

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Facing Death Confidently, Part 1**

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:1

Code: 47-31

Well, after several weeks of studying "The Love of God," a special series through our holiday time, we come this morning back to our study of 2 Corinthians. And I'm so thrilled and excited to be back to this book. It was like leaving a treasured friend for a couple of months and what a welcome it had for me as I came back to it over the last couple of weeks.

Let's open our Bibles to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and one of the most practical, one of the most encouraging and one of the most helpful sections in all of this great epistle comes to us in the first eight verses.

Now remember, as Paul writes this letter to the beleaguered Christians at Corinth, he himself is beleaguered as well. The Apostle is facing death on a daily basis. As he has continued his ministry from its beginnings, hostility has escalated. Hostility, animosity and persecution has grown and grown to a fever pitch, both among Jews who plotted to take his life and Gentiles who saw him as a threat, not only to their religion but to their political stability. And so Paul is continually being persecuted. In fact, we find him as he writes this letter under a daily sentence of death. He realizes that any moment, any day he could lose his life. The hostility swirls around him. The hatred has escalated. The animosity has accumulated, great power and strength.

And the sense of imminent death comes through in this letter many times. Back in chapter 1, for example, he writes in verse 4 about all our affliction and how much we need the God of all comfort in the midst of that affliction.

Down in verse 8 of chapter 1 he says, "We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life. Indeed we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a peril of death." We don't know precisely what that was, but he felt himself on the brink of death.

We find that same attitude expressed in very clear terms over in chapter 4, and you will remember, starting in verse 7, about how he talked about having the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels. And he says in verse 8, "Because we represent God, because we serve Him, we are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed." And then this, "Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus." And then verse

11, "We who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake." Verse 12, "Death works in us." Always on the brink of death from those who hated him.

Chapter 6 verse 4, he mentions endurance, afflictions, hardships, in distresses. And then in verse 5 he says, "In beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger." And then down in verse 9 he says, "As unknown, yet well known, as dying yet behold we live as punished yet not put to death." Death all around him.

In chapter 7 and verse 5 he says, "We had conflicts without, fears within. But God who comforts the depressed comforted us by the coming of Titus." And then the familiar text of chapter 11, in verse 23 he says, "In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death." And then he talks about the five times he received 39 lashes, the three times he was beaten with rods, when he was stoned, three times shipwrecked and spending a night and a day in the sea and on and on about the dangers, the labors, the hardships, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, without food, cold, exposure.

In chapter 12 it says he was caught up to the third heaven, and even in that he says in verse 10 of chapter 12, "I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak then I'm strong."

Now back to chapter 5, all of that to say he lived on the brink of death. He knew that every morning when he first opened his eyes it could be his last day. And the question that arises is how did he do...how did he deal with this? How did he face this? How could he deal with death every day? He was like a soldier on the front line of a furious battle with bullets flying around him every single day. How did he face the possibility every day like a loyal soldier in the fire of war the possibility of death? What was his perspective? What was his attitude as he knew he could be killed at anytime? With what understanding did he view his earthly demise?

The first thing we might wonder would be...Well, wouldn't it make him a little less courageous? After all, it was his preaching that made death imminent. If he just toned that down a little bit and perhaps related a little better to the culture and demonstrated not quite such a hostile confrontive mentality, maybe he could mitigate a little of this imminent death.

Maybe any normal person realizing that because he was preaching so boldly it could cost him his life would tone down the preaching, but not Paul. Didn't he have any fear of the pain that might be associated with dying? The pain of some torture, some knife? Some spear? Some sword? Some axe? Didn't he have some dread of death, the inevitability of leaving this world and facing the next?

But as you look at his life, the more the hostility escalated, the more the persecution escalated the more bold he became. And even when he was dragged in before all of the dignitaries and all the

authorities who held his life in their control, he never ever toned the message down, he just cranked it up. He never lost his boldness. He never lost his conviction. He never lost his courage to proclaim the truth that was the very reason his life was threatened. He faced death confidently. And that's what this section is about. He faced death courageously. I'll go beyond that, he faced death gladly and he faced death happily. In fact, he preferred it to life. And when you get to that point, that will take all the sting out of persecution. That will take all the fear out of rejection, all the dread of physical difficulties and illnesses and danger.

