

GROANING WITH GOOD COURAGE

From 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

6/13/21

1. INTRODUCTION

- a. Illustration: Summer always evokes fond memories of camping (tenting) with my mom which eventually became 'cabining' with my mom. The appeal of a transient life (i.e. van life) and the great reckoning of 2020 - more research
- b. Transition: Just like 2020 served as a great reckoning for transients world-wide, so too will physical death serve as the greatest reckoning for each and every living person.

According to our text this morning, we - all of us - are 'van-lifers'; transients; vagabonds. And while it may not always feel like it, we're all tenting through this temporary life. Even the most seemingly permanent things in our lives will soon pass away.

Our earthly bodies are no exception. The longer you're around, the more you realize how mortal our bodies really are. The more we live, the more we're confronted with life's only guarantee: death.

For the Christian, there is good news. The Apostle Paul is trying to offer some perspective to the Christians in Corinth. And his message is as relevant then as it is now:

- c. Proposition: God has prepared for us an eternal and embodied home with Him; therefore, make it your ambition to please the Lord with boldness.

If you remember, one of the reasons Paul is writing to the church in Corinth is because there were some in that community who were doubting Paul's apostleship.

Paul? The guy who's been whipped, scourged, imprisoned, ran out of cities, shipwrecked - that Paul? He doesn't even speak that well - how could he be an ambassador of the living God? He's suffered too much to be a spirit-filled apostle!

Paul wants to remind the church that earthly suffering, rather than diminish the glory of the gospel, actually enhances its power.

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves (4:7)

And while it may be discouraging to encounter hardships in this life, "we do not lose heart... for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (4:16-18)

Paul continues this train of thought as he considers the temporary nature of our earthly bodies. For Paul, his convictions about the transience of his mortal body and the glory that awaited him were the keys to his courageous, gospel ministry.

2. HOW CAN WE LIVE COURAGEOUSLY IN MORTAL BODIES?

In these ten verses, I believe the Lord has used Paul to help us understand 1) three truths about eternity, 2) two ways Christians should live in light of eternity, and 3) a final warning before we enter into eternity.

a. Three truths about eternity (vv. 1-5):

Admittedly, these verses are a bit hard to follow because of Paul's various metaphors. He talks about tents, buildings, dwellings, and clothing - but they're all conveying similar ideas. The first being:

i. Our bodies are temporary

Read verse 1 - Paul likens our earthly bodies to tents. And this is a fitting analogy, right? Tents are perfectly suitable for staying places for short periods, but it's not long before they wear out and need to be replaced. I wonder how many times the canvas of the tabernacle needed to be mended or replaced during Israel's 40-year wilderness wandering!

Just like tents, our bodies wear out. If you've been around long enough, you're already experiencing that reality! Just like milk in your fridge, everyone's body has an expiration date.

And that's a scary thought, something our culture is particularly averse to. Youth and youthfulness are prized and romanticized. Women (and men) dye their grays, middle-aged men wear skinny jeans, and the anti-aging skin care industry alone is worth almost \$58 billion in the US alone!

In fact, there are research firms throughout the West that are working (and spending hundreds of millions) to develop therapeutics to slow, and even stop, the aging process.

And while some of these therapeutics appear promising for certain medical applications, I'm not holding my breath for the fountain of youth - and neither should you.

Death and mortality are baked into the fabric of our fallen world. There's no escape: physical death is coming for us all. Paul knows this and we should too. What's the point?

Don't put too much stock in a collapsable, fabric tent! It's going to rip, tear, degrade, and eventually end up buried in the ground somewhere.

Church we need to unhitch our hope from the transient.

If we believe this life is all there is - all that's worth-while, we will never live with the courage and boldness God created us for.

Our bodies are temporary so don't hope in them or in anything else on this side of heaven.

We may have temporary bodies, but...

ii. We have eternal buildings

Read verse 1 again - If our earthly, impermanent bodies are tents, our resurrected bodies are eternally

permanent structures made by God and awaiting us in heaven.

It's important to note here that Paul says we 'have' these resurrected bodies, not that we 'will have them'. The bodily resurrection for Christians is a now-but-not-yet reality. For those who have been united with Christ by faith, your future resurrection is as sure as Christ's resurrection itself. It's so sure, in fact, that we can speak about it as though it is something we already have.

The Christian belief in the resurrection of the body is also counter-cultural. Just because creation now is prone to decay due to sin, it does not mean that physicality itself is somehow bad, evil, or wrong.

Our physical bodies, as flawed as they may be, are not something different than who we are. We are embodied souls. This is true now and it will be just as true at the resurrection.

Consequently, as Harold Senkbeil has said, "One cannot be born in the wrong body, as many are prone to say, because no one is born 'in' a body. Rather, we are our bodies."

Embodied existence is not just something we have now; it will be our mode of being for all eternity - and we should embrace it.

