

Great Reward

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening, everyone. If you haven't got a Bible in front of you, then you need to get one. And there are some up the back, just out there in the foyer.

Let me be frank with you. If you don't have a Bible, what I'm going to say is going to get really confusing very quickly. And you need to follow along with me. I say that because I've been wrestling with this text all week.

And up until five minutes ago, I'm still wrestling with this text. And so we need God's help to see what can't be seen.

So let's pray that we might be encouraged and we might not lose heart. Father God, I pray that as we look at your word now, that you might bring clarity to the confusion. We pray that you would help us to see that which is unseen.

And that in seeing that, and even just getting a small glimpse of it, that it would cause us not to lose heart as your disciples seeking to proclaim the lordship of Christ so that everyone might bow their knee and confess with their tongue that Jesus is in fact Lord.

[1 : 1 3] And so Lord, spirit, we pray for the global task. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. I've developed quite a bad habit recently.

While I'm watching a movie on TV, I grab my phone and I look up the movie in Wikipedia and read the plot summary.

And so very early on in the movie, I know how the movie ends. The negative side is that it spoils the end of the movie, especially if there's some unexpected twist.

And sometimes there is. In fact, I was looking at the TV guide last night, wondering whether I would watch a movie, looked at the plot summary, went, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah. And then right at the end, something happened. I went, oh, that'd be good, but it's too late now.

I know what's going to happen. The positive side of it is that every little throwaway line and statement and facial expression and random event makes sense.

[2 : 1 4] First time up. The other positive side is that I don't waste an hour or two of my life on a dud movie and I get a little bit more sleep. So I feel like that I need to do something similar now to help us understand 2 Corinthians 4 and 5, which is our focus for mission month this year.

If we go to the end of the letter, it helps us understand the beginning and especially what's happening in these chapters. So you need your Bible and flick over.

Chapter 10, Paul starts to, if you like, pull the curtain back on the reason that he has penned this letter. He's defending his ministry against some people who have commended themselves to this church at Corinth.

It would seem that they're boasting a lot about themselves. Their ministry achievements and their spiritual experiences and their successes and stuff like that. And in the process, they're rubbishing Paul as if Paul's not the real deal, that they're superior to Paul.

And so in chapter 11, verse 5, all's revealed who these people are. He says, I do not think, this is Paul speaking, I do not think that I'm in the least inferior to those super apostles.

[3 : 3 3] And so there they are. These are the people that Paul has been writing about. Right from the beginning of the letter, the super apostles. And he uses that term quite sarcastically because while he's an apostle, these guys have elevated themselves as super apostles over the top of every other apostle.

These guys are the real deal, if you like. And so these super apostles are on the forefront of Paul's mind as he is penning this letter and including these chapters, obviously in four and five that we are focusing on.

It seems that these super apostles were professional speakers who got paid lots of money for being impressive people. They were eloquent. They were loud. They were funny. They promised the world.

They were successful. They were beautiful. They were well-dressed. They were sort of like the got-it-all-together types, if you like. The only thing I could think of was maybe a Tony Robbins, if you ever know who that guy is.

If you don't, Google him and you'll soon understand what I mean. People looked out to them. They wanted to be like them, like these super apostles. They had the kind of lives and lifestyles that make you envious.

[4 : 43] And Paul's great defense of his ministry is at the end of chapter 11 where he joins in on their boasting. He draws a big breath and he starts to say the sort of things that he hates to hear.

And he starts with his heritage in verse 22 of chapter 11. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are these guys Israelites? Me too. Are they Abraham's attendants? Got that one.

And then he makes a bold claim about himself against the super apostles. This is where he draws the line, if you like, in verse 23. Are they servants of Christ? And he's sort of like a little bit of a sideline here.

He goes, I'm just mad when I say this. And then he comes back in and he says, are they servants of Christ? I am more. That's a pretty big sort of line in the sand to draw at that point.

And then what he does is having declared that he is in fact the genuine apostle, that he is the genuine servant of Christ.

[5 : 44] At this point, you would expect Paul to go on and give his resume like the super apostles and talk about his successes, his spiritual experiences and everything that makes him impressive and more impressive than the super apostles.

But instead, he talks about his sufferings, his losses and his defeats. Look at what he says. I have worked much harder, been imprisoned more frequently, been flogged more severely, been exposed to death again and again.