He was a man who said, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." He was a man who said, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." He faced death as a preferable alternative. That's the way he faced it. And consequently he had no fear, he welcomed it. And if he was discomforted and if he was saddened and if he was sorrowful, it had to do with the failures of his life, it had to do with the unrequited love toward believers. It had to do with a broken heart over the lost, it didn't have to do with a fear of death. He knew what was on the other side of death and he preferred it and he makes that clear in this text, let's read it.

Starting in verse 1, "For we know that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven; inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord for we walk by faith not by sight, we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

Give him his choice, he'd rather die. And that is why he can say we are always of good courage, verse 6, and repeated in verse 8, we are of good courage. Now that is a wonderful and confident way to face the reality of death, to face it with good courage.

What do you mean by good courage? What is he saying when he says good courage? Confidence, that's what that word means. It actually means confidence. It means we die with hope. We die with joy. We die with confidence. We actually prefer death. That's what it means. The verb is *tharreo* and it means to be of good cheer, or to be happy. And may I suggest to you that his attitude is not the result of some emotional high. It is not the result of some loving encouragement by a friend. It is not the result of some momentary grace of God. It is not a temporary feeling due to a moment's excitement. But he says here we are always of good courage. It is constant with him. It never changes. It's always the same. He faced death as preferable.

Now this passage builds on the end of chapter 4. Go back to chapter 4 verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, no matter how things are difficult, no matter we are imminently facing death every day, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." In other words, he could face all his difficulties because it was strengthening him spiritually. But beyond that, he says in verse 17, "For momentary light affliction...that's how he viewed his troubles...is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." Any suffering in this life would result in an eternal reward way beyond anything that could ever be understood, and far more wonderful than the suffering itself. He was willing to suffer because of the weight of glory it was producing. And verse 18, "Because he looked not at the things that are seen but at the things which are not seen, namely the things which are eternal."

Here's a man who willingly put his life on the line for what was eternal. Who willingly suffered in this world for a greater weight of glory in the world to come. Here was a man who gladly faced the dilapidation and decrepitation of his own body in old age and the pain and suffering and anxieties of persecution because it would lead to ultimate glory in the next life. This is a man who faced death as a better option than life. He preferred it. He says it in verse 8, "We prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." That is preferable.

Now that's reality for the believer. We will die. You will die by accident. You will die by illness, disease. You will die by agedness. You will die by criminal action, somebody might shoot you. And the question is, you could...I could even add you might die by being persecuted and becoming a martyr in some environment somewhere in the world. The question is...how do you face that? How do you face that terminal reality? How do you face the inevitability of death? Death will come to you and to me like an utterly unsympathetic landlord, waving an eviction notice. And that eviction notice will be executed the moment that landlord arrives.

Are you frightened about that? Shouldn't be, just take a look at what you're living in. It's actually releasing you from a fairly wretched neighborhood down here to a much better neighborhood up there and from a dilapidated slum down here to a glorious dwelling up there. It's not going to make you homeless. No, when the unsympathetic landlord that we call death comes with his eviction notice, it's not going to make us homeless. There is waiting for us a far more grand and glorious dwelling in a far better neighborhood. And consequently Christians should have no fear of death. That's what Paul is expressing here. And this is very helpful because as he pours out all this information about how death is imminent and death is imminent, he wants his friends not to be too fearful, to be concerned about him too much because he actually prefers it. The sorrows of life are worse than death. The disappointments of life are worse than death. The depressions of life are worse than death. Death is not something that causes him sorrow or depression, life is. And that's part of why he longs for death.

Christians should have no fear of death. Christians should welcome death as nothing more than a reprieve, a release from the dilapidated slum we now live in ushering us into a better home in a far better place. Now listen, any less attitude than that is sub-Christian, any less attitude than that is sub-Christian. The current obsession with physical healing is inconsistent with the anticipation of death that a Christian should have. You say, "Are you saying that we shouldn't do anything to take care of ourselves?" No, we want to be here as long as the Lord wants us to be here for useful service to Him. But the longing of our heart is to leave and be in heaven. As Paul said in Philippians chapter 1, "If I stay here it is for my service to you. But I would really prefer to be there." Unless there is some compelling usefulness that we have to God here, we should be eager and anxious and prefer to be gone. We should anticipate death the way Paul anticipated it. Anything less than that is sub-Christian. Any other attitude than that robs believers of the privilege and the joy of anticipating death in a way that glorifies God.

