

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Now we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, which is not made by human hands. ²In fact, the reason we groan is that we long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. ³If we do indeed put it on, we will certainly not be found naked. ⁴To be sure, while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as the down payment.

⁶Therefore we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, ⁷for we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸But we are confident and would much prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹And for this reason we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home or away. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he did while in the body, whether good or bad.

Your Building from God

I.

The calls of the night birds, the croaking of frogs, the chirping of crickets. Those sounds outside the walls of the tent are so peaceful. In an instant the peace is destroyed. A flash of lightning lights the sky from horizon to horizon. The crack of thunder that follows a moment after decimates the peaceful night sounds.

The trees begin to dance and twist rhythmically as they're bent by the winds that come with the rapidly approaching storm. Rain begins to pelt the tent and the winds increase until it feels as though the tent and its occupants might be lifted off the ground in some sort of scene from the Yellow Brick Road.

It is certainly not a moment for heroics. Just get into the dry vehicle and drive away from the danger of falling limbs, or even whole trees. Get to some sort of more permanent structure. Stiff from a night of fitful sleep slumped down on the seats of the car, you wake with the morning light to see what 8-10 inches of rain has done to the gravel roads of the campground. There's no getting out unless you have an all-wheel drive with plenty of ground clearance.

Living in a tent is fun. That is, for a short stay to get away from the grind of day-to-day life. That is, if there is a nice patch of rock-free-grass on which to pitch your tent. That is, if the weather cooperates, and the mosquitoes aren't the size of hummingbirds. That is, when there is a nice shower building which the campground staff keeps spotlessly clean, and one which is also not too far from your camping space. That is, if the campers at neighboring camp sites are considerate.

Living in a tent is fun when you know that you can break camp and pick everything up and go back home at any time. After awhile, cooking over a camp stove and showering—and doing other things—in an outbuilding, and the smokey smell on your clothing from the campfire that just never goes away, gets a little bit old. It's nice to go home—to running water and electricity and heat in the winter and air conditioning in the summer and a roof and walls that don't bleed through when it rains, and a chest of drawers and closet with clean dry clothes to change into when you're soaking wet.

Living in a tent is fun when you know that it's only temporary.

II.

We spoke last week of Paul and his gift of understatement. He called the issues of life “Our momentary, light trouble” (2 Corinthians 4:17, EHV). Even with Paul’s gift of understatement in *that* chapter, later on in his letter he gave a litany of all kinds of troubles he had to deal with during his lifetime. He finished last week’s lesson by saying: “We are not focusing on what is seen, but on what is not seen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:18, EHV).

Temporary. That’s what *this* life is. Focus on the eternal, Paul said last week.

Not much can make that easier to understand than talking about living in a tent for awhile, can it? Living in a tent, wearing soiled camping clothes, and being away from home on a trip are things a person hopes are only temporary.

“To be sure, while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened” (2 Corinthians 5:4, EHV). In this life we groan—not because of soaking wet sleeping bags and damp clothing, but because of sin and its consequences. In this life we are burdened—not by cooking on a wobbly camp stove balanced precariously on a picnic table, but by spiritual problems and family tensions and personal problems.

Sometimes, perhaps, this life *feels* like an endless camping trip. If only all the days could be sunny and dry and beautiful. But plenty of the days are filled with challenges. Day after day you just slog through the mud of life and just wish there were something better.

III.

There is. Jesus says: “In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2, EHV). I like that the Evangelical Heritage Version returned to the translation of “mansions,” rather than “rooms.” Jesus was referring to your own permanent dwelling place, not a guest bedroom or a hotel room. He promised his disciples of every age and generation that he was returning to heaven to prepare our permanent dwelling place—our mansion.

Paul talks about that place this way: “Now we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, which is not made by human hands. ²In fact, the reason we groan is that we long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven” (2 Corinthians 5:1-2, EHV).

There have been all kinds of improvements in tents since the day when Paul penned his letter. Not only is the fabric designed to be somewhat waterproof, there are waterproofing chemicals you can add to your tent. You can get a tent that is designed for whatever weather conditions you will be facing on your journey. Accessories like a nice air mattress can make the accommodations more comfortable than in the past. Still—it’s only a tent. It’s temporary.

What is coming is not a tent. What is coming is *not* temporary. We have an eternal building in heaven made by the hand of God through Jesus Christ, not by flawed and frail human hands. That permanent home is your mansion. It was made with the wood of the cross, nailed together with the spikes from Jesus’ hands and feet. The door is unlocked by the same key used to open the tomb on Easter Sunday when Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus himself told us that he was going back up to heaven to prepare that place. He said “If it were not so, I would have told you.” It is sure and certain that Jesus is preparing that eternal mansion for us. Paul is so certain of God’s promise that he doesn’t say we *will* have this beautiful mansion, but that we *have* it. The reason we groan now is that we long to go

to that home. For the time being, however, we live in a tent.

IV.

“Now the one who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as the down payment” (2 Corinthians 5:5, EHV). God wants us to have the same certainty of our permanent place that Paul had. He gave the guarantee of the Holy Spirit, who connects us to Jesus’ earthly life and death. The Holy Spirit created new life in us at our baptism, and stays with us as God’s down payment—the guarantee that God will finalize his promise. We will truly inherit a permanent, heavenly home.

“Therefore we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:6, EHV). When you are camping in a tent, everything can be taken in stride. You have set aside your daily routine to do something different. Even though everything you do is in a makeshift setting, you are confident as you go about the camp chores. Even challenges of weather and mosquitoes and shower rooms can be taken in stride because you know it’s all temporary.

So it is with your life of faith. The challenges of family tensions and personal problems are all put into context by the knowledge that Jesus has taken care of the greatest problem of your life—sin.

“But we are confident and would much prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8-9, EHV). One day you will strike camp to go home. The permanent home God has prepared for you in heaven is waiting. While you are dealing with the challenges of life, you might wish the day would come sooner rather than later when you can go home to be with Jesus. *That* is what changes your attitude about everything you see and do and have *here*.

This stuff is all just camping equipment. Your house, your car, your possessions. “You can’t take it with you,” is the old saying. It’s true. You can’t take worldly possessions into heaven. Since that is the case, don’t get too preoccupied with those things. Don’t compare your tent with the motor home of the guy in the next space. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, EHV). The treasures we *really* have are hidden right now. Trust God’s promise as you walk your walk through life.

“And for this reason we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home or away” (2 Corinthians 5:9, EHV). Because this tent is only a tent, our attitude changes. Our goal is to please God, not just to acquire more stuff or do more things on this earth. Our vocations are opportunities to serve God. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit to use to glorify him.

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he did while in the body, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10, EHV). Jesus has already won the victory. He has secured the verdict in the courtroom—“not guilty—forgiven!” Because we have already been forgiven by him, we live as children of God. Jesus said: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16, EHV). Faith is the decisive thing. Faith is what motivates the Christian to walk in a God-pleasing way.

Confident. Our confidence is not in what we have done or will do, but in Christ. He has saved us through his death on the cross. His resurrection assures us of forgiveness. The down payment has been made. The Holy Spirit guarantees our life here and hereafter. Your mansion awaits you—your building from God. Amen.