

In-Tent Living

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 January 2008

Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] Well, please be seated. You may like to have open the Bibles at page 939 to 2 Corinthians, the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5.

And for those who are visiting, this is part of a series through January in the mornings and also the January Wednesday evenings. So let's pray now as we come to God's Word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word that trains us in righteousness and teaches us, that corrects us and rebukes us and equips us for every good work.

We pray, Lord God, that your Word will bring about your good purposes in our lives for the glory of Jesus. Amen. They say that the frightening thing about middle age is that you grow out of it.

Well, I'm not quite sure when middle age ends. When I was 41, which is not all that long ago, and my ophthalmologist said to me that one of the problems with my eyes was old age.

[1 : 0 8] And I was 41. I must say that was a bit of a shock to the system to think that I'm actually old. Especially because I think the most common piece of advice that people give me in general, here and elsewhere, is don't get old.

Well, I'm afraid it's too late. According to my ophthalmologist, I'm old. Well, at least my eye is, and I think the rest of my body is pretty much the same age. So I'm already old, and that was from 41 at least.

People say don't get old because they don't like the frailty of the human body, basically. It's often distressing when our human bodies begin to fail us and give way.

When our joints begin to stiffen and the arthritis takes home. When we lose our memories bit by bit. When our eyes become dimmer and our ears harder of hearing.

When you have to get up three or more times during the night to go to the toilet. When you struggle to remember all the tablets that you take each day. When you lose your independence.

[2 : 1 8] When it's harder to walk or to shower yourself and no longer able to drive, for example. As the hymn, Abide With Me says, change and decay in all around I see.

And for many of us, and you don't have to be that old before you begin to see it in your own body. It begins to decay. To grow weaker. You no longer have the energy, the stamina, the fitness, etc. that you used to have.

The wearing out of the physical body is a reality for all of us if we live long enough. And it's usually seen as something that we grieve and lament deeply.

What's your view on aging and decline? How do you react to the decay of your physical body?

Well, I think Paul's words today ought to encourage us deeply. But also to challenge our thinking. Paul begins this section saying, we do not lose heart.

[3 : 23] Something that he said at the beginning of chapter 4 as well. And indeed he said more or less the same thing in two or three other places earlier in this same letter. We do not lose heart.

Verse 16. Even though our outer nature is wasting away. We do not lose heart. Paul has been arguing in the previous part of chapter 4 and also in the end of chapter 3.

That the ministry that he's exercised. Which has brought about so much anguish and distress and afflictions and beatings and persecution. So much wearisomeness. So much sense of despair almost at times.

He does not lose heart. Because of the power of the resurrection. The power of the gospel. That is already at work. So for example, he said in chapter 4 verse 11.

For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake. So that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh.

[4 : 27] And Paul's particular situation. He's saying that the sufferings, the decay, the wearisomeness of his life and ministry. Is a bit like carrying around in his body the death of Jesus.

But with the purpose of the life of Jesus being evident. So he has a connection in his mind here and now in this life. Between the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus.

He said in verse 14 of chapter 4. We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus. And will bring us with you into his presence.

So Paul has a strong hope. That at the end of this life. There will be the resurrection of believers. To be in the presence of Jesus and God the Father. And that's something that Paul has confidence in and looks forward to.

But it's not simply resurrection power then. Because that resurrection power is already being evident. In the Christian's life here and now. At the end of chapter 3 in verse 18.

[5 : 27] He said in this great verse. That we saw last Sunday morning. All of us with unveiled faces. Seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror.

Are being transformed into the same image. From one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord the Spirit. Paul in effect is saying there. That our transformation into the likeness of Christ.

Is the beginnings of the resurrection power of the gospel. At work here and now in our life. So even though our physical body is wasting away. The work of God within us by his spirit.

Is transforming us into the likeness of Jesus. In glory for the final day. And that's already begun. So Paul is saying here. That even though his body is wasting away.

