

Facing Death Confidently, Part 2

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:2-8

Code: 47-32

Now this morning it is a great privilege for us again to return to 2 Corinthians chapter 5 because this is such an encouraging portion of Scripture...Facing Death Confidently. We're looking at this great section in chapter 5 verses 1 through 8 in which the apostle Paul explains his attitude as he faces death every day.

We remember, don't we, in chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians and verse 10 that he said he was always carrying about in his body the dying of Jesus. And in verse 11 he said he was being delivered to death for Jesus' sake. And in verse 12 he said death works in us. Here was a man who was living on the brink of death. There were Jewish people who wanted him dead. There were Gentile people who wanted him dead. There was the treachery and the difficulty of his journeys, the threat of illness and disease, the enemy of robbers and brigands who occupied the edges of the highways and set about to pounce on people and rob them and kill them. But mostly the hostility of those who were against his faith and against his message and he knew that death could take him any day. And he wants the Corinthians to know how he deals with this.

The key is down in verse 6, "Being always of good courage," and then in verse 8, "We are of good courage." That verb means to be cheerful. It means to have joy, to have happiness, to be confident, to be content. And that is how he faced death...confidently, contentedly, joyfully, cheerfully, patiently, peaceably. In fact, as we have been learning, he preferred it to life. That is an amazing way to live.

Here was a man who actually preferred to die. In Philippians chapter 1 verse 21 he said, "For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain." Far better, he said, to depart and be with Christ. Here was a man who faced death triumphantly.

Faith always has its greatest work to do at the very last. The reality of faith is most clearly manifest in the face of death. Paul had the kind of faith that was strong in life and strong in death. He finished well. He died with patience. He died with hope. He died with joy. He died with eagerness. And he left behind a tremendous witness to the integrity of his faith and his confidence in the truth of God's Word and the excellencies of God's ways. God is honored when believers die triumphantly. He is honored when they are confident in the face of death, even cheerful. And certainly our last and best witness to the love and devotion we have to our Lord is how we die.

In fact, if we don't groan for heaven like a prisoner longs for freedom, like a sick man longs for health, like a hungry man longs for food, like a thirsty man longs for a drink, a poor man longs for a payday, and a soldier longs for peace, then something is wrong. If we don't face death with joy and with anticipation, not the pain and suffering physically necessarily that's associated with it, but death itself, if we don't face it with joy and anticipation, then we have come to idolize the passing world. We have come to settle for fading joys. We have learned to be content with sinful surroundings, to accept and cherish our fallenness and to overestimate earthly relationships. And, honestly, we haven't set our affections on things above but on things on the earth.

To wish to avoid death is disloyalty to God. It is depreciation of the glories of heaven. It is insensitivity to the comparative worthlessness of earth's vanities. To wish to avoid death is coldness of love to Christ. And to wish to avoid death is little weariness with sin.

Paul faced death with good courage, confidence, eagerness. And he tells us why in these eight verses. The verb "being of good courage" used in both verse 6 and verse 8 tells us his attitude and the rest of the passage tells us why he had that attitude. And as I said, he faced death every day. Any day could be his last. It never caused him to compromise his message because death was no threat. Death was a welcome friend. Death would take him where he would rather be and make him what he'd rather become. So the reality of death, the threat of death never affected his boldness, it never affected his courage. In fact, if anything it only excited it because he desired to die because he would rather be in heaven and be with Christ.

He shows us how to face death confidently, triumphantly and joyfully. He had, unlike our society today, no obsession to escape death, rather he sought it. At the end of his life, he said, "I have finished the course, fought the good fight, kept the faith and now I'm ready to go." He looked death in the eye daily and never blinked. And he makes in this text some statements which show us why he faced death with such confidence.

First of all, and this is a review from last time, first of all, he knew the next body is the best. Look at verse 1, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house," that's referring to the body, the physical body in this life, like a tent, transient, temporary. "If it's torn down," or the verb means dismantled, "in its place we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We're going to go from a tent to a building. We're going to go from something that is a part of this creation to something that is not, a house not made with hands, which is a phrase referring to something not of this creation. We're going to go from something which is passing to something which is eternal in the heavens.