We ought to glorify God most in the way we die. We are to glorify Him in the way we live, but we ought to glorify Him most in the way we die. We ought to have a completely triumphant acceptance of death, not a hysterical panic, not trying to avoid it at all cost and to all extremes as if it were something against God's will, or as if earthly relationships were more important and more wonderful than heavenly ones. In fact, death is the last and the best opportunity for believers to have a bold and courageous faith on exhibit. If I can't face death with joy and anticipation and gladness and happiness and good cheer and confidence and excitement and enthusiasm, then that's sub-Christian because I was made for heaven and everything I hold dear is there.

When we look at death in the eye and never blink, when we see dying as preferable, that is the testimony of our faith that transcends all other testimonies. That says our hope is real. Does it work in the hour of death when everything is on the line? And as I said, this current obsession with physical healing is inconsistent with the anticipation of death that a believer should have. In fact, as I said to someone, once we get to heaven we'll wish we never had that bypass. It gives to us, death does, the single greatest opportunity to prove the reality of our faith. Here is Paul our example, he faces death with joyous anticipation because he believed it would usher him into glory, in to the presence of the Lord whom he supremely loved, into the blessing of heaven with all its perfection for which he was created and for which he was redeemed. He faced death with good courage, with cheer, happily, gladly, confidently. Death was a welcome friend.

Now in this text he gives us four reasons why, I'll give you one this morning and next week I'm going to give you the rest. This is so basic. There were four reasons why, number one, he faced death courageously and confidently because he knew that the next body is the best...the next body is the best.

Look at verse 1, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." He's talking about the

body...the body. That eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison that he mentioned in 4:17, those things which we can't now see and which are eternal that he mentioned in 4:18 include a new body, a new body. For any of us, that should be a thrilling promise.

Paul has been suffering greatly. He's been writing about that suffering. In fact, we could safely say suffering and affliction was the dominant feature of his life, the dominant experience and yet the worst it could bring was the best. He could get rid of this earthly tent and in its place a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens would belong to him. He knew the next body is the best.

Let's look at this statement carefully. Starting out he says, "For we know." He refers not to a wish, not to a possibility, not to some vague hope, but to a fixed reality, a settled fact based on the promise of God. "We" refers to believers. We know! How do you know? Because God has revealed it to us. In fact, in the letter that we call 1 Corinthians which he wrote to the church before this one, and the fifteenth chapter, he went through the whole chapter, 58 verses, and described our future. He described in the middle of that chapter our resurrection body, and we'll look at that in a moment. So the knowledge of which the Apostle is here speaking is a particular knowledge that has been granted to Christian believers by way of revelation. It doesn't spring from human intellect. It doesn't spring from mystical fantasy. It comes from the revelation of God in Scripture. The Bible promises resurrection. And Paul rejoices when he looks at death because the frailties, the limitations, the gravitational and iniquitous pull of sin associated with our present bodies will be a thing of the past. And he says "for we know" because he knew the Corinthians knew because he had written them about it one whole chapter of 58 verses. He had given them God's word on that and it was this great reality that lifted Paul above the earthly affliction and the suffering. He preferred death because then he'd get his glorified body. It was the best body.

Now notice that he says, "For we know that if..." And somebody might say, "What do you mean if?" "The earthly tent which is our house is torn down..." What do you mean "if"? Wouldn't it have been better to say "when"? I mean, isn't death inevitable? Isn't it going to happen? Isn't it appointed to men once to die? What do you mean if?

Well, Paul was in the midst of the imminent reality of death but there was always that lingering hope that he wouldn't die. You say...what do you mean that he wouldn't die? Well, that he would live until the return of Christ, right? That he would live until Jesus came back. So he says "if" not "when" because he really doesn't know if...if he will die. And you know what that tells me? That tells me he believed in an imminent return. He believed it was really possible that Jesus could come in his life time or he wouldn't have said "if". And frankly, that's what he would prefer.