Even though he's growing old and tired. And all those sorts of things. There is resurrection power now at work in his life. As it is indeed in work in every Christian's life.

[6 : 25] Ready for that final day. Now Paul brings this idea together again. In the section we're looking at today. Verse 16 says. Even though our outer nature is wasting away.

Our inner nature is being renewed day by day. The outer nature is really our physical body. Which is wasting away. As we know our faculties are diminishing.

Our fitness is decreasing. Etc. It's getting weaker and more and more worn out. That's what Paul is referring to. By the outer nature wasting away. But he also says.

Our inner nature is being renewed. Day by day. Now Paul doesn't have in mind here. Simply our soul or spirit. It's a more robust idea than that.

Our inner nature is. In a sense. Our life with God in heaven. That's being renewed within us. The outer nature is the mere physical body. A sort of shell that is decaying.

[7 : 26] But our inner nature. Like he said in chapter 3 verse 18. Is being transformed more and more. Into the image of Christ. As though when we look in a mirror. We will see the image of Christ.

That's what the final day perfection is like. And that's what's happening now. Day by day. With the renewal that God's spirit is bringing within us. That's the resurrection power at work.

But it's not simply two independent things. That on the one hand. Our outer nature is wasting away. But it just happens. That on the other hand. Our inner nature is being renewed. The two are actually connected.

As verse 17 makes clearer. For this slight momentary affliction. Is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory. Beyond all measure.

That is. The wasting away of our outer nature. Now. Is actually preparing us. Or another way of saying that. That Greek word would be. Producing within us.

[8 : 23] An eternal weight of glory. For the future. That is. The wasting away now. Has actually got the benefit of. Producing in us. The renewal.

The transformation. Ready for the eternal weight of glory. That awaits us in heaven. Notice the perspective. Paul has here. Paul has been suffering for years.

As a Christian. And as a minister. Persecution. Beatings. Imprisonment. Etc. He calls that a. Momentary. Slight. Affliction. He's not.

In an odd way. Downplaying it. But in the eternal perspective. That's true. That if you could. Do a timeline. From the beginning. To the end. Of eternity.

You would barely see. Our human life on earth. And within that life. You would hardly see. If at all. The. The sufferings and afflictions. That Paul has gone through.

[9 : 21] They are really. In the scale of eternity. Slight. And momentary. It's the same argument. Paul uses in. Romans chapter 8. In effect. That our sufferings.

Are like. Birth pangs. Towards something. That is better. That we're longing for. And groaning for. What Paul is saying here. For Christians. Is that our growing frailty.

Our aging. Our physical weakness. Our afflictions. Persecution. Suffering on earth. Should drive us. To inner renewal.

That is. It should make us. Look forward to. Long for. Heaven. And even now. Be preparing us for heaven. So that our inner nature.

Is being renewed. Day. By day. Robert Browning. The poet said. Grow old. Along with me. The best. Is yet.

[10 : 17] To be. But this is more profound. Than that. This is not simply saying. Oh the best. Is coming. As though the best. May. Be better.

But. Not perfect. Paul is saying. That the best. That is coming. Is the best. That you can imagine. There is nothing better. There cannot be anything better.

It is an eternal. Weight. Of glory. That is coming. It's not simply something. That will. Oh yeah. That will be better. But it will be perfect. It will be beyond.

Imagination. An eternal. Weight of glory. Beyond. All measure. We can't imagine that. Glory. Is the idea. Of the presence of God. And this will be the presence.

Of God. Beyond measure. Face to face. In the presence. Of almighty God. The glory. At its absolute. Brightest. And fullest. Beyond all measure.

[11 : 11] Beyond our understanding. Beyond our comprehension. Even. Beyond our expectation. It's the best. Paul's focus then.

Here and now. On earth. In the midst of his sufferings. And the. Wasting away. Of his outer nature. Is to focus. Not on what is seen. He doesn't sort of.