The beloved Apostle's body was aging, battered by suffering, worn out by journeys and hard work and battled in the struggle with sin, and he longed for his resurrection body. He longed for that perishable to put on what is imperishable, for that mortal to put on what is immortal, for that

corruptible to put on what is incorruptible. He longed for that natural body to go into the ground, as it were, and to be raised a spiritual body. He longed to have the body of his humble state, made like the body of the glory of Christ. He longed to be like Jesus Christ. He, along with all other believers, was groaning for the redemption of his body and he knew the next body is the best one. He was weary of the limitations, debilitations, temptations, iniquities of his flesh. And so he faced death with confidence and anticipation because he wanted that body that was the body of glory.

Secondly, and now moving into the text for today, he not only knew that the next body is the best but he knew that the next life is perfect...the next life is perfect. And that is in verses 2 through 4, follow the thought. "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...and here's the key...in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life."

What he wanted was life, real life, eternal life. That's what "life" there means. He wanted what is mortal, the end of verse 4, to be swallowed up in the fullness of the perfections of eternal life. That's what he was after. An immortal life, that's what he longed for. He wanted the full richness of the eternal life which God had prepared for His own. The keynote is that little phrase "by life," at the end of verse 4. I want everything to be swallowed up by eternal life, the perfect life.

Now back to verse 2 and we'll see how that unfolds, and this is a most interesting section because it gives us great insight into his personal heart, as he looked at death. He says, "For indeed," that emphasizes again the certainty of the glory of heaven that produces the desire to get there, "For indeed in this house we groan, or sigh." What he is saying is we are uncomfortable in this body. There's a certain kind of misery in this body. We are unfulfilled. We are incomplete. We are imperfect and we ache and we sigh and we yearn for the next life that this mortal may be swallowed up by that which is immortal, incorruptible and eternal. He's groaning with a passionate longing. He's weary of the frustrations of this life, the disappointments, the limitations, the weakness, the sins. And he wants to be free from all of this debilitating warring relentless living. The disabilities of earthly life plague him and he's had enough.

And so, he says, "For indeed because we know what awaits us, in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven." He mixes his metaphors a little bit there, doesn't he? He's got the house being put on as if it were clothing. But that's all right, we understand what he means. He's talking about his resurrection body but more than that he's talking about the perfections of immortality, this life that he refers to in verse 4. He groans with longing for the glorious manifestation of the sons of God, he groans to be made like Jesus Christ, to share His glory and His perfection. And it would be His desire to have it immediately, if he had his choice. He wanted it and he wanted it passionately.

In Romans 7:24 he says, "O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from the body of this death?" He didn't fear death. He feared life in this world, so debilitating, so corrupting. And he would choose to be delivered from it. And in the place of this body he wanted his glorified body. In verse 3 he says, "Inasmuch as we having put it on shall not be found naked." When he says "inasmuch as we" he indicates he's going to clarify verse 2. What do you mean...what do you mean longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven? What I mean, he says, is when we put that on we won't be found naked. That's an interesting thing. What does he mean by this?

Now follow this thought, it's very interesting, and there have been a lot of different interpretations of what he intends to say here. I think the simplest one will unfold to you as you listen to what I say. He says, "Let me clarify what I mean..." "When we put on the resurrection body we won't be naked," so being naked would be a condition in which you didn't have your resurrection body, right? I mean, that's very clear. Nakedness would be a condition when you didn't have your resurrection body because when you put it on you're not found...what?...naked. So without it you're naked.

What's he talking about? He's talking about that his hope as a believer is not some spiritual life to come, but a life to come that is spiritual but also involves a resurrection body. That's very important to him...very important. That's very important to the Corinthians and it's a very important issue in the New Testament, and let me tell you why.

In the Greek culture there was a reigning philosophy of dualism and dualistic philosophy basically said matter is evil and spirit is good. And I don't want to go into all the reasons why that was a convenient philosophy, one of them would be you could do anything in the physical and it had no consequences. So you can understand that it was popular. The spiritual was the highest and the noblest and the best. In fact, they even taught that some wayward wicked deity created matter and that the good God only creates spirit because spirit is good and matter is evil. And the ultimate goal for the religionists in the pagan system that was being espoused at that point was that they would be disembodied spirits.

