

“Faith, Not Sight,” 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (Pentecost, June 9, 2019)

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, ³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

⁶ So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

PRAY

We are in chapter five as we continue our study of 2 Corinthians this morning we come to that very famous passage in verses 7 where Paul says, “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” The Christian life, Paul says, is one lived by faith, not by sight. If you could pick one phrase to summarize what the Christian life is like, certainly what it *feels* like to live the Christian life, you’d be hard-pressed to find a better phrase than this one.

But what does it mean? For a long time this phrase tripped me up because I wasn’t sure what Paul meant by it and, from I can tell, it is widely misunderstood by many today.

What does Paul mean when he speaks of walking by faith, not sight? Three things: *first, to walk by faith means we groan, but not without hope. Second, it means we aim, to please the Lord. Third, it means we appear, to receive our reward.* To walk by faith means we groan with hope, we aim to please, and we appear to receive.

First, we groan, but not without hope. “For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan ...” 2 Corinthians 5:1-2a.

There’s some debate among biblical scholars as to what Paul refers when he writes about this “tent” that is our earthly home, but to me at least it is clear: Paul is talking about the human body. And in these bodies, Paul says, we groan.

Grace Bible Church is such a young church, and by young I don’t mean in terms of how long the church has been around (though in that sense we are certainly not an old church, as we just turned fourteen years old). I mean we are young in the sense that the average age of an attender of Grace Bible Church on a Sunday morning is about two-and-a-half. There are so many young people, so many children.

Therefore, some of you cannot relate to what I'm about to tell you because you don't just get out of bed in the morning, you *bounce* out of bed in the morning. It's effortless for you. But as you get older, you don't bounce as you get out of bed, you *groan* as you get out of bed. You're stiff, you stoop, you shuffle across the floor, and it takes a while for you to limber up enough to walk like an actual human being, until you get to the age where all you can do no matter how much you stretch is stoop and shuffle.

But it's not just the old that groan in their bodies, the young do as well, it's just we're so used to it we don't think about it. It's all we've ever known. We are accustomed to thinking about how hospitable planet earth is to human life, as it has oxygen and water, the sun is not too close nor is it too far away, gravity is the right strength, and the atmosphere is the right thickness. We say the earth is the perfect place for human life.

But it's not. The only reason we think that is because we compare life on earth to life in outer space, or at the bottom of the ocean, or on the top of Mt. Everest. Earth is better for human life than those places, it at least has a chance here, but it's not perfect. Why?

Because all of us need food, or we'll die. We need sleep, or we'll lose our minds. Even if we get those things we still get sick. We can still fall and injure ourselves. And all the time death is at work at us. Every second we wear down and decay. When we were born a clock with a finite amount of time on it began to run, and though we don't know *when* the clock will strike zero we can be sure *that* the clock will strike zero.

All of us, in these tents, groan, it's just that some groan more obviously than others. No, this earth is not the perfect environment for human beings. But do you know what was?

Eden. In the Garden in Eden life was effortless and the first humans had bodies that were impervious to hunger, thirst, disease, injury, and death. But the promise of Christianity is that one day we will get those bodies and Eden itself back. "For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,³ if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked.⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." 2 Corinthians 5:2-4.

This is not what most people think about when they think about heaven. Christianity doesn't teach that when you die you will get a halo and wings sit on a cloud for all eternity and strum a harp. I don't know where that idea came from but it's not the Bible. That kind of existence after death would not be good news to me at all. I don't want to sit on a cloud for all eternity and I don't like harp music. Plus, who would want a halo?

Rather, Paul teaches the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of believers. The Christian hope is **physical**, real bodies, real world, **new heaven, new earth**, all far better than we've ever known in this age on earth. All through the Scriptures we see that though we groan now, we have hope because we can be clothed in life when at the end of the age we are raised from the dead and given new bodies that are *impervious to the ravages of sickness, injury, age, and death*.

We see it prophesied in the book of Isaiah where we read: “⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷ And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸ He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.” Isaiah 25:6-8.

We have several doctors, physicians, who come to Grace Bible Church. A great group of talented people. But guess what? In the new heaven and new earth they will be out of a job. I know of one dear Christian lady who has suffered with various chronic illnesses for about twenty years. The physicians have done their best, but there’s only so much they can do. And when you ask her what’s the latest with her sicknesses, her standard reply is, “Nothing the resurrection won’t fix.”

One of the ways some people in our culture criticize Christianity is they say all it amounts to is a polite veneer for weak-minded people who refuse to face hard realities. I had a man tell me one time, very patronizingly tell me one time, “It must be nice to be a Christian because your faith must comfort you like a child’s blanket and keep you from thinking about hard things.”

