

## **Heaven, Our True Home**

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2 Corinthians 5:1-10

How's heaven doing these days? Christian pollster George Barna asked that question and discovered that 86% of Americans believe that God will judge us all individually. However, 57% said that God judges us on our good deeds. Less than half (45%) believe that what we believe has any impact on our future destination, while exactly the same number, 45% said that what we believe does influence our future judgment. 39% of Americans say they believe that "people who do not consciously accept Jesus Christ as their Savior will be condemned to hell." And over the years, more Americans accept the notion that what you believe is irrelevant to your future after death.

We have a video today taken on a college campus that says pretty much the same. It's called, "Ever think about dying?" Let's have a look.

### **VIDEO, "Ever Think About Dying?" (2:28 length)**

As we've been working our way through 2 Corinthians, we've seen that Paul spends a lot of time on the subject of hardship and how God gets glory in our lives even though we may have to suffer. It's not a surprise that at some point he builds a bridge from our sufferings in life to what is to follow life here. We've heard what surveys say about life after death, and we've heard what some college students think. What does God's word say above heaven? Let's look together at 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.

Here, I think we can sum up what Paul says this way:

- 1. It's like moving from a tent to a house**
- 2. It's moving from faith to sight**
- 3. And when we get there, God's going to review the value of our life contribution**

**It's like moving from a tent to a house (2 Corinthians 5:1-5)**

*1Now 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. 2Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4For 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. 5Now 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.*

Paul gives a whole series of comparisons between life now and life with God after death. Now here's where what he says, and what the Bible says from beginning to end says, that's very different from what most people say and think. We tend to think of this world and this life as "real" life and life after death as kind of unreal. Remember the one woman who talked that way in the video about her sister?

The Bible turns that upside down. Here Paul talks about this life being like living in a tent, and the life to come like living in a house. Now a tent can be nice. A tent can be sturdy. When Lynann and I were in Egypt in 1999, our bus drove along the Mediterranean coast of the Sinai Peninsula. All along the way we passed

through little towns where the Egyptian government was working to get tent-dwelling Bedouins to settle down in villages. Bedouins have lived in tents for thousands of years. Tents mean you wander around, but a house makes you settle down. The Egyptians want their Bedouins to stop wandering.

A tent compared to a house is a flimsy place to live. So Paul says in vs. 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.*

Actually, there's very little "if" here: one day you're tent is going down, one way or another. But God says, that's OK. He says, I have something BETTER planned for you. You're moving from a tent to a "building from God, an eternal house in heaven." Death for a Jesus-follower is not a move down; it's a move up.

This is a lot like what Jesus promised the disciples in John 14:2-3:

*2In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

The difference is that in John, Jesus is speaking in general about our future destiny. God will take care of us, and Jesus is going to prepare a place for us—a room in the Father's house. In 2 Corinthians, Paul builds on that with special reference to **our bodies**. Our body is the tent on earth, but in heaven, we get a HOUSE, something far more tough and enduring.

God has promised an eternal future for our bodies. We don't become ghosts or spirits playing harps on clouds. Our bodies are included in God's eternal plan. Other passages make clear that we're talking about the future resurrection of our bodies, but here Paul assumes we know that and compares the weak tent of our present bodies with the strong house of our resurrection bodies.

Look on to vs. 2-4:

*2Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4For 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.*

There's a story that as a kid, Richard Nixon, who as you know grew up in Yorba Linda, went skinny-dipping with some other boys. But while he was in the water, one of the other kids stole his clothes and young Richard had to sneak home naked! It would probably be accurate to say that young Richard "groaned, longing to be clothed." Paul compares our whole here on earth to being "found naked." There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, in the Old Testament especially, nakedness is associated with being **ashamed**. You can go right back to Adam and Eve and the shame they felt when they ate from the forbidden tree. There are other examples as well, including references to the custom that if a man found his wife committing adultery, she was cast out of the house naked as a way of shaming her.

So, to be found naked was to be found in shame. Nakedness has another layer of

meaning. It also speaks of our **mortality**. Remember what Job said? After all his troubles, he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart." (Job 1:21) Nakedness speaks of our mortality. We were all born naked. (Maybe some of us more hairy than others, but still naked!)

There's even a third reason for Paul comparing life now to being naked and the life to come to being clothed. To be naked is to be **unprotected**. Try skinny-dipping in the Arctic Ocean! Why do you think that Arabs crossing the Saudi deserts where the temperatures can pass 130 degrees wear flowing robes? The body needs to be covered in such extremes.

Now, what does this mean for us in this passage? Eternal life with God means **no shame**, it means **no death** and it means the **eternal protection of God**. We have no shame because we are forgiven through the cross of His Son. We have no death because on the cross He defeated death. We are protected because then we will be safe with Him forevermore.

But now we "groan" (not once but twice Paul says that). In this flimsy tent we're "burdened." Here, we discover that life is hard and just get harder. We see that more and more as time goes on. I see it every morning. My 18-year-old soul looks in the mirror each morning and is surprised to see a 49 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  year old face staring back. I take a pill for cholesterol and another to thin my blood, and a few others because my wife says I ought to. I guess you could say that my tent has got some holes in it!

I wonder, did anyone here, other than Lynann and I, go see the movie "Rocky Balboa" last Christmas? Sylvester Stallone is now 59 years old and he plays the old Rocky, grieving over

the death of his wife, and upset that he and his son are drifting apart. And at one point Rocky breaks down in tears as he says to his old buddy Paulie, "Nobody told me life was supposed to hurt so much." That's the reality of living in a tent. It's tough, real tough.