Five times I received from the Jews the 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods.

Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and day in the open sea.

I've been constantly on the move. I've been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger from the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea and in danger from false brothers.

I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food. I have been cold and naked and besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.

[6 : 48] Who is weak and I do not feel weak. Who is led into sin and I do not inwardly burn. He says, that's what makes me the real deal.

There is my CV about genuine authentic apostleship. The biggest issue for the super apostles and this church of Corinth who have been swayed by the super apostles was not primarily about Paul's teaching but about Paul's lifestyle.

Paul's response is that his lifestyle is characteristic of the way of the cross, of a life of faith, of following his saviour Jesus.

And so that's the perspective that he wants us to have as we look at chapters 4 and 5. That is, he wants us to have clay pot, jars of clay, takeaway containers, expectations of life as a disciple of Jesus.

If we understand with clarity that we are jars of clay, then I think what Paul's saying is that if we have that expectation, it will help us not to lose heart in the global task of proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 18] Clear expectations and not losing heart are in fact put together in the passage that you looked at last week in chapter 4, verse 16.

Have a look at it. Therefore, we do not lose heart. So, we don't lose heart. That's what he wants.

Though outwardly we are wasting away clay pot, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

We don't lose heart even though we are wasting away outwardly because we are being renewed inwardly day by day.

We don't lose heart even though the body is falling apart because inwardly being renewed day by day. Inward renewal. That is the key to not losing heart. And how does that inward renewal day by

day happen?

He tells us in verse 18. We fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen.

[9 : 27] Paul's renewed heart to pursue God's global agenda to keep surrendering his life to the Lord Jesus Christ and his priorities life comes from something very strange.

It comes from looking at what he can't see. As verse 18 says the things he can see are temporal the things he can't see are eternal and it's gazing on the eternal things that means that he is inwardly renewed and encouraged and not losing heart.

The summary statement I think is in chapter 4 verse 17. for our light and momentary troubles those he can see those he can feel those he can touch are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all that he can't see.

In other words the unseen things that Paul looks at for inner renewal is the immense weight of glory that is being prepared for him not just after but through and by the wasting away of his body in the pursuit of God's glory.

That is there is a correlation between the decay of Paul's body in the service of the Lord Jesus and the display of Paul's glory for all eternity.

[11 : 01] the decaying of his body was not meaningless. The pain the pressure the frustration and affliction it's not happening in vain.

They are not causing him to lose heart because when Paul is hurting he fixes his eyes not on how heavy the hurt is but on how heavy the glory will be because of the hurt in the pursuit of the Lord Jesus.

Now that bit is crucial for us to get. Because when we look at Paul's life of surrender to the Lord Jesus there is a very significant threat here.

If you choose the way of surrender to Jesus then the great threat is the loss of everything precious. When you look at the list of what Paul suffered because of the gospel because of God's global agenda of the gospel going to the ends of the earth the great threat to us is the loss of everything precious everything that is most precious and that is our life.

[12 : 17] it's a genuine threat. It's a genuine threat. Anyone want to lose their life? No hands go up. I don't think you need to dwell that point.

I don't want to lose my life. I had a great time today. After church sat on the deck of morning tea there and just discussed this passage with a couple of people and it was awesome.

From that I walked straight over. we had a bunch of people for lunch and we sat down to roast lamb and we talked and it was heaps of fun and my lovely wife made it and I love her dearly.

My kids are adorable. They are an absolute hoot. Basically all the time. Last week I was visiting Hong Kong, meeting new people, seeing new places and to lose all of those things.

A threat. And so a life of surrender to Jesus looks like a real threat. He may take it.

[13 : 25] And so as Paul launches into chapter 5, he's helping us not to lose heart. To keep surrendering all to Jesus. To keep sacrificing for God's global cause because in these verses he deals with that threat.

and the way he deals with it is you're actually not going to lose it. You think this is good? All those things I described, you think this is good?

You're going to get more if you pursue Jesus. 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.

So the contrast here that he says is between the temporary inferior tent that is my wasting away body, to the eternal superior building that is the resurrected, perfected, eternal body that Jesus will give me.

And so what he does here in verse 1 is he gives us a real dose of realism. Every person experiences the wasting away of the body and finally death.

