

FIT FOR HEAVEN

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10

For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Author, Jay Strack, writes about a NBA basketball game he once attended. The game ended strangely.

Dallas Maverick's point-guard, Derek Harper, dribbled the final six seconds off the clock. Harper thought his team was up by a point. Actually, the game was tied. The Mavericks could've used the wasted time to win the game. They ended up losing in overtime.

Strack wrote afterwards, "Dribble, dribble, dribble go the seconds - the minutes, the hours, the days, the years of our lives." How often have you dribbled away valuable seconds you could've used to win the game?

You could've won the prize of knowing Christ...

You could've won a reward for serving God...

You could've won lost souls to Jesus...

Instead we dribbled away the seconds. It was like we had *time to waste* instead of a *game to win!* Paul's goal in Chapters 4 and 5 is to help us avoid that mistake.

In 2 Corinthians 5 his sights are set on eternity!

Paul is focused on the judgment seat of Christ. And he encourages us not to waste a single second...

Chapter 5 begins, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens..." In ancient times, a Jewish rabbi not only studied the Scriptures, he also learned a trade. Paul worked with canvas. He made sails and tents.

Acts 18 tells us when he first arrived in Corinth he found a Jewish couple named Aquila and Priscilla, and stayed with them for the 18 months he was in town.

Verse 3 explains their connection, "Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers." Rather than burden the believers in town, Paul worked a job and paid his own way. Paul the preacher also made tents.

In the early days of our church, we had little financial backing, so I worked a warehouse job to support my family. To this day when a pastor works a second job to make ends meet, we say it's his "tent making job."

My point is, Paul knew about tents. And he opens Chapter 5 by comparing our bodies with a tent. He paints a contrast. Our earthly bodies are like a portable tent, whereas our heavenly bodies are a building.

A cloth tent is fragile and flimsy, and subject to the elements. A brick building is strong and stable, offering max protection. A tent is meant to be a temporary dwelling - whereas a building is a permanent structure.

It's amazing, here in verse 1 the apostle describes the most dreadful moment in a person's life - the event we're all hoping to avoid for as long as possible - **our death** - as simply, *striking a tent* - pulling up a few pegs, collapsing some poles, and folding up a canvas.

In our culture death gets depicted as [the grim reaper](#), a sinister character who kills and steals. For most people death is frightful. *But not for Paul*. To him, the hassle, was life in a human body. Death was a relief - like *striking a tent... moving back inside the house*.

It reminds me of the night Sherlock Holmes and his trusty assistant Dr. Watson went camping. Around midnight Holmes nudges Watson awake and tells him, "[Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.](#)"

Watson says, "[Well, I see God's glory. The heavens truly](#)

declare His handiwork... I'm also reminded of God's sovereignty. He orders the orbits of all heavenly bodies, and rules the universe... Certainly, the night sky tells us of our own smallness. We're sitting on a tiny planet amongst millions of stars... And finally, a cloudless night informs us a beautiful day tomorrow..."

That's when Watson asks Holmes, "And what do you see?" Sherlock answers, "*Someone stole our tent.*"

One day, your tent and my tent will gone. Paul uses the word "*destroyed.*" It means "to be taken down or disassembled." Literally, we'll fold up our tents.

The bodies we're currently inhabiting are temporary dwellings. Even though most people want them to be, they were never meant to be permanent. They serve us only for a short time. They are collapsible tents!

I know a lot of you like to camp... *but not me!*

My problem isn't sleeping under the stars, or enjoying the outdoors - I just hate all the effort that goes into camping. You pack up, and set up, and build the fire, and go through a can of bug-spray, and then tear it down... *all for just a few hours outside.*

To me, going to the effort to set up a tent and a campsite is a hassle. *And so are these tent-like bodies!*

Think of the time, and energy, and money I waste maintaining my body. For starters I refuel it three times a day. *Even my car runs a week on a full tank...*

I also have to park my body for a few hours each night... A body requires frequent oil changes... It needs a daily wash

and wax... And to top it all off I'm constantly driving it into the mechanic for repairs...