But God has promised that our tent life here, and our tent bodies here are going to be replaced by a God-made house. Things God makes are designed to last. Human houses will all crumple and fall apart. Not a God made house, and not a newly created God-made resurrection body. No more aging, no more tears, no more disease, bad eyesight, mushy muscles and peptic ulcers. Now the fullness of this is something that has to wait until Jesus comes back; that when believers will receive our resurrection bodies. Until then, our spirits after death here enjoy the presence of God, but at the end, God wants us to have eternal bodies. Is that great, or what?

So the first thing we learn here is heaven is like moving from a tent to a house. The second thing we learn here is that heaven is like **moving from faith to sight**. Look at 2 Corinthians 5:6-7:

*6Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7We live by faith, not by sight. 8We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

Knowing what God has planned for us gives us confidence. Right now, living in these tent-bodies we have now, we are "away from the Lord." But the promises of God are sure. Sure, here we age or maybe we're persecuted so we can't see the promised fulfilled. So, "we live by faith, not by sight." We long to see, to

be “away from the [present] body and [to be] at home with the Lord.”

One thing that heaven means is that we move from faith to sight. One day you’re really going to see Jesus. You’re going to meet Paul and Isaiah and David. You’re going to spend eternity knowing and serving and worshipping God. And one thing I’m sure of: it won’t be boring.

So many times we think of heaven as a kind of endless sameness. I think that’s all wrong. For one thing, Revelation tells us that the bulk of eternity will be enjoyed on New Earth, which I understand to be this earth renovated for eternity. So everything we have here that’s wonderful now we will have there and it will be a million times better. There’s no loss of anything in heaven that you wouldn’t want to be rid of anyways.

So resurrection life will be an endless adventure. It won’t be strumming on harps for a million billion years; that sounds worse to me than being stuck in a dentist’s waiting room. Now we live by faith; then by sight.

But there’s a third thing Paul says about heaven that we all need to consider:

**And when we get there, God’s going to review the value of our life contribution**

Look at 2 Corinthians 5:9-10:

*9So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10For 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.*

This is an incredibly important Biblical teaching, and it's really important that every follower of Jesus understand this.

The Bible speaks about future judgment in three ways:

1. **In general, it says God will judge all people after death.** There are a lot of passages that say that everybody has to stand before God to be judged. For example, Hebrews 9:27 says, "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment."
2. **It also says that the lost will be judged at the Great White Throne Judgment.** Many people think that the Bible teaches that there will be one Final Judgment. Actually, there are several judgments described in the Bible and that last one is found in Revelation 20:11-15. This is the judgment of the lost. No believer in Jesus will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment.
3. But we are also told that believers will be judged at **the Judgment Seat, or Bema, of Christ.** That's what Paul mentions here as well as in 1 Corinthians and in Romans. This is not a judgment of your sins, or your faith, or even of you as a person so much as a judgment on the quality of the works that you have done for Jesus' sake.

You see, at the judgment seat of Christ, it won't be your eternal **destination** on the line; it's your eternal **compensation** that's being determined. We have these few brief years here to maximize our eternal rewards. Paul calls that the "things done while in the body, whether good or bad."

Some explanation: the word translated "judgment seat" is the Greek word *bema*. The bema was what you called the platform that a

judge in law sat on. The same word, *bema*, was used for the platform a judge for an athletic contest sat on, and where the medals were handed out.

Also, you should know this: here in 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul uses some special words. He says that we'll be judged for the good and bad we do. The word for "good" is the common word for good, the word *agathos*. (We get the name "Agatha" from that word.) But for "bad," Paul uses a special word. Instead of *kakos*, which always means something evil, he used *phaulos*, which means more like "worthless" or "useless." (We get the English word "foul" from *phaulos*.) At the Bema of Christ, our works are being evaluated as either "good" or as a waste.

So, as Paul says, "we make our goal to please Him." At the end, after death, all followers of Jesus will stand before Him, not to be judged for our sins, but to undergo a life review. And Jesus is going to say, "How did you invest your years on earth? In things that were good and godly and holy and wholesome, or in things that were a waste of your years?"

It's hard for us to think this way. When we think of heaven, we just want to think of it as a comfort, and that's good. It's going to be great. But right now matters forever as well. Right now reaches into eternity and shapes our eternal enjoyment of God's rewards. Again, our work for God doesn't earn us a place in heaven—that something that Jesus earned on the cross and that we just accept by faith. If you know Him, that's a done deal and eternity with God is secure. But the Bible very clearly teaches that there are degrees of reward in eternity, and that's what the Judgment Seat, the Bema, of Christ is all about. That's something that we are commanded to seek

and to work for. As Jesus says in Matthew 6:19-20:

*19"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 **But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,** where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

When I was in college, we used to sing a silly little song that went:

*Heaven is  
A wonderful place  
Filled with  
Glory and grace  
I wanna see my Savior's face  
Heaven is a wonderful place...*

Heaven is so real to me now, not just a silly song to sing. I know people there now. A lot of people. But the best of all is knowing that Jesus is there, and that I will see Him.

A little girl, no more than five was walking with her dad one warm summer's evening. The moonless night showed a million stars.

"Daddy, heaven must be wonderful," she said. "Look how pretty the bottom side is. The top must be even better." Yes, it is.

**PRAYER/END**