Absorb himself. In his aches. And pains. In his struggles. And weakness. And beatings. And afflictions. He mentions them. From time to time. We saw that a couple of weeks ago. In chapter one. We'll see it again later. In this letter. We see it in other letters.

By Paul in the New Testament. But that's. That isn't what absorbs him. He doesn't become full of self-pity. He doesn't become totally obsessed. By all the suffering.

But rather. He says. My focus. Is on what is not seen. Verse 18. Of chapter four. Because we look at. Not at what can be seen.

[12 : 06] But at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen. Is temporary. But what cannot be seen. Is eternal. It's slightly paradoxical. He looks at.

What cannot be seen. How do you look at something. That you can't see. Paul's sense here. Is not. You can't see it. Because it's invisible. You can't see it. Because it's not yet revealed.

Is in effect. That is. His focus is. To the future. And just because the eternal weight of glory. Has not. Cannot yet be seen. Doesn't mean it's not real.

Sometimes we get conned to think. Even as Christians. That the future is sort of. A wishful dream. A happy dream. Of what might be. But the biblical view.

Is that what cannot yet be seen. Is actually more substantial. And more real. Than this earth. And this life. Paul calls it an eternal weight.

[13 : 02] Of glory. He could have just said eternal glory. And been right. But by saying the eternal weight of glory. Paul is indicating the substance. The realness.

The physicality almost. Of heavenly glory. That awaits Christian believers. It's not just. Some hope. It's real. It's substantial.

It's more real. More lasting. More permanent. Than life on earth. Which is just. Temporary. A slight. Temporary. Transitory. Affliction. And so.

Paul's focus. Even in the midst of his suffering. Is on what cannot be seen. At least. Yet. He's looking forward. To the resurrection.

Of Christian believers. Of the presence of Christian believers. With the resurrected Christ. In the presence of God. The Father. In heaven. He's looking forward. To the glory. Of a perfect place.

[13 : 57] Where there'll be no more suffering. Crying. Tears. Pain. Death. Or evil. Or sin. So when our outer nature. Is wasting away. As it is. We ought to be.

Focusing like Paul. On what is not. Yet. Yet. Seen. And see. That our inner nature. Is being renewed. Day by day. Ready. For heaven.

That's what resurrection hope. Is all about. In the here and now. Not just something. That will happen. Way off. In the future. So often. I think we Christians. Sadly. Mimic the pagans.

Of our world. Who don't also like. Old age. By and large. The tragedy. For pagans. And for the godless. Is. That. That the decay. Of their outer nature.

Is the decay. Of everything. But for believers. For Christians. It's only the decay. Of our outer nature. Our inner nature. Is being renewed.

[14 : 53] Day by day. For heavenly glory. Sometimes we lose. That perspective. And we forget about. The renewal. The transformation. The growth. In glory. Of our inner nature. And we fall into.

The pagan worldview. That says. Our decay. Is you know. Our whole life. Is just falling apart here. Because I'm growing old. And weak. But that's not Christian thinking. Certainly not Paul's thinking here.

That yes. There is outer decay. But unlike the pagans. It's merely the decay. Of our outer nature. Most of us.

I suspect. Don't like. Moving house. There are times. When moving house. Is actually a great thing. I remember. When I moved out. Of a fairly sort of. Squalid share house.

When I was a student. And moved into a house. When I became. An ordained minister. Oh it's fabulous. I was looking forward to that. For years. And I couldn't wait. To move house. And to get out.

[15 : 49] Of the sort of. Run down. Sort of place. That I was living in. In the inner city. And the difficult people. Sometimes that I was sharing. The house with. It's a bit too. Like when you go camping. You might enjoy living in a tent.

For a while. And having sand in your bed. And your sleeping bag. And the flies. And the mosquitoes. And everything. But there comes a time. After the joy of camping. Where it's so good. To have your own shower.

And your own bed. Now Paul uses. That sort of image here. When he speaks about. Death in effect. He uses actually. Three pictures. In chapter five. And the first one.