Paul's little priority list went like this. Number one option...Rapture. I'd just like to live till Jesus comes. Can you identify with that? And we would all say that's number one, Rapture. That's number

one option for me, too. But maybe not this second option. Number two option for Paul...death. If I can't be here until the Lord comes, I'd like to die and the sooner the better. Option number three...I have to live.

Now we would probably reverse those two in all honesty. But that's because we have a sub-Christian perspective. Number one, I really believe Paul wanted to live till the return of Christ and in his earlier writings to the Corinthians, in that fifteenth chapter verse 51, "I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep and we shall all be changed." I think he wanted himself in that "we" very badly. He wanted this perishable to put on the imperishable and this mortal to put on the immortal. He wanted to be there in the moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trump blew, and he wanted to go right into the presence of the Lord without ever facing death. That's the Rapture. He wrote about it to the Thessalonians and he similarly indicated his own longing for that. He says, "For this we say to you," 1 Thessalonians 4:15, "by the Word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord shall not precede those that are asleep. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and we shall always be with the Lord." And I think that was his priority number one, I want to live till Jesus comes. I want to see this thing to the end. I want Him to come and take me to glory.

He hints at that in this very text when he says he doesn't want to be found naked. And I'll say more about that next time. He doesn't like the idea of floating around as a disembodied spirit until the resurrection, so he'd rather live till Jesus comes and not have to go through any period of time when he doesn't have a glorified body.

Rapture was best, that was number one. Number two on his list was death. And number three was life. Far better to depart and be with Christ, Philippians 1. We prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord. And that's the way we should live. We should live in that same kind of longing ambivalence. I understand that. Oftentimes we talk as a family and I'm sure you do about the...wouldn't it be wonderful, we all love each other so much, we're having such a great time, wouldn't it be wonderful if none of us had to face the loss of the rest? If none of us lived...outlived everybody, or if none of us had to die and we could all enjoy each other's fellowship until Jesus comes. We talk like that, that's normal human desire. That was Paul's desire. We live in that longing that Jesus might come and take us all to glory and we're not going to face death.

But it's that second one that gets us. Paul says if that can't happen, Lord, then let me die and let me die soon, I just want to get to glory. That's a Christian attitude. That's a Christian attitude. If it can't be Rapture, let it be death, get me to glory. And that's why he uses "if" because he might live till Jesus comes.

Well it turned out he didn't, right? But the Second Coming was imminent, He didn't know when He was going to come. So, he says if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, and in his case it was. What does he mean by that? Death. The earthly tent is the body. He calls the body an earthly tent. It's a great, great concept. It's the idea that your soul lives in a tent. In the incarnation, John 1:14, it says that when Jesus Christ the eternal God came into the world, He tented among us, He put on one of these earthly tents.

You say, "Why do you use the imagery of a tent?" A tent is transient, temporary, insecure, inferior, lowly, fragile, frail, dilapidating, decaying, like a human body. And a tent belongs to somebody who wanders around and doesn't have a permanent home. And Paul knew that as a believer he was a stranger and an alien and a sojourner and a pilgrim, to borrow the words of Peter, 2 Peter 1:13 and 14, 1 Peter 2:11, Peter says the same things. Peter has to put off his tent, he says in 2 Peter 1:13 and 14, he's got to get rid of his tent very soon. He knows his tent is going to be taken down very soon.

So the tent was a very good image in ancient times because people who were nomads, who were peripatetics who just floated around with no lasting place, moved in these tents. And there were a couple of other reasons Paul might have chosen a tent, not only because of the culture around him but I think because secondly he made tents. In Acts 18:3 it says he was a leather worker. Literally that means he made tents as well as other leather goods. One of the things you did as a leather worker, you stitched things together, was tents. And so he's talking right out of his own trade. He knows the strengths and weaknesses of tents. Obviously he knows that they are transient, temporary, insecure and inferior.