That's kind of crazy to think about, isn't it? And I think that's the point. We should have a holy curiosity about heaven and the eternal state. Death and heaven won't be some disembodied, spirit-like

fuzzy place. It won't be boring. It will be MORE real than the reality we know now. That is something to look forward to!

iii. Godly groaning is good

Read 2-5 - (some explanation) It might be easy to get lost in these verses, but don't miss the big picture:

Christians who have accepted the temporality of their earthly flesh and are aware of the embodied reward that awaits them in heaven can't help but groan.

This groaning isn't grumbling, mind you. This godly groaning is a holy longing for heaven - for the way things are supposed to be. It's an expression of the innate tension between the suffering of the present with the glory awaiting us at the consummation of all things.

In this way suffering of all kinds can be a servant. Suffering coupled with faith, decouple our attachment to that which is fleeting and focus our vision on something greater and more abiding. Don't begrudge your hardships, make it a servant to glory!

One of the best analogies for this kind of groaning is from the Apostle Paul himself who likened it to childbirth

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body (Rom. 8:22-23)

Now, I'm not going to pretend to speak from personal experience here, but I'll venture to say that no matter how agonizing labor is, the delight and joy of motherhood far outweighs whatever pain it may bring.

All creation – our bodies included – is about to give birth (in a figurative sense). And it's going to get worse before it gets better. Oh but it will get better.

How do we know we have this better inheritance?

Read verse 5 - The Holy Spirit is the down payment for our eternal inheritance. Isn't God generous? Not only does He promise an incorruptible life with Him forever in perfected bodies, He also says, "Here, have some earnest money!"

- Our bodies are temporary
- We have eternal buildings
- Godly groaning is good

May the Lord, give us a holy hunger for heaven

- b. Two ways Christians should live in light of eternity (vv. 6-9):
 - i. Be of good courage

Read verses 6-8 - The 'therefore' at the beginning of verse 6 signals to us that what follows is a consequence or implication for what has just been discussed.

In our case, Paul is saying that Christian courage and boldness is built on our heavenward hope. If we cannot be confident of our future inheritance, we have no reason to be courageous today.

Imagine if Joshua had no reason to believe the Israelites would inhabit the Promise Land? Do you think he'd do something as crazy as march around Jericho's walls until they fell down? No way! And yet, the Lord's charge to Joshua was "Be strong and courageous." Why? "Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh. 1:9)

Joshua trusted God's promise and that trust enabled Joshua to act courageously.

Church, we must trust in all of God's heavenly promises if we are to be the courageous men and women God wants us to be in this generation.

Is this world failing? Certainly! Is it better to be with the Lord in heaven? Absolutely! But does that mean we resign ourselves to pessimism and cowardice in the face of the wickedness around us (and in us)? By no means! We walk, stand, and advocate for gospel truth by faith.

Walking by faith and not by sight, does not mean we walk blindly. On the contrary, walking by faith

requires a laser-focus on that which is unseen and eternal.

Where is your focus today? Where is your vision? Are you contending with gospel boldness or cowering in unbelief?

Church, be of good courage - your home is in heaven!

ii. Purpose to please the Lord

Read verse 9 - in addition to producing a boldness for the gospel, our heavenly inheritance should also produce a holy ambition to please the Lord – not the other way around!

We won't need courage in heaven. We don't need boldness to proclaim the gospel in heaven. We will, however, need hearts that are directed towards pleasing the Lord.

Whether in this body or the next, a God-pleasing life will never go out of style.

Do you long to bring pleasure to God? Do you think about what you can do to bring him more pleasure?

If we're honest, we live pleasure-centered lives. We love to please ourselves. We think a lot about what we can do to bring ourselves more pleasure.

I'm not saying there's anything wrong with experiencing pleasure from God's many good

gifts. What I'm saying is that too often in our world of abundance, pleasing self takes the place of pleasing God.

What's your ambition today? Young people: what ambitions do you have for your life? Not as young people: what are your ambitions for your careers, for your children, for your retirement?

Nothing wrong with having goals. There is something wrong when those goals are disordered, when a GPA, a promotion, a child's successes, a retirement account, are more strongly sought after than pleasing the Lord.

There are a million ways to direct your life, a million ambitions and dreams to pursue, but there's only one direction, one ambition that will endure the final judgement - a God-pleasing life.

Two ways Christians should live in light of eternity:

- Be of good courage
- Please the Lord

c. A final warning (v. 10)

Read verse 10 - Our bodies may be temporary and fading, but what we do in them has eternal value and significance.

The judgment described in verse 10 is one which every human who has ever lived will one day endure. Doesn't matter if you're a Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Democrat, or Republican. The resurrected (and embodied) Christ is seated at the

right hand of the Father, and from that seat, He will judge and compensate each of us according to what we have done.

We are saved by faith, but judged by works because it is by our works that our faith is proven genuine.

The point? Do not rely on a mere profession of faith or mountain-top spiritual experience. Do not rely on the faith of your parents or the fact that you think you're generally a good person. None of these are sound bases upon which to rest your confidence on the Last Day.

Our only solid basis and hope is the atoning work of Christ, our faith in which is a tree that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, produces God-pleasing fruit.

Church: God has prepared for us an eternal and embodied home with Him; make it your ambition to please the Lord with boldness.

Let's pray.