

Temporary Tents and Permanent Houses

2 Corinthians 4

October 27, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to 2 Corinthians 4. At his boss's funeral, a disgruntled worker knelt next to the casket and whispered, "Who's thinking outside the box now?" A cartoonist was found dead in his home. The details are sketchy. And of course the undertaker is the last one to let people down. Although we laugh, we all feel the sting of death. Over the last several months, we've had a number of brothers and sisters in our congregation pass away and in addition, many other families here have been touched by death. Whenever someone dies, there are always questions. Why did it happen? Where are they now? How do we go on? Etc. Today and next Sunday, God willing, we're going to look at some of those questions to see what the Bible says. But before we can understand death, we must understand life. What is it? Where does it come from? We'll start in Genesis 2:7 where it says, "the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."

Say life. The Bible tells us that God formed Adam from dust and scientists have confirmed we are made up of the same elements found in the ground under our feet. We are all organized dirt. Our physical bodies are a collection of incredibly ordered and designed chemicals in just the right amounts and places to enable us to live. But a dead body also has those chemicals and elements. So we know we're much more than just organized dirt. Adam's body had those elements and chemicals all arranged perfectly and yet he did not live until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. That is when, the Bible says, he became a living being.

Say Breath. God's breath makes all the difference. There is **no** life apart from God. Jesus said I am the Life. Even people who don't believe in God get their life from Him. He's the sole/soul supplier. From that moment on Adam began to live and all who came from him live also. And so we understand that life is more than just a physical body. It is also the soul, the breath of life. But as we find later, we are also spirit with personality and the ability to love and be loved, to think and create, to decide and act. And all of these are connected in a living person. We are, if you will, soul, spirit, and body, a kind of trinity similar to the Trinity of God. And yet much inferior.

Paul tells us in 2 Cor 4:7 that we have this treasure in our jars of clay. Say jar. Our bodies, like ceramic pots, are made from mortal clay but they hold the immortal soul. Some of our jars hold a few more gallons than others. Some are a bit more decorated than others and some are plain jane. Even though when we think of someone or hear their name, we think of what their jar looks like, but the real person, the real treasure, is not the pot, but who's inside.

Our bodies and souls and spirits are interwoven together very tightly. Our physical health can impact our emotional health. Our spiritual health can impact our physical health and so on. We think we can neglect the body, the jar, and only focus on the soul, but we soon learn how strongly all of these are interconnected. In fact, it is usually the failing of the body, the cracking of the jar through accident, injury, disease, or old age, that triggers the departure of the soul and spirit from our bodies, and when that happens, death occurs. When a person dies, their breath, their soul leaves their body. Their spirit departs and all that is left is an empty physical shell, an empty jar. When Jesus died, He committed His Spirit to His Father. So death occurs when the spirit and the soul exit the body.

Let's also remember that death was never part of God's original plan. He designed Adam and Eve's bodies to last forever. For their soul and spirit and body to remain united forever. But from the moment they disobeyed Him, their bodies began to age and deteriorate and eventually they both died. Granddaddy Adam at 930 years and we don't know how old grandma Eve was. One of the reasons death is so hard for us, so foreign, so painful is that it we were never supposed to do it! We were made to live forever. But don't just blame Adam, you and I have also sinned and fallen short of God's glory, and because of the curse of sin, we will all die, unless Jesus comes first.

When the jar is emptied of its contents, it's called death. We know what happens to the jar. It returns to the elements from which it was made unless it was embalmed or otherwise preserved. But even those who have been embalmed, over many years may decay into the elements from which they were made. In many cases the body is buried and it stays in the ground. In cases of cremation, it is reduced to its elements even more quickly. And that's that.

Except that's not all that. What happens to the liquid that was in the jar? What happens to the contents? The soul, the spirit? Let's read again from 2 Cor 4, this time verse 16. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 **So** we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Our clay pots that you can see, these physical bodies are temporary. But the unseen soul within is eternal! It will live forever! You and I will live eternally in one place or the other. From the moment of conception within our mothers' wombs, we began our eternal journey. You cannot escape or change that fact even if you want to. God designed and your parents procreated an eternal being called you. And for the Christian, as we age, as our clay pots get cracked, chipped, and decay, the contents, the soul and spirit are renewed by God. Like wine, getting better with age, even if our bodies are not.

Paul continues this discussion in chapter 5 but he changes the metaphor. He never had Becky Fadeley's English class to realize he wasn't supposed to do that. But look at 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. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.

Here Paul calls our bodies tents. Say tent. Paul was a tentmaker so he understood tents better than clay jars. Tents are structures in which people live. But tents are temporary, not permanent like houses. Tents are used by pilgrims, campers, and nomads moving through. This world is not our home. We're just pitching our tents here for a spell. And one day, Paul reminds us, our tent will be destroyed. What's he talking about? Say death. And when death comes, he assures us that God will give us not another temporary tent, but an eternal permanent house in heaven not built by human hands. Your house here might have been built by a great contractor, but it's nothing compared to the one God's preparing for you there, if you're saved. No more crying or dying there!

But vs 2, Meanwhile we groan. Say groan. We groan with sore backs and hips, with sore throats and arthritis, with cancer and disease, with fatigue and heartache. We do long to be clothed with our heavenly house that won't have any of them problems to groan about, amen? No more groaning there! But vs 4, "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because 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." While we're in this tent, we moan and carry the burdens of life. Not just physical burdens, but mental, emotional, financial, and all kinds of burdens.