But there may have been another thought in his mind as well. Not only the culture around him, not only his own trade, but even the history of Israel because you remember when God constituted the nation Israel when they came out of Egypt and they had their identity as a nation, and He was leading them to the promised land, the Lord gave them instructions to build a large tent called the tabernacle. And it was a tent which symbolized the presence of God in their midst as God dwelt with them. They were a nomadic people roaming and traveling all over everywhere. The tent was associated with the wilderness wanderings and was replaced when they came into the promised land, into the city of Jerusalem, occupied the holy land, occupied the holy city, had Mount Zion there and on that mount they put a temple. And the temple was a permanent place, a fixed place, a building.

And so the imagery behind Paul's thought could come from those various sources. He simply says the body which we possess in this world is like a tent which is our house. It's the earthly, temporary, fragile, frail, insecure, lowly home for the eternal souls of sojourners and pilgrims whose real citizenship is in heaven, whose real home is in heaven and for whom the Lord Jesus is building them a place.



Now he says if this thing is torn down, and it was for him and for everybody since him who has died, if it is torn down...by the way, that concept of tearing down the tent meaning death is found in Isaiah 38:12 if you want to look at an Old Testament comparison. But he's talking about death. And the word here is "torn down," but maybe a better word and it would be fair with the Greek is "dismantled...dismantled," folded up. Paul's body was already battered and wounded and weakened and death was at work in him, he says back in 4:12 and back in 4:10 he says he was always carrying about in his body the dying of Jesus. And so he says, "If I die and this tent is dismantled, that's good because we have a building." Now that suggests solidarity, foundation, fixed, secure, firm, permanent. Beautiful imagery. Assurance, certainty, I will gladly trade my tent for a building, is what he's saying.

What's he talking about? What is this building? Well if his tent is his physical body, then the building has got to be his glorified body because it's replacing his tent. Back in chapter 4 verse 14 he referred to this. He said, "Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus." He knew there would be a resurrection. He knew it would be a bodily resurrection. And here he calls it a building. We're shedding this tent, as it were, and we're getting a building. And this is best.

These same longings, by the way, for the glory of our body in the world to come are expressed in Romans 8. Go back to Romans 8 for a moment with me. In Romans 8:18 Paul is speaking very much like he does in 2 Corinthians. And he says here, by the way, this was written just a short time after 2 Corinthians so he's in the same milieu of suffering and the same general attitude that he writes Romans that he was when he wrote Corinthians and here you feel the same kind of thing coming through. Verse 18, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is revealed in us." Well that's almost the parallel to 2 Corinthians 4:17. And then he says, "The anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." The whole created world and universe, he says, waits for the time when the sons of God become what God had intended them to become. The creation was subjected to futility, of course, by the fall of man, not of its own will but because of him who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will also be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom, the glory of the children of God.

In other words, the whole created universe has felt the effects of the Fall. It is all cursed with sin and the whole creation groans and longs, verse 22 says, suffering the pains of childbirth together until now. It's groaning under the curse and it wants to experience the freedom of the glory of the children of God. It wants...the whole creation wants transformation, which you know comes in the new heaven and the new earth.

And then in verse 23 he makes it personal. "And not only this but also we ourselves having the first fruits of the Spirit," and that too he comments on 2 Corinthians, we'll see that next week. "even we ourselves groan within ourselves and we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons." Why? Because we

want the redemption of our...what?...of our body. Paul is saying I've really had it with this body. I've had it with this tent. It is decaying. It is dilapidated. It is scarred. It puts tremendous limits on me. It is debilitating to me. I want my building. I'm tired of this.

And, look, it wasn't that he had a mirror. You and I look in a mirror and long for the heavenly body and the longer we look and the years go by, the more we long for the heavenly body. But we're not talking about something that is purely physical. I mean, we all have to live with what we've got and we can do everything we can to fix it and comb it and paint it a little, and sort of keep it moving with some degree of civility. But that isn't the issue. He's not talking about the fact that he doesn't like the shape of his nose. He's not talking about the fact that he would...wished he had better muscle tone. He's talking about the fact that the body debilitates him in his desire to serve and honor God, that's the issue. I mean, the man isn't concerned about the physical. He's not saying, "You know, I'm going over to the gymnasium, you know the gymnasium to try to keep in shape." What he's saying is, "I am sick of this debilitating, limiting body that is a beachhead for iniquity, this fallen flesh in which my redeemed nature exists," Romans 7. "Oh," he says, "wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" Romans 7:24. When do I get rid of this thing? "I long to serve God and worship God and adore God and love God with absolute purity and perfection and I am restricted and limited and I battle my own fallenness and my own flesh." He says, "I do what I don't want to do and I don't do what I want to do and it sickens me, I'm weary of this thing." It isn't so crass and so trivial as to say...I wonder what a perfect nose looks like. Or I wonder, you know, if I'll be able to pose in heaven and everyone will say, "Now there's a perfect body." Of course it won't mean anything cause everybody else will have one.