[14 : 38] It is a normal experience. We will all experience that at some point. His point is your life is not secure anyway.

we live in a tent, not a building. Tents are vulnerable and weak. And Paul here wants us to be free from the expectation that we will be free from fragility and frailty while we live in this world, whether we pursue Christ or not.

Pursue all the security and protection and comfort you like. It won't provide what you want it to.

Death looms as a shadow over every life.

Which is partly why we groan. Verse 2, we groan longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed.

The groaning while we're in this tent means that we groan all the time. Impending death means that groaning is everyone's experience. At any moment death will bring into question everything that we've held dear.

[16:01] Everything that we have claimed to achieve in this life. But the groaning of the Christian has an added element. Verse 2 says that we groan because we want the eternal perfected resurrection body.

The building made by God. That's what we groan. We long for it in other words. A resurrected body is our hope. Our own bodies will be fitted out eternally perfectly fallously like Jesus' body.

That's good because a building is so much more secure than a tent. Especially notice when this building in verse 1 is built and is coming from God.

The eternal God. This building is not made by flawed human hands like mine but made by perfect eternal hands like God.

We have the secure hope because of the great treasure of the gospel. That's why we get this building. I haven't made it with my hands. God has made it for me. For me, a sinful, flawed, ungrateful, undeserving of God's love, deserving of his condemnation.

[17:14] People like me who have been forgiven through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ have this hope. I go from death to life eternal. It is secure and it is an eternal gift.

It's an eternal house in heaven given to everyone who trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is Paul's hope and it is our hope who live by faith in the Lord Jesus. As verse 5 says, now it is God who has made us for this very purpose.

He is the builder of the eternal house, the secure building, the perfect building and he has made it for me. Okay, that's good.

That renews me and gives me focus in serving Christ in that life in this world is not the end. Paul has helped me to see, just get a glimpse of the thing which is unseen.

There is an eternal and perfect life in Christ waiting for me. But there is one more unseen thing that I need help here to see and that is when do I get this new eternal and perfect life?

[18:30] This new body, this new building fitted for eternity so that I can enjoy the food, the relationships and everything else in heaven for all of eternity.

eternity. And this is the other unseen thing which I need to see if I'm going to not lose heart in serving Christ. What happens when you die? In his answer, Paul here wants us to be utterly secure because security will renew us inwardly as we outwardly waste away.

And he addresses this in verse 4 and onwards. We do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

To go back to the tent building metaphor, what Paul is saying here is I want the building fantastic, new eternal perfect body.

What I don't want to experience is my tent being folded up and packed away before I get the building. I don't want to die in order to get that.

[19:44] That is, I actually don't want to be separated from my body. I don't want to be found naked is what he says in verse 3. He doesn't want to die and be absent from the body.

And so if he has a choice, he wants Jesus to come back and immediately swallow, if you like, his life up. That is, he wants Jesus to immediately swap his tent for the building in a twinkling of an eye, as other parts of the New Testament say.

Christ will come back and in a twinkling of an eye, those who are alive in Christ, those who are walking the face of the earth, trusting in Jesus at that moment, will immediately be transformed. No death.

That's an awesome option. Bring it on any day, I reckon. That's what he means when he says what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Good option. No death. No separation from the body. No wasting away. No weariness and weakness in a twinkling of an eye. All that stuff gone. Perfected. Unrestricted.

[20:51] Eternal. In the presence of Jesus. With my body. Able to give him a hug. That's preference number one. I'm assuming that's if you're in Christ, that is your preference.

That seems like a good option to me. You see, like us, Paul loved life in this world. He loved the ability to be able to hug people and kiss them and eat food and chat and travel and whatever else it was.

Which is why the Christian hope of bodily resurrection connects so significantly with our hearts. We don't want to be separated from our bodies. bodily resurrection in a perfect physical world that goes on forever is our hope.

Our hope as a Christian is not an aimless spiritual world. It's not clouds and wings and harps, but relationships and work and trees and rivers and food in the presence of our great God.

life. And that's, I think, put Paul's lifestyle in perspective for us. He didn't endure what he did for Christ because he didn't love life in this world.

[22 : 08] He didn't surrender all that he surrendered. He did not suffer what he suffered because he was a depressing, morose kind of dude. He just went, I'll just bring it on because I really hate my life. He loved it and he wants to spend eternity with his body in a perfected world and so he doesn't want to experience death.

