johnson. He's kind of, I guess, famous on the internet now a little bit. He's like this tech millionaire. And he's been in the headlines for this one goal that he wants to live forever.

Right? He's convinced that he can live to be hundreds of years old by following this extreme health regimen. His entire life is organized around these perfectly measured meals, all these supplements taken at different times, constantly scanning his body, scanning his blood, scanning his organs. And he treats this temporary body as if it is this careful machine that must never be allowed to break down. Because he's afraid. He is afraid to be unclothed, to lose his body.

[7:14] Right? But no matter how hard Brian tries, it is impossible to turn this temporary tent into an eternal dwelling. We were not made to live in this body of sin forever.

And we were also not made to be disembodied spirits. It's scary because it's unnatural. But what we're encouraged by in Scripture here is that God is preparing for His people an eternal and imperishable body.

a dwelling, a castle made without human hands. And we long to put on our heavenly dwelling. And this building that Paul is talking about is the resurrection body that only God can provide.

A new body that is fit for the new heavens and the new earth. And what will that body be like? It will be unbreakable. Unable to be damaged or destroyed.

No more scraped knees. No more back pain. It will never wear out. It will never grow old or weak. It will never be devoured by cancer. But instead, our heavenly bodies will grow from strength to strength.

[8:17] We will never again look at small children running around and tumbling all over the place and saying, I wish I could do that. I wish I could have that kind of energy. That kind of energy will be ours. And even better than all of that, our new bodies will never be tempted to sin.

In this life, wickedness and temptation rule in our bodies. Even as we seek to follow Christ, temptation is constantly entangling around us seeking to trip us up.

Seeking to choke us out. And yet, in our new bodies, we will be free even from the temptation to sin. And Paul begins in verse 1 with a statement of assurance.

He says, for we know. He's not speculating about this. He's not guessing. He's not dreaming and wishing. But he is certain that God is preparing for each one of His faithful people this same kind of eternal body.

Perfect in every way. But how do we have that same assurance as Paul? How do we know without a shadow of a doubt that if we breathed our last breath today, that that would be our future?

[9:29] In verse 5, we read, He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. The guarantee of our eternal body in the presence of God is the Holy

Spirit.

All those who have the Spirit will have this eternal life. And as Ephesians 1.13 tells us, it is those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ who will be filled with the Spirit.

Every man, woman, and child who has their faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He truly is God, that He took on flesh, that He died in our place for our sins and has risen from the dead and is now reigning at the right hand of God the Father, every one of those people is filled with the Spirit.

It's not a measure of the good works that ensures our eternal life, but simply this, have you put your faith in Jesus? And if your faith is in Jesus, the Holy Spirit dwells in you and is a down payment, a guarantee of this future resurrection life.

And we see in Galatians the evidence of the Spirit. In Galatians, we are taught about the fruit of the Spirit, the evidence that the Spirit is actually at work in us so that we might know and have confidence that our faith in Christ is genuine, that we're increasing in love and joy and peace, patience, kindness, in goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control.

[11:01] The evidence of the Spirit in our life is this growing love for God, a growing love for what God commands. And the evidence isn't that we're perfect.

It's not that we need to measure, oh no, I've fallen short in sin. Am I really saved? Do I really have the Spirit? But simply this, that we see ourselves growing in the grace of the Spirit.

Right? The question is not whether you have ever sinned at all or if you've sinned at all in the last week or the last day, but rather as you look back on your life over the last year, over the last 10 years, 50 years, do you see yourself growing in love for God's Word?

Do you see yourself delighting in serving God and His Kingdom? Do you see yourself overcoming areas of sin in your life? Maybe lust or anger or envy used to conquer you and now by the grace of God, you are now conquering over some of those sins.

These things don't earn us our salvation as if we could be saved by them, but they are the evidence that the Holy Spirit truly does dwell in us. We can never live a life that is pleasing to God on our own, but it is the Holy Spirit who works in us this growing love for God.

[12:12] And as you see yourself growing in these things, it is the evidence that the Holy Spirit dwells in you. the assurance that you have this eternal life that Paul talks about.

This assurance of the resurrection body. And so knowing with certainty that our eternal life is secure, Paul tells us to live with courage, to walk by faith, and to set our hearts on our true home.

Look with me at verses 6-8. He says, 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. Because of this great confidence that we have in our eternal life, he says, be of good courage. Now, having courage doesn't mean never being afraid. To be a Christian is to enter into a life of suffering. It's a life of swimming against the current, of standing up for what is right and what is true, even when no one else is.