That isn't what he's talking about. What he's talking about is the debilitation that sin brings in restricting him from being what he wants to be for the glory of God and the purposes of God. I can't wait...he says...to get that building from God. I got one from my mom and dad and I'm to a degree appreciative, but I want that one from God. I want that building, that fixed and permanent thing, the best thing my parents could give me was a tent with all of its weaknesses and all of its transitory character, all of its temporary usefulness, all of its fragile character, its insecurities. I want that house from God, that building.

And then he adds this most interesting little phrase in verse 1, "A house not made with hands....a house not made with hands." And you might say, "Well, what does that mean?" Well just to kind of give you a little bit of a feeling for what it means, let me take that phrase from some other passages. You remember in John chapter 2 Jesus said, "If you destroy this temple, in three days I'll raise it up," remember that? Commenting on that in Mark 14:58 it says, the chief priests and the council said, "We heard Him say," and they were harking back to John 2 when He said, "Destroy this body," and so forth. "We heard Him say," and here's what they quote, "I will destroy this temple made with hands and in three days I will build another made without hands." Whew...how interesting, so that the resurrection body of Jesus Christ was a body made without hands.

That phrase is used a couple of other places. It is used in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 11 to refer to circumcision made without hands. What does that mean? Not a physical circumcision but...what?...spiritual circumcision of the heart. But the most telling use of that phrase comes in Hebrews 9:11 and here it defines it for us, very straightforward. "But when Christ appeared as High Priest of the good things to come...listen...He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands." Christ had a body not made with hands. There is a circumcision not made with hands. And Christ when He went to glory entered into a tabernacle not made with hands.

What does "not made with hands" mean? This is what verse 11 says, "That is to say not of this creation." There it defines it. Not of this creation. It's referring to about a circumcision that is not earthly and physical. It's referring to a resurrection body that is not earthly and physical. It is referring to a tabernacle, a dwelling place for Christ in His glory that is not earthly and physical. It is spiritual and transcendent. Simply, it is not of this earthly creation.

Paul says, "I want a building that is not like the one I have in this life. I want a permanent, fixed, settled building made by God not having anything to do with this creation." That's what he's saying.

And then he adds, "Eternal in the heavens." It's a heavenly body and it's eternal. Eternal in the heaven. I want a much classier house in a much classier neighborhood. And you know the issue of real estate...location, location, location. Paul says I want to be there with a body that is suited to that place that will be forever perfect and a perfect vehicle for the expression of what my transformed nature wants to do in praising and serving my Lord.

That's why he could look at death and say he always was confident. He always was glad. He always was happy when he thought about death because he knew the next body was the best...the best.

Now let me just take you as far into what that new body is like as I can because I'll take you to what Scripture says. Go back to 1 Corinthians 15. He had already told them about that best body to come. You know, there are some people who say, "Well I don't know about that new body, I don't know what it might be...I mean,..." And, you know, you talk about resurrection. People ask me this all the time. "How in the world is the Lord going to find these decomposed people if He's going to raise them?" One writer says, "The limitation of our present knowledge makes it almost impossible to comprehend the resurrection of the body. We raise questions about flesh and blood that is buried in a grave and reduced to the elements or burned to ashes or dissolved in the sea." And this is true, people ask me that. They say, "Can it be possible that these scattered elements will be reassembled with the same molecular structure as at the hour of death?"