But one day, Vs 4 says, that which is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Wait a minute. I thought we were already alive. Not really. Not in the fullest sense. On the day a believer dies, real true life swallows up that which was mortal. We are engulfed by an existence that is so much greater, happier, and more wonderful than anything we've ever known. Vs 5 "Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." This is what God made us for! To live **that** kind of life! Not this kind! He gave believers His Holy Spirit as a deposit, a down payment, to give us a foretaste of what that life is going to be like! The best we've ever enjoyed here is only an appetizer for what's coming for the Christian! When life swallows up mortality! And we won't groan anymore! What a glorious dawn, fear of death is gone. For we carry His life in our veins

Vs 6 "Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." Paul makes it very clear there are only two options for believers. 1. We're here in

the body, the tent, the jar. Or 2, we're with the Lord. Nothing in between. No soul sleep. No purgatory, no limbo. Here in the body, or with Jesus. Period. End of possibilities for a Christian.

In Phil 1:21-26, Paul can't decide which of these two he wants the most. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me." I'd like to go, but for your sake, I'll stay. We leave the departure date to God. If you're living now, God has a plan and purpose for you even if you don't understand it or know it. No matter how painful life may be, no matter how much we look forward to seeing Jesus or our saved loved ones, we leave the leaving to God. But notice in this passage he also says either here with you or with Christ. Nothing in between.

So our saved loved ones who have passed away are right now with Christ. They are in His presence. King David said of his deceased son, he cannot come to me, but I can go to him. And now he is with him. I would remind you of what Jesus told the thief on the cross who asked Him for mercy. (Luke 23:43) "**Today** you'll be with Me in paradise." Say Today. Not tomorrow, next month, or at the end of the age. Today. So our saved loved ones are enjoying their time with God right now! We miss them here. We will miss them. The more we loved them the more we miss them when they leave, but even Jesus wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus even knowing He would raise him from the dead. When they saw Jesus weeping, the Jews said, "See how He loved him." Our deep grief when a loved one dies indicates our deep love for them. Tears are normal and natural. God created our tear ducts for a reason. Use them. Someone once said if our eyes don't leak our heads will explode. But not all of us grieve the same way. And that's OK too. Sometimes it comes in waves, sometimes it's immediate, sometimes it comes later. I'm thankful for Sister Diane and the grief group that can help us through these times. And for Christian Counselors, and for close friends. But most of all for God's Holy Spirit who is the comforter. Nancy recently bought blankets for each of our grandkids. Frozen, Mine Craft, etc. They each have their own personal comforter. The Holy Spirit is God's personal comforter assigned to you. Confide in Him, rest in Him, weep in Him, be healed in Him.

So since all this is true, 2 Cor 5:9 "So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it." Say Please God. That should be our goal every single second of every single day. Instead of pleasing self. Or others. Please God. What's on your agenda today? One thing: Pleasing God. We can do that in many different ways, but that should be the overarching objective for everything we do! For, vs 10 reminds us, "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.” We’ve preached on this before. Our works do not earn our way to heaven. But after we’re saved, our works should glorify Him and we will have to answer for our works one day, not at the Great White Throne in Revelation 20, but at the bema seat, the courtroom where Jesus will hand out rewards. I Cor 3 talks more about that and those temporary deeds that will burn up and those good deeds of gold, silver, and precious stones that will earn rewards.

Now let’s also talk about those bodies we bury in the ground or those ashes we sprinkle hither and yon. What about them? Let me read what 1 Thess 4:14-18 says about them. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words.

I do encourage folks with these words at almost every graveside service I’ve ever done. When the archangel shouts and when the trumpet finally sounds, all those buried bodies will rise up! Those who were buried centuries ago who are now just dust and those who were burned at the stake who became ashes will all be raised! Called back into being. Reassembled, put back together, but as Paul says, not in our former state but in a body that is like Jesus’ resurrected body! A body glorious! An eternal house of splendor! An unbreakable jar this time! They will rise and be remade and those Christians on earth who are alive at that time will also be caught up, raptured, transformed from their lowly bodies into glorious bodies. Even so come Lord Jesus! Let’s get this party started! Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast, 'Til our faith is turned to sight, When He comes at last! Soul, spirit, body reunited never to be separated again! Therefore encourage each other with these words! Soon and very soon, we are going to meet the Lord!

Next week, God willing, we’ll talk more about heaven. What is it like? Will we know our loved ones? Will we be angels? Etc. But before we finish today, your part is to make sure you’re ready when your time to die comes. Those who are not believers don’t have any of this to look forward to. They will live forever, but not in heaven, rather in a place of eternal bitter suffering. We will absolutely live forever somewhere. Either in God’s presence in perfect glory or in the pits of eternal hell with the Devil and his angels. I was talking with someone this week about a coworker who had died very suddenly. We don’t know when it may happen, but when it does happen, our permanent estate is fixed, sealed, unchangeable. Today is the day of salvation. Today is the day for you to get saved and make sure you’re ready for when **that** day comes. You do that by

admitting you've sinned, repenting and turning from those sins, and asking God to forgive and save you through Jesus' blood. Whosoever will may come. No matter what you've done or haven't done, Jesus is waiting to give you life that is truly life. Don't wait and don't put it off. Come today as we pray and sing.