Is of sort of moving house. Or going from camping. To home. He says. At the beginning of chapter five. We know. That if the earthly tent. We live in. Is destroyed.

We have a building from God. The earthly tent. Is our outer nature. Our physical bodies. In effect. And he's saying. That will culminate. In a time when it's destroyed.

[16 : 43] That is death. Is what he's saying. But that's not the end. For believers. We're merely changing house. Moving house. And we're moving from a tent.

Which is temporary. And wearing out. To a permanent dwelling. That is better. Than a tent. And it's a house. Not made with hands. Paul says.

Which I think. Deliberately evokes. Words of Jesus. When he spoke. Of his resurrection. Paul is saying. That the house. Without hands. Is the resurrection. Body of Jesus. And through that.

Our own resurrection. Bodies. Paul's not talking. About just becoming. A bodiless soul. Or spirit. Floating around. In the outer space. He's talking about. Dwelling physically again.

But fit for heaven. So we move out of our. Temporary. Physical bodies. So to speak. Our outer natures on earth. Into a permanent dwelling. That is fit.

[17 : 39] And appropriate. For eternity. And heaven with God. So we have a building. From God. A house. Not made with hands. Eternal. In the heavens.

That's what Paul is. Focusing on. And what he's. Looking forward to. He's saying that when we die. As believers. We will dwell in. Resurrected bodies. Like the resurrected.

Lord Jesus Christ. And his. Eternal dwelling. A house. Made without hands. It will be. Eternal. And in the heavens. As the end of verse one.

Says. Our bodies now. Are like tents. That are wearing out. And we will move house. So to speak. To a permanent dwelling. When we die. In faith.

Verse two. He goes on to say. For in this tent. We groan. Longing to be clothed. With our heavenly dwelling. Well sadly. The pagans of our world. And we sometimes.

[18 : 34] Copy them. Groan and grumble. With our sufferings. And afflictions. But this groaning. Is like the groaning. Of labor pains. That is looking forward.

To and expecting. And hoping for. A heavenly dwelling. Not the groaning. Of complaint. But the groaning. Of expectation. And longing. Paul in verse two.

Actually mixes metaphors. He talks about being clothed. With a dwelling. But he does it transitionally. Because he moves now. Into the second picture. He's used the picture. Of changing houses.

Or tent to dwelling. As a expression. Of what happens. When we die. Now he talks about clothing. In verses three. And four. If indeed. When we have taken it off.

We will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent. We groan under our burden. Because we wish. Not to be unclothed. But to be further clothed.

[19 : 31] So that what is mortal. May be swallowed up. By life. Paul likens now. Our outer nature. To clothing. Rather than a tent. And he says that at death.

In effect. We take off. That outer nature. But unlike. Taking off your clothes. And being found naked. Paul says. We'll take off. Our outer nature. At death.

And find that we are actually. More fully. Or further clothed. Strangely enough. And we'll be clothed. In effect. With our heavenly bodies. What is fit for heaven.

Again. It's not the sense. Of losing your body. So that you've got. The immortality. The soul. That floats around. Bodiless. Not at all. That's not Christian expectation. Or hope. But rather. That as the.

Outer clothing. Is taken off. Of our physical bodies. Now. That are now. Already subject. To decay. We'll actually. Find ourselves. Clothed for heaven. With our resurrection.

[20 : 28] Bodies. That's what Paul's hope is. That's what he's expecting. As he says to the. Corinthians. In his first letter. In chapter 15. We saw a bit of that reading. In the first reading today.

We will put on. Immortality. And. Imperishability. And we'll take off. Mortality. Or as he says here. At the end of verse. Four. What is mortal.

That is our outer nature. May be swallowed up by. Life. That is immortality. That is on that day. We'll take off. Our mortal clothing. Which is now subject.

To decay. And we will find ourselves. Clothed. In life. In immortality. What a wonderful expression. And a wonderful hope. Because at the moment.