[13:15] And so, to have courage is the strength to do what is right, even when things are hard and even when we're afraid. And Paul has courage in the sense that he is at peace that no matter what happens to him in this life, whether it is suffering or even death for the sake of Christ, he knows that his eternity is secure.

Even if he dies for Christ, all he does is trade a tent for a palace. And so he has courage to face any danger that comes from following Jesus.

Last year, if you were at our diocesan synod, we got to hear from this incredible woman, Miriam Rostampour. She grew up in Iran as a Muslim. But through the grace of God, she heard the Gospel, she repented, she put her faith in Jesus.

And very quickly, as she was growing in her faith, she was more and more passionate about the Gospel. She wanted other people in Iran to have the same experience of the freedom found in Jesus Christ that she had experienced.

And in Iran, as many of us probably know, to seek to convert Muslims to share the Gospel is illegal. But despite these risks, Miriam and others, they handed out thousands of New Testaments, they started small house churches, they were meeting with people in their homes, talking about Jesus and the Gospel.

[14:32] And in 2009, the Iranian authorities arrested her and others and they charged them with apostasy and blasphemy and anti-government activity. These are things that carry the death

sentence.

And so they were imprisoned in Tehran for months. They were daily being threatened, being denied basic medical care, pressured to renounce their faith, all while awaiting their execution.

But instead of denying Christ, Miriam refused to abandon her faith and by God's grace, she was miraculously released from prison after almost a year. I'm sure that she was often afraid as she suffered at the hands of her captors.

But she knew down into the depths of her soul that this body is just a tent and that God had secured for her an eternal body that could never be tortured.

And because her heart was set on eternity rather than this life, she could have the courage to do what was right even in the midst of fear. And in the same way, because our eternal home is secure, we can live this life in good courage.

[15:43] Now perhaps you feel like you're lacking in courage for Christ. You wonder, would I be able to respond in the same way that Miriam and others did? But I want to encourage us deeper, deeper courage is not found by working it up in us, but rather by continually turning to the Gospel, meditating on the truths and the promises of the Gospel in Jesus Christ.

And as we meditate on those truths day and day, as we hear the Gospel preached day in and day out, our hearts are more and more set on eternity. And as the Holy Spirit sets our hearts on eternity, He also strengthens us with courage.

So in verse 7, Paul tells us the way to live courageously. Walking by faith rather than by sight. A popular verse. And I'll say there's a lot of misunderstanding about what it means to have faith.

As if faith is to have this jump into the darkness, a blind leap of faith. Today, sometimes people will even talk about faith as a belief in something contrary to evidence.

As if faith in God means believing in God even though science has proven God. That doesn't make any sense. But what faith actually means is trusting in something that there is good evidence for even though we don't see it now.

[17:02] None of us here have ever met George Washington. You've never met him. You've never spoken with him. You've never shaken his hand. And yet, I'm pretty confident that all of us here believe that George Washington was a real person.

We have faith that George Washington existed. Not because there's no evidence or contrary to the evidence, but because there's an immense amount of evidence. His writings, eyewitness testimony, the impact of the world that he left.

Every morning when I wake up, my wife Lauren, she sleeps longer than I do and I get dressed in the dark so I don't wake her up. And I set out my clothes the night before. And when I wake up, I can't see anything.

But I do have faith that everything that I got out the night before is where I left it. And so it is. And that is what faith is. Trusting in something that you know is there even when you can't see it in the moment.

And so to walk by faith as Paul is commanding us to do here in this passage does not mean to do goofy things that are contrary to the evidence. Walking by faith doesn't mean refusing medical treatment and saying, God will heal me.

[18:08] Walking by faith doesn't mean quitting a job without a plan and calling it obedience even though now you can't feed your family. We don't walk by faith by closing our eyes and stepping out into traffic while we say Bible verses.

We look both ways because God has made a world with cause and effect. And so when Paul tells us to walk by faith, it means living according to what God has revealed to be true.

Walking by faith means we order our lives, the big decisions and those small day-to-day decisions around what God has promised even though it's a future that we can't see yet.

To walk by faith is to live with this singular purpose in life. Not joining everyone else and seeking pleasure and success or safety. Not living for this temporary tent. But to live by faith is to live with our eyes set on our eternal dwelling.

Perhaps the most shocking part of this passage in verse 8, Paul tells us that he longs for this life to end so that he can be with Jesus. He's ready for this life to be over. To leave this tent and to be clothed with the eternal dwelling that God has promised for him.

[19:23] Now Paul isn't wishing for death. He isn't suicidal. But he knows the nature of his hope. For those who trust in Christ, death is not the end.