I wanted to say, “Are you kidding me?” To the contrary, the Christian faith is uniquely suited to face the “hard realities” of life, because Christians can go into the hospitals, into the ICUs, and into the nursing homes and tell those suffering there, “Yes, you are groaning now. But you can have hope. This body as you know it and this world as you see it does not have to have the final say. God himself is coming and he will destroy death with his bare hands and wipe away every tear from every eye.” No religion or philosophy takes on the “hard realities” of life on earth like Christianity. And, you know, the people who talk the biggest about how Christianity is for weak-minded people are the last people you’d find going into the ICUs trying to comfort the dying, for they know they have nothing to say to them.

One last thing before we move on to point two. Paul says in verse 6: “So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord ...” Then in verse 8: “Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

What Christians have coming in the resurrection is far better than what we experience now. However, that does not translate into a right to take any kind action that will enable us to hurry our own death. We want to be away from the body, but the timing of that is up to God.

Nine jurisdictions in the United States have approved what has popularly been called “Death with Dignity” laws, another term for assisted suicide. It is legal now in California, Colorado, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, Vermont, Washington, and as of August 1 it will be legal in New Jersey. If you are suffering from a terminal illness and you wish to take your own life, all you have to do is tell your doctor twice (fifteen days apart or so), and he or she will supply you with a lethal overdose of a barbiturate. This is extremely popular across the country. Some polls say that over seventy percent of Americans agree with these laws.

But Christians must be opposed to them. Why? Because Paul says we are to be of “good courage.” Knowing the resurrection is coming strengthens us to endure now, not push us to check out early. Christians oppose suicide because we don’t want there to be any doubt: every single human life, no matter how desperate it might feel on the inside or pitiful it might look to those on the outside, has meaning, value, and dignity. Even the sickest, most disabled people on the planet still bear the image of God and demand everyone’s respect.

As Joni Eareckson Tada puts it (someone who has been a quadriplegic now for 51 years and would be eligible for assisted suicide in some jurisdictions), “Your gutsy choice to face suffering head-on forces others around you to sit up and take notice. It strengthens the character of a helping society. When people observe perseverance, endurance, and courage, their own moral fiber is reinforced. Conversely, your choice to bow out of life can and does weaken the moral resolve of that same society.” We groan, and we may have to groan with pain for a long time, but not without hope.

Second, walking by faith means we aim to please the Lord. “⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.” 2 Corinthians 5:9.

Being a Christian does not only mean resurrection in the next life, ***but it means pleasing the Lord in this life.*** And how do we do that? We please the Lord by keeping his law.

But keeping the law of God **is hard**. We know that we should admire the law of God. It says things like share with the poor. Be compassionate and hospitable. Practice forgiveness. Love everyone. Hate no one. Always tell the truth. Never steal. The law of God is beautiful, but it’s so hard to keep.

Yet to walk by faith means we do just that. But why? Why do we make it our aim to please the Lord? We must be absolutely clear on this point: ***not because we have to.***

The Bible teaches that in Jesus Christ God loves us completely, totally, perfectly, infinitely, *no ifs, ands, or buts*. To be in Jesus Christ you must, first, admit that you are a sinner (in other words, you admit that you have made a wreck of your life and left to your own devices you would completely destroy yourself). Second, you must trust that Jesus lived the perfect life you should have lived, and on the cross died the death you deserved to die in your place, as your substitute, to atone for your sins and reconcile you to God.

But once you’ve done those two things then you are loved by God and once you are in God’s love *there is nothing you can do to make God love you more and there is nothing you could possibly do to make God love you any less*. God’s love for you is totally by grace. **You did nothing to earn it, and you can do nothing to lose it.**

So, as Christians, we don’t make it our aim to please the Lord because we have to. Why do we then? Some of you have parents and you knew how to please them. You knew that through one of the four “a’s” you could make them happy. You know what the four “a’s” are? Academics, athletics, appearance, and aspirations.

Some of you knew that if you made good grades, or hit a homerun, or got elected “Most Beautiful”, or if you really wanted to be an artist and worked hard at it, your parents would be pleased. You could tell they were *more pleased* with you than when you didn’t do those things.

Others of you were truly blessed and had a different set of parents. You had parents and you really didn’t know how to please them. It never crossed your mind because it seemed *they were always pleased with you*. No matter whether you made an A or not, or made the team or not, and even if you made it to 27 years old and still didn’t know what you wanted to do when you grew up, they just loved you. Sure, you could disappoint them, and when you did wrong they disciplined you, but **all they ever wanted for you was your own happiness**. That’s it.