To be quite honest, after 58 years, it's time for a new model. The upkeep on this old one is costing too much. The odometer has flipped over. It's breaking down. It's harder to get cranked - *yet I still need it to get around.*

But Paul says one day we'll swap these temporary and troublesome tents for more permanent structures. Christians have been promised *"a building from God."*

Paul spoke of this in 1 Corinthians 15... "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body... However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual... I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... The dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

At the rapture, when Jesus airlifts His Church, our mortal bodies will be transformed into eternal, glorified bodies. Believers alive at the time, and the bodies of Christians who died in the faith, will undergo an instant metamorphosis - we'll have a body like Jesus' after His resurrection. Our heavenly bodies will be made from elements not subject to decay or deterioration.

Imagine, you're heavenly body won't have to be refueled, or rested, or repaired. A glorified body won't have to be set up or

torn down - it's permanent!

In your perfected body you'll be able to take all your time and energy - and spend it worshipping Jesus.

One day the spirit of every believer will be given the keys to hassle-free housing. We'll get glorified bodies!

Once a family had a little ritual they conducted whenever one of the children's pet goldfish died.

Mom, dad, brother, and sister would gather in the bathroom around the commode. Two year-old, Drew, would hold the fish - and five year-old Alexis would say a prayer. Then both kids would flush the fish to heaven.

On one such solemn occasion, after the goldfish had been sent to heaven, the little girl asked her mom if grandpa, who had died several years earlier, was also in heaven. The mom said confidently, "Yes, he is!" That's when the little boy asked, "*who flushed him?*"

Well, when the Lord returns for His Church we'll all flush these pup-tent style bodies, and receive immortal and incorruptible bodies that will last for all eternity. In the meantime we're stuck living in a vert tentative tent.

I ran across a letter to **"Mr. Tentmaker."** "It was nice in this tent when it was strong and secure and the sun was shining and the air was warm. But, Mr. Tentmaker, it's scary now. My tent is acting like it's not going to hold together. The poles seem weak and they shift with the wind, a couple of the stakes have wiggled loose, and worst of all, the canvas has a rip. It no longer protects me from the beating rain and stinging flies.

It's scary in here, Mr. Tentmaker. Last week I was sent to the repair shop and a repairman tried to patch the rip. It didn't help much, though, because the patch pulled away from the edges. Now the tear is worse.

What troubled me most, Mr. Tentmaker is that the repairmen didn't seem to notice that I was still in the tent. They just worked on the canvas while I shivered inside. I cried out once, but no one heard me.

I guess my first real question is, "Why did you give me such a flimsy tent? I can see by looking around the campground that some of the tents are much stronger and more stable than mine. Why, Mr. Tentmaker, did you pick a tent of such poor quality for me and even more importantly, what do you intend to do about it?"

Here's Mr. Tentmaker reply, "Oh, little tent dweller," as the Creator and Provider of tents, "I know all about you and your tent and I love you both. I made a tent for myself once and lived in it on your campground.

My tent was vulnerable too, and some vicious attackers ripped it to pieces while I was still in it. It was a terrible experience but you'll be glad to know they couldn't hurt me. In fact, the whole occurrence was as a tremendous advantage because it is this victory over my enemy that frees me to be of present help to you.

Little tent dweller, I am now prepared to come and live in your tent with you, if you will invite me. You will learn, as we dwell together, that real security comes from my being in your tent with you. In the storms, you can huddle in my arms and I'll hold you. When the canvas rips, we'll go to the repair shop

together.

Someday, little tent dweller, your tent will collapse (*for I've only designed it for temporary use*). When it does, we'll leave together. (*I promise not to leave before you do.*) Then, free of all that would hinder or restrict, we'll move to our permanent home and together forever rejoice and be glad." That's our hope!

Verse 3, "For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven..."

Someone humorously said the real purpose of camping is to increase our appreciation of home. Well, that's definitely God's purpose for these flimsy tents!

After being bogged down in these bodies, we should be groaning, yearning, longing for our heavenly home.

Once there were a few friends hanging out together. Someone posed a question to the others, "*What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?*"

One of the friends commented, "I hope they say I was a sincere Christian who cared about other people..." Another person confessed, "I hope they say I made a difference. The world is a better place because of me..." A third fellow spoke up, "I hope they talk of my love for my wife and kids. That I was a family man..."

Finally, the last man said, "I hope someone cries out, *look he's moving!*" It's like the ole saying, "Everybody wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to go right now." We'll just take a raincheck. *But not so with Paul!*

Remember the hardships Paul endured. He was beaten with rods and pelted with rocks. His back ached and his eyes were infected to the point where at times it was as if sharp daggers, or thorns were sticking into his eyes. The condition was incurable and recurrent.