He wants to go from this life and immediately into the next. And it will happen for everyone who lives by faith in the Lord Jesus when Jesus comes back.

That will be your experience. If Jesus comes back when you're alive, pray for that to come. Come, Lord Jesus.

So Paul says, see the unseen and feel the security of that. Now if you took the first option to his extreme, you could possibly conclude that life is greater and the greatest possible thing and so do whatever you can to keep this life secure in this world.

Which is why Paul gives us his second preference in verse 8 and without verse 8 you could misconstrue verse 4. That is, this helps us, verse 8 helps us to correct any misunderstanding of verse 4 we might have.

[23 : 33] He said, I would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. What both option 1, verse 4, and option 2, verse 8 reveal is that the highest priority in life is to be with Jesus.

That's the highest priority. If the choice here is between more life, for Paul is what he says, if the choice is between more life here by faith and going to be with Christ, he'd prefer that God would take him even if it means that his body gets buried in the ground here right now and he has to wait before Jesus comes back and unites him with that body.

Being at home with the Lord, he said, is so irresistibly attractive because it means ultimately more intimacy with Jesus than we would ever experience in this world.

Whatever happens with you, Jesus comes back, twigly even I, done or death and wait for your body to be united with him in his presence in the physical world.

Paul wants us to have absolute security and confidence in the future. For Paul, death meant gain.

[25 : 09] Philippians 2, to live is Christ and to die is gain. It's better in Christ. And what Paul writes here is meant to give the Christian a deep sense of security in the future.

For the Christian who loses their life before Jesus returns, you are not aimlessly floating around in some spiritual world. At the point of death, there is an immediate folding into the presence of Christ. We will not be separated from Jesus. We will never be separated from his love. that is the impact of verses 6 to 8. But these verses do emphasize that the great and final hope of the Christian is not to die and be freed from our bodies.

Our hope is not a spiritual world. It is a world more physical and real than the world in which we live. This is but a foretaste, this world, of what is yet to come.

The hope of the Christian is not to be free from their body. We often say of the Christian who has just died, well it's all over now, at least they're in heaven. And I want to say that's option number two, according to Paul, and that is good, but it's not the best.

[26 : 25] There is still something yet to come. There is even more forward to look forward to when Jesus return and raises all the dead in Christ. As 1 Corinthians 15 54 says, when the perishable, this body, has been clothed with the imperishable, my eternal body, and the mortal, this body, with immortality, the eternal body, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. That, the perusia, the end of time when Jesus comes back and winds up this whole show, that's the victory we're looking for.

The resurrection body is our hope. And so Paul here has given us a glimpse of the unseen. I can't explain it all to you.

I can just do what Paul did and try and explain something of what he has seen. It is meant to cause us to be confident. In fact, he uses the word twice in these verses, that he is confident. Of course, the future shapes his present life. If Christ doesn't come and clothe him with immortality in the twinkling of an eye, bam, and he doesn't call him home in death, then Paul will, verse 7, live by faith and not by sight.

[27 : 50] That is his life in this world. Now, that living by faith and not by sight doesn't mean we leap into the dark and just hope that preference one or two, one or both of them sort of work out and come true.

What it does mean is that what is eternal, precious, important, and beyond our senses, that's what it means. We can't see or even imagine what the eternal building will look like and feel like.

What does it mean that my body will not decay? Ever. What does it mean it will never be restricted? Ever. I don't get that.

I mean, I'm preaching with a neck that I can't hardly move. That direction at the moment. That's got to be good to get rid of that one. And so what happens is, living by faith means we look to what we know of the Lord Jesus from faithful witnesses who walked and ate with him and heard his voice, witnessed the horror of his crucifixion and saw him risen from the dead, who ate fish with him on a beach after that had happened, put their hands in his side and in his fingers.

And we look to such tests and we believe the good news of the salvation of sinners and with the help of the down payment of the Holy Spirit, we trust his word and we renew our courage and we make it our goal to please him, to live by faith.

[29 : 15] death. There is, just before we finish, there is another aspect of the end of all things that shapes Paul's lifestyle and gives us another reason why we should want to please him.

It's verse 10, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

very quickly, for Paul in these verses, it's not condemnation that he fears, although it might be true for some who at the present are not trusting in Christ.

What he fears in that verse, in the judgment throne, is evaluation. salvation. It's not the loss of salvation, but the loss of commendation that he fears.