We know that our. External and outer nature. Is irresistibly. Leading to death. But at death. We'll find that we are clothed. In the clothes of life.

[21 : 24] And immortality. For eternity. For that heavenly weight. Of glory. Isn't that what we should be desiring.

As we grow old. As we suffer the aches and pains. Do you long for that heavenly body. The resurrection body. Do you long for the body.

That won't be reliant on pills. And creams. And medicines. Do you long for the bodies. That will no longer be subject. To decay and disease. Do you long.

That what is mortal now. Will be swallowed up. By life. Grow old along with me. The best is yet to be. But the best.

Is perfect. It is life. And glory. Now please. Do not doubt. This Christian hope. Do not think.

[22 : 23] That this is just some. Optimistic. Wishful thinking. That will somehow. Help us persevere. Persevere. Through some aches and pains. Not at all. There is no doubt.

At all in the scriptures. That this hope. Is real. Sure. And certain. It is as certain. As tomorrow. Is Monday. May. This is something.

Substantial. And weighty. It is grounded. In the resurrection. Of Jesus. From the dead. So Paul says. Back in verse 14. We know.

That the one. Who raised the Lord. Jesus. Will raise us. Also with Jesus. So if you doubt. This hope. Look back. To the resurrection. Of Jesus. And say. What happened to him.

Is what will happen. To us. He was raised. With a resurrection. Body. And that is what will happen. To us. Look back. To chapter 3.

[23 : 17] Verse 18. Again. We are being transformed. Into the image. Of Jesus Christ. That's happening now. And because it's happening now. It ought to give us confidence.

And certainty. That it will reach its destination. When we will look in the mirror. And see the image of the Lord. Jesus Christ. On the day of glory. This is not wishful thinking. But we are now.

On a journey. To that destination. Inexorably. Through faith. In the resurrected. Jesus Christ. And Paul says now. In chapter 5. Verse 5. He who has prepared us.

For this very thing. Is God. And the implication is. God cannot be doubted. Or mistrusted. And indeed. God has given us. The spirit. As a guarantee.

A down payment. The same word he used. Of the spirit. Back in chapter 1. As well. When you pay. When you pay. A guarantee. Or a deposit. On a house. Or car. Or something that you're buying.

[24 : 13] You're in a sense. Expressing. A confidence. And certainty. That you will be. Buying the rest. Paying off the debt. So to speak. God has given. To every believer.

His Holy Spirit. Shining in our hearts. In glory. Now. As the guarantee. Of our future destiny. It is that spirit.

The Lord. Who is working. The work of transformation. In us. As the end of chapter 3. Made clear. So that spirit of God. Is a guarantee. For us. So that. As Paul goes on.

In verse 6. To say. We are always confident. He says it again. At the beginning of verse 8. Yes. We do have confidence. Not just. Wishful. Dreamy optimism. But confidence.

In the future resurrection. Of the day. Of being clothed. In glory. In the presence. Of almighty God. After we die. And the confidence.

[25 : 07] Comes. From the resurrection. Of Jesus. The work of God's spirit. Already within us. The spirit. As a guarantee. Or down payment. That God has already. Given to every believer.

That's why Paul says. We do not lose heart. He knows where he's heading. And he's longing. For where he's heading. Well Paul has used the image. Of moving house. From a tent.

To a dwelling. He used the image. Of changing clothing. Taking off the old. And finding ourselves. Clothed already. With the new. And now he uses his third image. Of being home and away.

And not home and away. As in a TV soap. And not home and away. As in a football team's. Fixtures. But rather. Whether you're at home. In the body. Or are you at home. With the Lord.

He says in verse 6. We're always confident. Even though we know. That while we're at home. In the body. We're away from the Lord. For we walk by faith. Not by sight. Yes we do have confidence.

[26 : 03] And we would rather be away from the body. And at home with the Lord. Paul's saying that here now. Life on earth. We're at home in our bodies. Our external nature. That is wasting away.