Paul had little attachment to his mortal body.

He said to the Philippians (1:23-24), "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you."

Paul so longed for heaven he had a tough time rationalizing why he should remain on earth. Ultimately, it was to help the Church. God wasn't finished with Paul yet. But it's interesting, Paul had such a longing for heaven, he was torn between the two destinations.

In contrast to Paul, it's amazing what folks today will put themselves through just to hang on to life a few more days. Modern medicine has given us the means to extend our lives beyond the bounds of yesteryear.

But brutal rounds of chemotherapy - and excruciating treatments - are often far worse than the disease.

I know this is easy for me to say. I've never received a terminal diagnosis. And I'm sympathetic to anyone who wants to hang on to life as long as possible to savor moments with their spouse, or to provide a child guidance, or to meet a grandchild. This takes bravery.

But the confidence to let go comes when we realize what's before us. God promises we'll be clothed in glorious attire - *perfect health awaits us - a heavenly body.* We'll inherit a

“habitation which is from heaven.”

There is a point though on which we’re a little uncertain. 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 both teach that believers won’t get their resurrected bodies until the end of the age when the Church is raptured... Yet here Paul is clear if we go to heaven before the rapture we’ll have a body - a *“habitation.”*

So what kind of body adorns the believers in heaven at this moment? Do they have a pre-released version of the transformed bodies that’ll cloth us at the rapture, **or** some kind of warm-up body, like a demo version?

I really don’t know. But what is certain is that when we get to heaven we’ll have a heavenly *bod from God*. Heaven is like Snellville, **“Everybody is *some* body.”**

Here’s the bigger question, *is heaven and all its glories something for which you groan and long?* Or are we so comfortable on earth, so fixated on the here and now, we lack a taste for the glory to come?

The Bible refers to heaven as **a feast**. That means there’s no gluten-free in heaven - no Jenny Craig or Weight Watchers. The delicacies and joys are endless.

But it’s not just a feast, it’s **a wedding feast**. So if you love food **and** Jesus you should be thinking about heaven. You can have as much of both as you’d like.

Lawrence was a seminary student from Africa. When it came time for him to preach his first sermon he chose a text describing the joys we’ll know in heaven.

His sermon started, "I've been in the United States for several months now. I've seen the great wealth that's here - the fine homes and cars and clothes.

I've listened to many sermons in churches here, too. But I've yet to hear one sermon about heaven.

Because everyone has so much in this country, no one preaches about heaven. People here don't seem to need it. In my country most people have very little, so we preach on heaven all the time. We know how much we need it." And I think his observation is true.

Last week's sermon was one I've preached before. I talked about living for *the spiritual not the physical, the eternal not temporal, and the invisible not the visible...*

The sermon always blesses me, but I told my wife when I preach it I usually get a lukewarm reaction.

Could it be we're so comfortable in the here and now that the heaven we've been promised seldom gets considered? *This might be why our faith is so shallow?*

How can we be heavenly minded if we have no longing for heaven... In contrast, Paul says, "*we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.*" Greek philosophers saw the physical body as evil - completely unredeemable. The body was a prison - a drag on the human spirit.

Epictetus referred to himself as, "a poor soul burdened with a corpse." Seneca said he was "a slave of the body." The Greco-Roman hope for the afterlife was to be free from the

body - *be a disembodied spirit.*

But Paul tells us God has a greater plan! He's going to transform our mortal bodies into eternal bodies.

The same body we inhabit now will one day be resurrected. Our spirits won't be homeless. We'll simply move from a *flimsy tent to a sturdy building.*

"For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

Our redemption won't be complete until every trace of sin is blotted out - including its effect on our bodies.

If you were in a car wreck, and all the insurance paid for was repairs to the engine you'd be disappointed.

How about some body-work? Well, God is not only a mechanic, He also has a body shop. He's not only an expert under the hood - *purifying and sanctifying and energizing* - He's an artist at redesigning wrecked frames and chassises. He's an expert at body work.

Notice in this verse the Christian's hope is not to be **"unclothed, but further clothed..."** Some people think of heaven as this misty, ethereal, unearthly kind of place, where a fog machine keeps everyone unrecognizable.

People and their mannerisms appear sort of ghostly and ghastly. But that couldn't be further from the truth.

