



## Hopeful Groaning

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

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Please take your copies of God's Word and turn in them to the New Testament, specifically to Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth. We're going to be looking this morning at 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 as we continue our journey with Paul on this important letter to the church at Corinth. Please give attention to the reading of God's Holy Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant, the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, and the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative. Second Corinthians 5, beginning at verse 1:

*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. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 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. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it.

Heavenly Father, we ask this morning that you would open up your Word to us, that as we look into your Word we would know your will, we would know, O Lord, all of the blessings you have provided to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and most of all, that we would look to our Savior. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

The text before us this morning is a well-known text. It is an important text about life after death, about the Christian's response to contemplating death. When we look at a text like this, it's very important that we put ourselves underneath the authority of the Bible, that we see what the Bible is saying to us so we can receive the comfort and instruction God wishes to give to us.

A text like this can be tempting to try to pick apart or dissect, to try to figure out exactly what every small detail means. If we had the time (and we don't), I could bore you with commentator upon commentator upon commentator who's trying to figure out exactly what each detail is and, at the same time, denying themselves the comfort that comes to the believer from this passage.

I think Paul wants us to see three basic things this morning. First, *understanding our earthly home*. Paul talks about our earthly home that we have, the body here and now. Secondly, *longing for our heavenly home*. Paul moves from the earthly to the heavenly. Finally, *the guarantee of our heavenly home*. It's not just that Paul describes for us our heavenly home, but he gives to us the guarantee we have of it. Understanding our earthly home, longing for our heavenly home, and the guarantee of our heavenly home.

## Understanding Our Earthly Home

Let's begin, then, by looking at this passage as it flows out of chapter 4. It is important to see this passage as following Paul's thoughts about the challenges of life in the present. We see this, as we so often do, in the way Paul begins this section with the grammatical word *for*. It's a very small word in the Greek, but it is designed to show us that what is coming is connected to what was before, that this is the reason the previous thing was true.

If we were to wonder why we should not lose heart, why we should persevere on though our outer self is wasting away, why we should look to the things that are not seen, this is why, Paul says. We can only understand life after death when we understand life now. We are wasting away, Paul says. We are experiencing affliction. This is important to keep in mind because Paul is going to set up a contrast with the life to come and the life now.

How can we understand life now? We could, as so many people do, first look to experience. Here the older among us have the advantage, but we all have some experience with life now. We've seen the weakness of our bodies. We've seen sickness and pain. We've lived through heartache, and we've struggled with our own sin. But I think even better than our own experience is to look to see what life is like now from God's Word.

What Paul is doing here in this passage is he is building off a main theme of the Scriptures, and that theme is the reality and the effects of sin. This goes all the way back to Genesis, chapter 3. From the moment of that very first sin, Adam and Eve began to die. The Lord told them that life would be challenging as they never thought it would be. Life would be filled with pain. Even things that are joyous, like the birth of a child or eating, would be the result of pain. The Lord told Adam he was from the dust and to the dust he would be returning.

This is what life on earth now is: full of suffering, trouble, and pain. Paul describes that here as a groaning. In verse 2 we see, "For in this tent we groan..." The word here Paul uses for *tent* is unique to this passage. It is a variation of the ordinary word used for *tent*, but the variation is designed to point us to the body. You see, when this particular word is used outside of the Bible, it refers often to the body. Paul wants you to equate *tent* with *body*. He wants you to see he's talking about our life now and our body.

So, our body now is the reason we groan. Now what does Paul mean by this? Well, in verse 4 he tells us one clue: we are groaning because we are burdened. We are still in this tent groaning because we are burdened. This word means to be weighed down, to be wearied, both physically and mentally. It could even mean to be oppressed. You may recall that we've seen this word earlier in chapter 1, verse 8, when Paul describes that he was so burdened he even despaired of life.

Another clue is a parallel passage in Romans, chapter 8. There we read about the effects of sin on us and even on creation, that sin has subjected the whole world to futility, to emptiness, to purposelessness. As a result, corruption is in the world and even seems to dominate it. The result of that is that we groan. We long to be set free from sin, free from death, free from trouble. Do you have trouble today? Are there things in life that bring you down? Are you reminded of the problems in your life each and every day? That is a part of life, Paul says. In this life we have trouble...trouble so significant that we groan.

Now, too many people try to ignore the trouble of life, to try to hide from it. They will do this through alcohol or through drugs or through pleasure. They will try to block out the trouble of life as if it's not real, but God's Word wants you to face the trouble in this life, and God wants you to face it so that you might have hope. You see, it's not just that our earthly home has trouble. It is also, Paul tells us, temporary. You can see this from the way your body is described. It is a tent.