We're away from the Lord. In the sense that he physically is in heaven. He's with us by his spirit now. Paul's not denying that. But Paul is saying. I long to be at home. With the Lord in heaven.

And away then. From this body. That is subject to decay. They're the two options in effect. But Paul then says. Either way. You see his longing for heaven.

Is not a sort of suicidal thing. His longing for heaven. As he says in verse 9. Is whether we're at home. Or away. We make it our aim.

To please him. Paul says. My longing is to be with the Lord in heaven. That ought to be a Christian longing. For every one of us. It ought to make us relatively dissatisfied.

[26 : 57] With life on earth. But. We live life on earth. To please the Lord. So whether I'm at home. Here on the body on earth. Or whether I'm at home with the Lord.

He says. My whole aim. Is to please the Lord. And the motivation for that. He says in verse 10. Is for all of us. Must appear. Before the judgment seat. Of Christ. So that each may receive.

Recompense for what has been done. In the body. Whether good. Or evil. When you and I stand. Before the judgment seat of Christ.

Our lives will be scrutinized. Our actions. Our thoughts. Our words. The things we haven't done. Or said or thought. What we do now.

Matters to God. It's actually a high view. Of our life. That we will be brought. Before the judgment seat. Of Jesus Christ. On the final day. It is a moral assessment.

[27 : 57] What will be assessed. Is whether we've. Done or thought. Or said. Good or evil. As the end of verse 10. Indicates. God. But this verse. Is not saying. That somehow.

We may be good enough. To pass a judgment test. On the final day. For the. Scriptures. Both old and new testament. Make it abundantly clear. That no person.

Can stand on that day. In their own deeds. All of us. Fall short of God's glory. And even in this passage. Both before it.

And indeed. What we'll see on Wednesday night. In the rest of chapter 5. Makes it also. Just as clear. That though we fall short. Of God's glory. It's by the death.

Of Jesus. For our sins. That we may be found. Righteous. In the eyes of God. And that. And that alone. But having said that. And we receive that.

[28 : 50] Through faith. But having said that. When we stand before God. Our lives will still be scrutinized. Not. Not for believers. In a sense. At the level of.

You know. Are you good enough. To get into heaven. But where is the evidence. Of your faith. It ought to be evident. In our lives. If we trust. In the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Paul is saying. In effect. God's judgment. The judgment of Christ. Will seek. Will assess. Our lives. Will there be evidence. Of faith.

In our works. Words. And thoughts. God has shone. His glory. Into our hearts. We saw that back.

In chapter 4. Verse 6. We fall short. Of God's glory. On our own terms. But God. In his mercy. Shines his glory. Into our hearts. And we have confidence.

[29 : 47] That on that final day. That on that final day. The transformation. And renewal process. Already begun. By God. And his spirit. In our mind. In our hearts. And minds. Will be brought to completion.

So that on that day. We'll stand perfect. In the sight of God. A mirror image. Of Christ. Himself. That's God's work. It's God's mercy.

In us. It ought to give us. Confidence even. But on the final day. We can stand. Because of Christ. And God's work. Before the judgment. Throne. Of Jesus Christ.

At death. Our outer nature. Will be cast off. And the glorious. Inner nature. Will be revealed. In all. Its beauty. And perfection. Even now.

It is being renewed. Day by day. A work of God's spirit. As we long. More and more. For the final day. So let us long.

[30 : 44] Then. For a heavenly dwelling. Made without human hands. And the casting off. Of this tent. Let us long. For the day. When we'll be further. Clothed in a glorious. Resurrection body.

As the outer clothing. That's wasting away. Now. Is finally cast off. And let us long. To be at home. With the Lord. Though now.

We're at home. In our bodies. And our aim. Is to please him. Always. Again. As we saw last week. The words of that great hymn.

Sum up. Perhaps. Our prayer. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. to cast our crowns before you, lost in wonder, love and praise.

[31 : 47] Amen.