In heaven we're not **"unclothed, but further clothed."**

Heaven is more substantive, not less. In heaven you know and are known. Distinguishing features are more identifiable.

Expressions more noticeable. Pats on the back, fist pumps, and handshakes are more palpable.

Fellowship in heaven is real and hearty. If I can use the word, relationships are more “*earthy*” in heaven.

We’ll hug and it’ll matter... *no air-hugs in heaven.*

Paul says in verse 5, “**Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God...**” Understand that’s what life on earth is all about - it’s God’s preparation for heaven.

Once a deeply troubled man took a walk after dinner. He strolled by a construction site. Stone masons were building a church. It was almost finished, but one craftsman worked feverishly carving and chipping on a huge stone. The bystander asked him, “*Why are you spending so much time on that particular block?*”

The worker pointed to a nearly finished steeple, and said, “*I’m shaping it down here so it’ll fit in up there.*”

And bingo, that’s what the man needed to hear. God shapes us down here, so we’ll fit in up there. This life and its trials are really just preparation for heaven.

And God is the One “**who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (or downpayment).**” The *spiritual life* we receive now is earnest money on the *spiritual body* we’ll be given in eternity. *Realize, the presence of the Holy Spirit in us means there's more to come for us.*

Actually, the word translated “*guarantee*” in modern Greek is the word used for an engagement ring.

The presence and power and peace of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is evidence we belong to Jesus and all His promises

belong to us. The Holy Spirit's in us is His token on our finger that we'll live forever with Him.

Verse 6, "So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord." Paul is saying, as long as you wake up in the morning and see your ugly mug staring at you in the mirror - as long as your back gets sore - and you cramp - and pull muscles... **know this is not heaven!**

In the morning, when I wake up, even though my gorgeous wife is lying next to me, it's still not heaven.

In the Lord's presence all His healing power will wash over me... Aches disappear. Arthritis will vanish.

There's no fibromyalgia in heaven. Cancer, and viruses, and infections will be gone. No need for power bars or energy drinks. We won't get tired in heaven.

Chiropractors in heaven will need to learn a new trade. The Lord will see to it we're all perfectly aligned.

Of course, that's not the story at the moment. Right now Paul says, "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

Here's my current dilemma... How do I confidently hope for a *new body*, while I have to deal with the deterioration of an *old body*? The answer is **faith!** And here faith translates into anticipation of what awaits.

Here Paul declares his faith, "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." The exact second a Christian's spirit leaves the body, we go straight into the presence of Jesus. No

connections, no layovers.

When you depart from your earthly tent there are *no detours, no delays* - instantly, you're with the Lord.

This eliminates any thought of **purgatory**. Roman Catholics teach there's an intermediate place between this life and the presence of Jesus, or Heaven.

For a period of time - and that depends on how dirty you were - you're required to spruce-up and clean-up to enter God's presence. You're *purged* in *purgatory*.

But purgatory isn't biblical. You're *purged* on the cross or not at all. When a believer's spirit checks out of the body, we go directly into the presence of Jesus!

And this also exposes the error of what some call "**soul sleep.**" It's the idea that when a believer dies they go into a state of suspended animation until the rapture, when they receive their glorified body.

I don't believe that for a second. Bears hibernate, not the souls of Christians. That doctrine is *unbearable*.

As I said, I'm not completely sure what kind of body we'll receive when we get to heaven - but I know I won't have to *wait* to receive it. The moment I arrive in heaven, I'll spontaneously be clothed in *some body*.

The instant we die we enter the presence of Jesus!

Verse 9 tells us, "**Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.**"

Paul wants you to be sure of where you'll go after life, but more importantly, *what's your aim in this life?*

We all have a target! Paul starts with heaven and works back to Monday. If I'm going to live forever with Jesus, then today I need to please Him. In all he does Paul's aim, his goal is *"to be well pleasing"* to Jesus.

When you meet the Lord face to face will you be ashamed? Will it be sort of awkward? Will you be embarrassed? *Or did you live for His pleasure?*

And this is a big deal. Verse 10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."*

The term Paul uses, *"judgment seat,"* is a translation of the Greek word, *"bema."* In the city center of Corinth, and in most Greco-Roman cities, at the main agora or marketplace, there was a raised platform - it had huge columns, an elaborate stage, intimidating thrones.

It was called *the Bema*. From the *bema-seat* *rewards were handed out, and decisions were handed down.*

In fact, Paul had been before the *Bema* in Corinth.