This is, as we've said, a unique word to this passage, but it is related to the word you would commonly associate with a tent. It's meant to draw an image for us of a temporary structure, and it would have been well known to Paul's audience. Israel, after all, had lived in tents during their wandering in the wilderness. God himself had a temporary home with the tabernacle before the temple was built, and afterward, at the Feast of Booths, Israel spent seven days dwelling in tents to remind themselves of their temporary home.

But this is also something that should be well known to you and me. When I speak of a tent, you think of a temporary structure. It's what we use when we go camping. It's something that's not permanent. We just use it from time to time to keep the rain off us and the wind away from us, but it's temporary. It's not permanent. That's one of the reasons I don't like camping. I like a permanent structure around me. I like to know that I'm secure.

Our bodies are like a tent. They're not something that is forever. Our earthly home is not designed to be permanent. This is important, I think, for our society to understand, because there is an end to our earthly home. Paul says it will be destroyed, in verse 1. The idea here is that it will be demolished, dismantled, put to an end. It will be no more. If there's something our society needs to learn, it's that our bodies are temporary and that no matter how much kale you eat, no matter how much you exercise, no matter how many vitamins or supplements you take, you will see an end to this earthly home. It's not permanent.

This points out a problem for us. We don't want to continue forever in an existence of pain and suffering, but we want even less to see an end to this life. We don't want to be found naked, Paul says in verse 3. We don't want to be separated from our body. There is a story of a young girl who said to a pastor, "Pastor, I want to go to heaven, just not right away." I think that describes our view. We know this earthly tabernacle we have, this tent, this building, this home, is temporary and is filled with problems, but we still don't want to leave it because we don't want to be, as Paul says in verse 4, unclothed, to be naked.

### **Longing for Our Heavenly Home**

A tent may be difficult to live in, but it's even worse to try to sleep out without a tent. That's what Paul is saying. It's worse to have nothing. This points us to a reality, a reality that we are meant to have a body, that when Adam was created by God, he was created with a body and a soul. God gave Adam a living spirit with the breath of life, but he also gave him a body from the dust of the earth. This was intentional. The body was not an accident. It was meant to be a part of what it means to be human. There is a future for us after this earthly home is gone.

Paul uses very certain language in verse 1 to point us to our heavenly home, the longing we have for our heavenly home. He says in verse 1, "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed..." This is a certain statement. When Paul says, "We know," he doesn't just mean we know from recognition. He says we know from

revelation. We know from God revealing it to us. Paul says: "...we have a building from God, a house not made with hands."

Paul does something here that's very interesting. We would have expected Paul to say, "We know that if our earthly home is destroyed, we will have a heavenly home," because it's something in the future. But Paul uses the present tense. Do you see that? He says, "We have a heavenly home, a building from God." What Paul is doing here is something we often see in the Old Testament prophets. He is describing something in the future with such vivid language it's as if it exists right now. That's how certain Paul is that it's going to come about. He can describe it as if it is already the case.

Even the condition Paul uses, the *if-then* statement, is the kind of condition you use when something... If the *if* is true, the *then* must be true. If it is the case that our earthly home is destroyed, then it must be true that we have a building from God. We're meant to see the certainty in it. This is an encouragement to us. Paul means to encourage us to look beyond our earthly home to our heavenly home. If our earthly body is a tent, what we will have from God is a building.

The heavenly body is described in terms of permanence. It is a construction. It is a lasting place. It is, Paul says, a house not made with hands. This points us to God as the builder of this house. For example, Paul uses this expression, *not with hands*, in Colossians 2:11 when he describes the circumcision that is made without hands; that is, it is a circumcision that is the work of God through Jesus Christ. What is being circumcised is not the flesh but the heart. It is making us a part of God's family.

This phrase *made without hands* is also used by Jesus to describe his raising up again of the temple in Mark 14. John tells us in his gospel, the second chapter, that when Jesus says, "I will raise this temple again without hands," what he meant was his body. Jesus was talking about his resurrected body. So, as our resurrection is linked to Jesus' resurrection, our resurrected body will also be made by God. We're not talking about a transitory building of stone. We're talking about an eternal and heavenly temple.

Now, wanting this body is part of the reason we groan. It's not just that life is hard. It's not just that there's pain and suffering in life. No. We look forward to the promise of God, to a house made by God in the heavens. We long to put on that heavenly body. We long to be more like Jesus. We long for permanence and fellowship with God. That's because we are meant for eternity. This world is not the end. You should never think you can have your best life now.

Jesus came to redeem you from your sin so you could be the one God created you to be. That's what that house is. It's eternal. It's not just heavenly; it's forever. It's from age to age without end. Now, we might think the purpose of the heavenly body is just to avoid having no body, but Paul says in verse 3 that's only part of what's going on. He says we long to put on this body so we may not be found naked, bodiless. That is part of the reason we have this heavenly body: so that we are not found naked.