Some have ridiculed this idea of resurrection by picturing a body in a grave and the body is dissolving in the action of the rain and the heat of the sun. And in time that dissolved body fertilizes the grass. And along comes a cow and eats the grass. The cow uses the grass to produce the milk which is then consumed at the breakfast table and nourishes another generation. And the critics say...The problem is going to be in the resurrection to decide which molecules belong to whom. And all of this is ridiculous and all of this shows a complete misunderstanding of the Bible. It comes from thinking only of natural and physical with no understanding of the spiritual. And that's the whole point that he makes when he says it is a building from God not made with hands, that is not a part of this creation.

So whatever those bodies are that come out of there, God's not going to have to sort through the grass and the cows to reassemble the molecules. Anyway, that's ridiculous because you've molecules all over the place that have long since disappeared. Do you know that if you're sixty years of age...or fifty years of age, you've had sixteen bodies? I realize they all look the same only decreasingly worse. But that's the fact. The latest scientist says the...the latest scientific data says that every three years your cells are replaced. So there are cells and molecules all over the place. In fact, I'll never forget reading some years ago that 75 percent of the dust in your house is you. Just keep the windows closed tight, the door shut tight, go on a vacation, come back you'll find out. You weren't there so nothing to dust. God can recycle you in this life in the physical realm, He can certainly recycle you in the spiritual realm and not have to sort out all that molecular stuff because it's not of this earthly creation.

Now with that in mind, let's go 1 Corinthians 15. Now in verse 36 Paul begins to describe the body but it's in response to the question of verse 35. First Corinthians 15:35, "Someone will say...and they do say this all the time...How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?" How am I going to understand a resurrection body? And he answers the question in four ways.

First, he gives an illustration from nature. Here's the best we can give, folks. He says this, "You fool," that's for all of you who have asked that question, "that which you sow does not come to life until it dies and that which you sow you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished and to each of the seeds a body of its own."

He says, first of all, let me explain the resurrection body with a simple illustration. You take an ugly brown little hard seed, put it in the ground and you get this...you get this yellow, red, purple stuff. There's no connection between this in appearance and that little ugly brown seed. For you on the tape, I'm referring to the flowers in front of the pulpit. I don't want to leave too much to your imagination. You look at that little hard seed and there is absolutely no way you could extrapolate out of that ugly little thing some of the magnificent glories of the beauty of flowers...or an oak tree, or a wheat field.

Well that's how it is, marvelous radical changes that are in no way visible when you look at the seed. And so when your body is planted in the ground in death, it doesn't in any sense resemble what is going to be yours in glory.

Then he gives a series of comparisons. First an illustration from nature, then a series of comparisons to try to explain what the resurrection body will be like. Verse 39, "All flesh is not the same flesh. There is one flesh of men and another of animals, or beasts, another flesh of birds, another of fish." So he's in the animal kingdom there, and he says...Look, they're all different. They're all different in terms of the animals that live in this world.

And then he goes up into space and he says there are heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies, the glory of the heavenlies is one, the glory of the earthly is another. That is the stars and moon and planets are different than the earth. And then in verse 41 there's one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, another glory of the stars for stars differ from stars in glory. There are all kinds of different stars with all kinds of different sizes and manifesting all kinds of different radiances. I mean, there's just all kinds of different bodies, on earth and in the heavens.

And then in verse 42 he says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead." It's just going to be different, as different as the sun is from the moon and the stars are from the sun. As different as the earth is from the heavenly bodies, as different as birds are from fish and beasts are from men. They're just all kinds of different bodies and all you need to know is the resurrection body is going to differ from all of them.

So an illustration from nature, and a series of comparisons. Then a series of contrasts help us to further understand this body. Verse 42, "It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

Now there you have it. What is it going to be? It is going to be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. That's all I can say. It is going to be imperishable, that is eternal, cannot die, does not diminish, does not decay, never deteriorates, never grows old, is not replaced. It is glorious, that it is it will manifest the glory of God, the fullness of all that God is that can shine through us. It is powerful, it will be able to do things on a heavenly and a spiritual plain, the likes of which we cannot even fathom. And it is spiritual, it transcends anything that we would know as natural.