Because he lives to please the Lord, his greatest fear is in fact not to please him with his life. Now when I say that, it sounds like I'm talking about rewards in heaven.

[30 : 29] And that's true, because that's what I am saying. The problem is that when I talk about rewards in heaven, it sounds anti-grace.

Ephesians 2 verse 8 says that we are saved by grace through faith and not of any works that we've done. We do not earn our salvation. Works contradict grace, according to Ephesians 2, and rewards sound like works.

I think what Paul is saying is salvation is by faith and rewards are by faith, but the evidence of invisible faith in the judgment room of Christ at the end of time will be a transformed life.

I don't think his teaching here is out of line to the rest of the New Testament. It's in line with Jesus teaching on the accountability of the steward to his master with respect to the faithful use of gifts entrusted to him.

It's in line with Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 3. The purchase of our pardon by the blood of Jesus, sorry, the purchase of our pardon was the blood of Jesus, sufficient once for all to cover all of our sins.

[31 : 46] The means by which we own it is faith. And faith alone. And at the judgment of believers, Jesus is looking for deeds that prove that we have enjoyed our pardon.

One movie I haven't searched on Wikipedia and haven't gone to bed early on is Gladiator. At the beginning of the movie, Russell Crowe's character, Maximus Decimus Meridius, is inspiring his troops to fight well in one final battle, knowing full well that they might die, but the victory is almost there.

It's been a long campaign. And to inspire his troops to throw their life into the battle, he says to them, what we do in life echoes in eternity.

of course, it's unfortunate that he then went on to live a life of seeking revenge, but that's beside the point. He was still the hero, I think, in the end, even though he died.

I think that's what Paul is doing for us here. Do not lose heart. The Lord Jesus has secured an eternal building for all who trust in him. Look towards it by surrendering your life to him.

[33 : 19] Who we are in Christ, what we have done with our time, how we have pursued opportunities, how single-minded we have been in our Christian service will matter for all of eternity.

And he says it's possible to live in such a way as to build an eternal weight of glory. In 2 Corinthians, Paul demonstrates a life that hasn't lost heart.

His lifestyle is the evidence of it. He longed for a life of comfort and security and health and safety and painlessness, and so much so that he surrendered his body to insults and torments and beatings for the sake of Christ.

Because in surrendering his body, he secured the comfort, the security, the health, the safety and the painlessness. And it was the grace of God that was sufficient to sustain him.

My friends, I think that one of the primary evidences of a Christian's losing heart in pursuing God's global agenda is seen in pursuing confidence, security, and painlessness, and everything else here and now, bedding down in this world now.

[34 : 37] That is, we start living by sight rather than living by faith. life. The temporal becomes what's, becomes, you know, the supreme thing for us.

We stop looking to the eternal building and try to make this tent as secure and as comfortable as we possibly can.

A few more poles, a few extra chairs. I mean, have you been to a camping shop lately? It's astounding.

You can get recliner camping chairs. You've got one. Oh, you can get recliner camping chairs, hot water systems, fridges.

I mean, why, why even go? Just stay at home. You've got it all there. And sometimes we do the same with the Christian life.

[35 : 37] We just pursue the comfort and the security. We try and make the tent as livable as we possibly can. And my friends, it's a daily struggle. Present comfort, security, and glory, or eternal comfort, security, and glory.

It's my struggle. I'll level with you. I love comfort. And the older I'm getting, the more I like it. I'll be frank with you. That's why I wear a jumper on a cold day.

It's because I love comfort. It's why I'd rather be sitting in business class than economy class, because I love comfort. It's like the fact I like an air conditioner when I'm in hot economy, hot climate.

It's because I like comfort. I like gadgets in my car. Not because I need them, because they're, I don't know, because I like comfort. It's a daily battle.

It's a daily battle. And so I think what this passage is doing for us is, do we share Paul's biblical priorities and values in life? Do I love his grace and his mercy?

[36 : 40] Do I enjoy his pardon? Do I long first and foremost, and do I pray for Jesus to come back? Or would Jesus coming back right now be an inconvenience for you?

Secondly, do I long to be at home with Christ, even if it costs the surrender of my body? And thirdly, am I committed to walk by faith until he comes or until he calls, and to live by faith in such a way that what awaits me in the building is an eternal weight of glory in Christ.

Amen.