God is more like those parents than the first set. From one point of view, all God wants for his children is their happiness. That isn’t the whole story; that’s not the sum total of what the Bible says on this point. God is zealous for his own great name and his glory, and he wants and indeed demands that we glorify him. But how do we, as his children, glorify him? He is glorified in us, his children, when we are completely satisfied and happy in him.

And our satisfaction in him comes only through keeping the law. We make it our aim to please him because God is so good and so glorious that it’s only right to give him obedience, and because only through our obedience can we find joy. The law is God’s design for how the universe is supposed to run. The law says, “Share what you have with the poor,” and no one was ever happy by being greedy. The law says, “Forgive,” and no one was ever happy by nursing a grudge.

Have any of you ever seen the ESPN “30 for 30” on the Manning family? It’s called *The Book of Manning*. At the very end Archie talks about his dad driving him to Ole Miss to start his freshman year of college in 1967. Archie said he asked his dad, “What should I study?” and his dad said, “Well, find something you’re good at, but mostly I just want you to be a good guy.” We don’t have to be good guys to please the Lord, because salvation is by grace alone. But we make it our aim, because we want to please him.

Third, walking by faith means we appear. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ...” 2 Corinthians 5:10a.

That phrase, “the judgment seat of Christ,” is a sobering one, and it should be. The Bible says that at the end of the age all people will stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone will see that he is indeed the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and he will sit in judgment. The books will be opened and every deed we’ve ever done will be examined. In fact, Jesus at one point says, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak ...” Matthew 12:36. Friends, are you prepared to answer for everything you’ve ever done and every word you’ve ever said?

It’s understandable, therefore, that many Christians are frightened when they think of the judgment seat of Christ. **But they shouldn’t be.** Christians won’t say, “Oh no!” in terror when they see Jesus on that day. You know why? Because Christians are those who have worshiped Jesus on earth. They have prayed to him and in his name. They’ve trusted in his grace, his

kindness, and his wisdom for, in some cases, decades. They've felt his love. They've been longing to see Jesus for years and years on earth, so when they see him on that day they won't say, "Oh no!" They'll say, "Oh, yes. Oh, yes, finally. I've walked by faith for all these years, but I don't need faith anymore because now I can see him."

I picked on doctors earlier and said they would be out of work in the new heavens and new earth, so it's only fair that I pick on myself. You know who else will be out of work? Preachers! You won't need men like me to tell you about Jesus anymore. You'll see him for yourself.

We will appear before Jesus and, Christians, we will receive our reward. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." 2 Corinthians 5:10.

No deed committed while walking by faith in the Lord Jesus will be overlooked. All will be remembered, and all will be rewarded. "And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward." Matthew 10:42. Even a cup of water.

You may wonder, "OK, but verse 10 also talks about evil. I know I've done evil. What about it?" Jesus paid for all our evil. That's the point of the cross. Those outside Christ must worry about receiving what is due for evil, but not believers. Not those who have trusted Christ.

But how will rewards for good deeds work? What do rewards look like in heaven? It won't be money, will it? That wouldn't make any sense. One question I had for a long time was this: if some believers in heaven have a greater reward than other believers, won't that cause the other believers to be jealous? After all, even the most godly people on earth still must wrestle with jealousy over what other people have – what will keep that from being true of the saints in heaven? This is personal for me, because I happen to know there will be many, many people in heaven who have done far more good deeds than I have, and a whole lot less evil. What's going to keep me from the sin of jealousy?

I wrestled over that for a long time, until I read a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. He preached back in 1740, and it's what I always default to whenever I consider rewards in heaven. Edwards wrote that every Christian in heaven will somehow be like a container, a vessel, some bigger, some smaller, and then he said this:

"It will be no damp to the happiness of those who have lower degrees of happiness and glory [in heaven], that there are others advanced in glory above them. For all shall be perfectly happy, every one shall be perfectly satisfied. Every vessel [every container] that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are some vessels far larger than others. And there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign through the whole society. Those who are not so high in glory as others will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them, that they will rejoice in [the superior happiness of others] ... This happiness of the saints shall never have any interruption ... The rivers of pleasure will not fail ... [and] the saints shall not be weary of loving, and praising, and fearing, as the sun is never weary of shining." In other words, my good deeds may result in only a thimble for me to carry

my joy in heaven, and you may have a swimming pool, but we will all be perfectly happy, and so full of joy that there is no room our resurrection bodies even for jealousy.

Long ago I remember hearing R.C. Sproul say, “The hardest thing about being a Christian is serving a God you cannot see.” He’s absolutely right. But it won’t always be that way. So, friends, be of good courage. We walk by faith now until one day we see him face to face. 1 John 3:2: “² Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” PRAY