It is the beginning. If you know the Lord of the Rings, Frodo has this dream of heaven, this picture of heaven that he dreams of. And one day, at the end of the third book, he finally sees it.

And here's how Tolkien describes it. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the great rain curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back.

And he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise. And so to die for the believer is to enter into the immediate presence of Christ.

All the gray rain curtain of this life will suddenly be rolled back like a scroll. And we will enter into a land of eternal joy, a far green country with a swift sunrise.

[20 : 25] And Paul summarizes it for us in this passage with one word, home. And what is home? What comes to mind for you when you think of home? And home is a place where we belong.

Where you are known, where you're welcome. Like the family reunion when you get together and you see these people who you love so much and who love you and who care for you. Home is a place of safety.

Home is a place of deep roots where your history goes back. You know, that feeling of making that family recipe that's been passed down for generations. Or watching your children or your grandchildren climb and play in a tree that you planted or that you played in as a child.

Home is a place of peace and love where you are known and where you know others. You know, one of the things that comes to mind for me when I think of home is the front yard of my parents' house that I grew up in.

Just the rough feel of the grass on my feet and climbing the trees. We had this giant silver maple tree that was so big that you could climb up and stand where the branches split off about 10 feet off the ground.

[21 : 30] And one of the greatest joys of my life is getting to see my own kids when I get to visit my parents' play in that yard. Seeing the joy of them enjoying it as I remember my past enjoying it there at home.

And all the home that we experience in this life is really just a reflection of our eternal home. I'm sure that all of us also experience longings for a past home.

We remember some of the joys of belonging and peace and love and they seem to have fallen away from us. They seem to have slipped out of our grasp. But we can't turn back time to get back to them.

And remembering them is both happy and sad. That giant silver maple tree was cut down years ago and my kids will never see it or climb in it. It belongs to a world that doesn't exist anymore.

There are joys of home that we have all tasted and yet they also belong to a world that doesn't exist anymore. But just like this tent of our body all the things that we call home in this life are temporary.

[22 : 37] They wear out and they fade away and we can't keep them forever. But if your faith is in Christ God is preparing for you an eternal home. And in that home all of the longings that you experience for home in this life will be fulfilled beyond your imagining in the presence of God.

And so if new eternal bodies and the presence of God is our true home then this world no matter how good it is cannot be our goal in life. We live courageously and we walk by faith because we have this one goal in mind our eternal home that is secure in Christ.

And as we long for eternity to be with God we live to please Him. Look with me in our last two verses verses 9 and 10. Paul says, So whether we are at home or away we make it our aim to please Him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body whether good or evil. You know many people wonder today what is the purpose of my life?

Why have I been placed here? For many they try to find their goal and their purpose inside themselves. They spend their lives focused inwardly scrutinizing what really makes me happy?

[24 : 01] And they set out to determine what their purpose will be. They set it for themselves. But for the Christian our purpose is simple. As we look to eternity as our goal we live with single-minded simplicity seeking to please God.

And this purpose also means that we don't just sit around doing nothing waiting for that eternal home. Longing for eternity should not be making us passive but rather it should make us purposeful.

We walk by faith. We live according to what we know is true. And so we don't live to please ourselves or pretend that this tent will last forever but rather we live for God. because we know that we have been saved for a life of serving the Lord. And as we walk by faith in that life His commandments grow sweeter and sweeter to us each day. And so Christ has secured our eternal home. And our longing for eternity must shape how we live today. If you think that the goal of life is to live as long as possible all your decisions in life will reflect that purpose.

[25 : 07] you'll avoid suffering. You'll avoid getting sick. And in the end this tent will still wear out. If you think the goal of your life is to have as much fun as possible all of those life decisions you make will fall in line with that purpose.

But knowing what Christ has done for us the whole goal and purpose of life has a radical shift. Our eyes turn away from this temporary tent and instead they are set on eternity. And Paul leaves us with this reminder of the coming judgment that all people one day will stand before the judgment seat of God. One day you and I will stand before the judgment seat of God and all of our life will be reviewed.

All the good you have done. All the wicked you have done. And only Christ can stand between us and cover us with His righteousness. And so knowing the true home that God has prepared for us we live to please Him.

We look forward to that moment where we will enter into the presence of God and hear Him say to us well done my good and faithful servant. Now enter into the joy of your Lord.

[26 : 17] Let's pray. Almighty God we pray that you would increase us that you would strengthen us to be able to follow you to live lives pleasing to you not to earn it for ourselves as if salvation is by works but knowing that our true home is in you that our entire lives would be centered around that truth and that joy and that one day we would see you face to face.

Amen. of the way I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm I'm