In Acts 18 a group of Jewish antagonists in Corinth rose up against Paul. They hauled him to the *Bema*, where he was interviewed by the Roman governor, Gallio. The Jews had accused Paul of treason against the empire - but Gallio, *a smart man* - saw that their beef was over religious issues, and had Paul released.

But Paul had stood before the *Bema*. He knew the tension and trepidation that comes when you're under interrogation - when your outcome is being decided.

And he recognizes this will be the experience of every Christian. All of us will stand before *the Bema of Christ*, and our eternal rewards will be determined.

Now don't confuse this *Judgment Seat of Christ* with God's *Great White Throne of Judgment*. Revelation 20 speaks of the great white throne where the lost will be judged, condemned, and thrown into the lake of fire.

It's for unbelievers... but the *bema* is for Christians.

Our place in heaven is secured by the blood of Jesus, but our service for the Lord will be tried to see what rewards we'll receive. Our motive will be judged.

Last year while in Corinth we visited the *Bema* seat.

Today it's in ruins. It's an archaeological dig, but I tried to imagine myself in the agora that day with Paul, standing before the most powerful man in the region.

There's a short pole in front of the *Bema*. The person under inspection stood by that pole. If any sort of punishment was due, he'd be tied to it and flogged. If a reward was to be bestowed, he'd stand by it in honor.

Every other year, in a locale not far away, the Greeks held an athletic competition similar to the Olympics in Athens. Corinth hosted the Isthmian Games, and it was here at this post, before this *Bema* seat, that the laurel wreaths were awarded to the deserving athletes.

Now Paul foresees the day when you and I will stand before our Lord's *Bema* seat, and receive from Jesus the reward for

our service. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul said the quality of our work will be revealed as *“by fire.”*

Verse 13, *“the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.”* What we did out of love will come out as **fine gold**, but what we did (*no matter how successful*) out of selfishness, or self-promotion, or mere obligation will be like **dry kindling**, incinerated in the fire.

When it comes to how we’ve served Jesus, what counts is not *the amount, or appearance, or outcome*. It’s the heart behind our service that will be judged.

Our motive is what matters. Jesus inspects to see *“of what sort it is.”* It’s our attitude that gets sorted out.

Here in verse 10 when Paul says *“that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”* The word *“bad”* means **“worthless or useless”** - in contrast to *“evil.”*

Paul is implying it’s possible to do a lot for God and it all be useless in terms of gaining for you a reward.

The times you taught Sunday School grumbling because you had to get up early to babysit a bunch of snotty-nosed kids... the time you ushered, and hurried folks along so you could get home and watch football...

Paul says those acts of service will be like **“wood, hay, and straw”** in the fire. They look impressive going in, but the fire of God’s holiness will burn them to ash.

Whereas, the time you jumped out of bed eagerly to love the little ones with the love of Jesus... the time you led worship with a smile - *made it peppy*... the time you shared your faith

because you cared... when those acts of service pass through God's holiness they'll come through un-singed - like *"gold, silver, jewels."*

There's a lot that looks impressive on Earth, that will be exposed in the end as worthless in God's eyes.

Whereas, some deeds that escape our attention right now, will be held up in heaven as precious to Jesus!

It reminds me of the widow who was furious over the fact that her husband had bequeathed all his money to his secretary. His own wife had been cut out of his will.

She rushed to the graveyard to have the inscription on his tombstone changed, but she arrived too late...

She hated spending her own money on a brand new tombstone. She figured it would be cheaper to have the undertaker carve an addendum. Right after "Rest in Peace" she had him chisel, *"Until we Meet Again."*

Each of us will meet again. One day, we'll all meet around the *bema-seat*, and Jesus will judge what we did for Him with our lives? Did we serve with sincerity?

Or were our pursuits worthless, useless?

Bible teacher, Allen Redpath, once shared how he'd been a successful businessman, happy with his life.

But God called him to the ministry. He said six words kept ringing in his head, *"A saved soul, a lost life... a saved soul, a lost life... a saved soul, a lost life..."*

It's possible to be a Christian - to be saved by the blood of Jesus - to know your salvation is certain... yet live a wasted life. "Dribble, dribble, dribble go the seconds - the minutes, the hours, the days, the years of our lives." Are we *wasting time* or *winning the game*?