But Paul goes on to say more than that. He says when we put on the heavenly body, we are *further clothed*, in verse 4. This word is used to describe when you put an outer garment on over the clothing you're wearing. It is an

intensification. It's not just replacement clothing; it's better clothing. The translation here hides a bit of Paul's intensity. Paul says in verse 4, "We would desire to be further clothed," but when Paul says in verse 2 that we long to put on our heavenly dwelling, he's using the exact same word. We are longing to be further clothed with our heavenly clothing. It's the same word.

Is your longing here today more than just to avoid death, more than just to live forever? Do you long to be with Jesus? Is your hope to be free from sin and to live forever in the presence of God? That was Paul's hope. That is the believer's hope. You are meant for eternity. Paul uses another metaphor to bring his point home beyond clothing. He writes that we long to be clothed with our heavenly body so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. Death swallowed by life.

This should remind you of Paul's other famous passage on life after death and the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul tells us that our mortality...that is, what is subject to death...will put on immortality. He tells us that victory over death is found in Jesus. This is the message of the gospel. The message of the gospel is not prosperity. It is not happiness. It is not contentment. It is not even what is right. The message of the gospel is that death itself will be no more. Sin has been conquered. Jesus has paved the way to eternity by his death, an eternity in the presence of God.

The permanent has replaced the temporary. The eternal has swallowed up all trouble. The prophet Isaiah puts it very well in Isaiah 25:8-9. He writes, "God 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. It will be said on that day, 'Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'"

### **Guarantee of Our Heavenly Home**

But we may ask: How is Paul so certain of all of this? How can Paul use language like *we know* and *we have* about the heavenly body? How can Paul be so sure that when he puts off his earthly tent he won't be naked, that he'll not only be clothed but he'll be *further* clothed? Is that a question you ask yourself, a question you don't want to admit to other people, especially the pastor, that sometimes you wonder what happens after death, what comes after this life? Is there really something more than this life?

Paul can be certain because he doesn't look to himself. He doesn't even look to what he hopes for. He looks to God. Don't let yourself get caught up in the benefits and blessings you receive from God. Earthly blessings are not permanent. We are not promised the freedom we have today to worship. Many of our brothers and sisters do not have that freedom to worship. We are not promised wealth and comfort. We are not even promised harmonious family relationships.

If there's anything we have learned in these past few months, it's that these things can be taken from us. A virus can take away our freedoms. It can take away our wealth, our job, our comfort. It can take away our relationships, isolating us from other people, but it cannot take away from you Jesus. It cannot separate you from the love of God. It cannot change that relationship ever. So, the reason we do not look at the blessings we receive from God is they are not what is eternally important. What is important is your eternal relationship with the Lord.

Paul tells you that you can be certain about your heavenly body, your heavenly home, because God is the one who is in charge of that. Look at how Paul begins verse 5. "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God..." The *very thing* Paul describes is the mortal being swallowed up by the immortal. It is the heavenly swallowing up the earthly. It is the eternal swallowing up the temporal.

I want you to notice something else here. God has prepared us to receive these very things. We might have expected Paul to write, "God has prepared these things for us. They're benefits God has prepared for us." But that's not what he says. Do you see it? He says, "God has prepared us for these things." God has made us fit for immortality. That's what he's doing. He's not just providing us blessings; he's making us fit for an eternal existence with him. The emphasis is not on the blessing but on the relationship. God has made us fit for heaven and for him.

You don't have to worry today about whether you have done enough good to receive the reward. *You* are the reward. God has prepared *you* for eternity with him, and God wants you to know this. You don't have to wait until heaven to experience heaven, because God has given you his Spirit as a guarantee, Paul says. This is more than what we normally think of as a guarantee.

Have you ever signed a lease for someone else, cosigned a loan or cosigned a lease? The way that works is if the primary person on the loan or on the lease cannot make the payments, then the guarantor steps in and makes up the difference. That's not exactly the kind of guarantee Paul is talking about here. This word means more a deposit or a first installment payment, a down payment, a pledge. It's something to show that you already have ownership. When you make a down payment on a home, you move in.

The down payment is the beginnings of ownership. The Holy Spirit, then, has been given to believers as a down payment on their heavenly bodies, their heavenly home. Of course, we can see this because the work of the Holy Spirit is to work immortality in us. Even before we shed our mortal home, the work of the Holy Spirit is to make us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit sets our eyes on Jesus, and day by day, month by month, year by year, he conforms our lives to Jesus.

When God starts something, he finishes it. That could never be more true than in the case of salvation. The ultimate destiny of believers is to put on their eternal heavenly bodies and dwell in an eternal heavenly home. This is certain because it does not depend on you but on God. Just put your trust in Jesus Christ, and all that he has done will be yours. The solution to a troubled, temporary body and home is Jesus. Will you come to him now? He will not cast you out. In Jesus, death is swallowed up by life.