So, an illustration from nature, a series of comparisons, and a series of contrasts. And then finally, he gives a prototype. He brings it right down to a prototype. You want to see a prototype? Verse 45, "So also it is written" and he quotes Genesis 2:7, "The first man, Adam, became a living soul."

Let's go back to the first man, Adam. Adam was a physical being and out of his loins when he became a living soul because the breath of God was breathed into him, out of his loins came the human race. We know Adam had a certain kind of body and we possess the same kind. We are from the loins of Adam.

"But the last Adam," who's the last Adam? Christ, and He's always compared to Adam because as Adam brought the physical human race, Christ is the source of the spiritual race. "The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." So this body is then not going to be like Adam, but like Christ. That's the point.

"So also it is written, The first man, Adam, because a living soul; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural then the spiritual." Adam's body plan came first, then Christ's. "The first man...verse 47...is from the earth, earthy, the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy, and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly." That simply says when you're in the world you're like Adam, when you're in glory you're like...whom?...Christ. First John 3:2, "When we see Him we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." We will be like Him in His resurrection body. That's it. That's the prototype.

Verse 49 sums it up, "Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The prototype is the resurrection body of Jesus Christ. So what you need to do is look at the Bible and just see what the resurrection body of Jesus Christ was like. It was marvelous.

He could go through walls with that thing and yet He was recognizable. And He could say, "Reach your hand thither and touch My side. Feel the nail prints in My hands." He could be touched. Well, in Luke 24 He walked, didn't He? He walked along the road to Emmaus, and didn't He talk? Yes. And down in verse 30 of Luke 24 He took the bread and blessed it and breaking it He began giving it to them. He sat down at the table and He started breaking bread and having a little meal with them. Over in verse 41 it says, verse 42, "They gave Him a piece of broiled fish and He took it and ate it before them." Whoa...He sat down at a table and had some bread and later on had a little fish.

You say, "Well how does a glorified body process a physical fish?" I have no idea. I really don't know and I really don't care. It doesn't matter to me that much. It's obvious that it didn't process that in the way that we would understand in a created world. And whatever kind of fish...and I don't imagine that they'll be any...but whatever kind of fish there could be or whatever kind of things we could conceive of eating, and we'll talk about that in Revelation later, in heaven would be different from the constitution of anything we know in this world.

But the point is, Jesus was recognizable. He walked. He talked and He even ate with His disciples in His glorified form. The point is, you're not going to be a floating fog. The point is, you're not going to

be Casper the Friendly Ghost. It will be you...it will be you.

Now go back to 2 Corinthians. And so, Paul is saying...Look, don't pine away because I face death, don't feel sorry for me because if this earthly tent which is my temporary house is dismantled, I'm going, folks, to a better place in a better neighborhood right into a building that God has prepared for my soul, a house not of this earthly creation that will last eternally in the heaven of heavens. I want that one. He's saying I'm sick of this one. I'm sick of crying every day of my life, "O wretched man that I am." I'm tired of the battering and the beating and the abuse that my body takes. I'm tired of the debilitating desires and the lusts and anxieties that the fallenness of my own human body perpetrates on my holy aspirations. I want to get rid of this thing and the sooner the better. That's a Christian view of death because the next body is the best.

Now next week I'm going to give you three more points. The next life is perfect, the next existence fulfills our purpose, and our next home is with the Lord. This reason is enough and the other three really make the case.

Why is it so hard for us to face death? It shouldn't be if we know what's waiting.

Father, we come to You now thankful for this great hope, for this great promise. O how gracious You are to have prepared us for glory. What wondrous love is this? Our souls thrill to it. And help us, Lord, though we would well long to live till Your return and thus escape the suffering that precedes death, help us, Lord, to put second on our list the longing to die if our work is done, realizing then that if the only reason we would stay here is to finish the work, then we better be about the work with all our passion and all our hearts, like Paul who could say, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain, and if I am to live on in the flesh, that will mean fruitful labor for me and I do not know which to choose, that I'm hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better, yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for Your sake. Lord, as long as we're necessary for the sake of others, keep us here, but oh how we long to leave and to get that next body which is the best. But until that time deliver us from all evil that we might give You fruitful labor and bring many into Your Kingdom. For our Savior's sake we pray. Amen.

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