In other words, they...they had as their hope to be freed from the confines and limitations of their bodies and they would deny violently that there would be any resurrection body since anything material was viewed as wicked. And the Corinthians, sad to say, had been influenced by this prevailing philosophy. So much had they been influenced by it that in his first letter, the 1 Corinthian epistle in the New Testament, he had to spend an entire chapter, chapter 15, an entire chapter, a long chapter, the longest chapter in the letter, defending bodily resurrection and telling them that there would literally be a real bodily resurrection for believers, and as well unbelievers, frankly, as Jesus indicated in John 5. That there is in the life to come a body, it's a spiritual one, it's an incorruptible one, it's an imperishable one, it's an immortal one, it's a different one, but it's nonetheless a body and a resurrection.

And so, Paul had to straighten them out and he wrote that long chapter which is really the only doctrinal chapter in the whole 1 Corinthian epistle of 16 chapters, because that was the prevailing doctrinal confusion at the church.

Well apparently, even after addressing it in that letter, it is still a problem. It was still a present issue so here he points out, "We are waiting to put on our resurrection body not to be found naked." He points to the truth that when his earthly tent is dismantled and he dies, God's plan is not for him to exist as some disembodied spirit, floating around in infinity somewhere as the Greek pagans taught. Their dualism, their hatred of the physical, their miscomprehension of creation, their seeing matter as evil led to the idea that death released the immortal soul into the nebulous freedom of the spiritual world. And they would be freed from the bondage of their body to float throughout eternity freely.

For example, a Roman thinker said the body is a tomb, we need to escape from it. Platonus could say that he was ashamed that he had a body. Another writer, Epictetus, said of himself, "Thou art a poor soul burdened with a corpse." No less than Seneca wrote, "I am a higher being and born for higher things than to be the slave of my body which I look upon as only a shackle put upon my freedom and so detestable a habitation dwells the free soul."

Paul wasn't looking for the release from his body, he was looking for the next body, one that was perfect in the perfections of immortality. Paul isn't looking for nirvana, some kind of unconscious extinction. He's not looking for freedom as a disembodied spirit. He's not waiting for the day when he's going to get absorbed into the infinite. He wants a body. He is a person. He was designed by God and promised by God he would have a body and he wants a body in which he can be like Jesus Christ. Jesus had a resurrection body and he wants one because he wants to be like Christ and he wants to serve God and glorify God and honor God and praise God through the means of that glorified body.

This dualistic philosophy had found its way so effectively into the church that it shows up in many different ways. In the church at Ephesus Paul had left Timothy there, at the end of Paul's ministry. You remember in 2 Timothy when he writes back to Timothy, he addresses some of the problems in that church that Timothy had to deal with. Listen to what he says in chapter 2, 2 Timothy 2:17, he mentions two men, Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth. How did they do that? Saying that the resurrection has already taken place and they have thus upset the faith of some. Their heresy was the resurrection has already passed.

Well you say, "What do they mean by that?" Well probably what they were saying was there's only one resurrection, it's a spiritual one, and you had it at your conversion and there won't be another one. The only resurrection you're going to get is the one in which you were united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, symbolized by baptism, and there isn't any other resurrection to hope

for. It was a denial, perhaps, of the physical resurrection of the future. So you can see that by virtue of what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, by what he says here, and by the reference in 2 Timothy 2 that there was a prevailing confusion about whether there would be a real resurrection. And Paul just throws it in to make it clear, we long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven inasmuch as we having put it on shall not be found naked. We're not looking to be floating spirits. The ancient philosophers may have longed for the nakedness of the soul, but Paul didn't. The ancients may have felt that the soul needed to be stripped of the body to enter its highest bliss, but Paul didn't. The highest expression that we will ever know in the glory of God's eternal heaven will be when we receive our bodies, our new resurrection bodies. And body-lessness to Paul and to any thinking Christian is a repulsive thought. We are to be a person, not a floating spirit lost in infinity.

In fact, Paul was so passionate about this, follow this, that he didn't even want to experience the period of time in which he would have to wait for his body. And I find that fascinating. He so longed to be like Christ, he so longed to have the perfect vehicle for expression of praise and service to God in eternity that he didn't even like the idea of having to wait around to get his body.

You say, "Well now wait a minute, did he have to wait around?" Yes, that's, you see, why I told you if he had his choice he would prefer to be raptured, right? Remember we went into that last week. If he had his choice he'd like to be raptured because at the Rapture there's a transformation of the body, right? And he would rather, just like you would, live until Jesus comes for His own. He comes and changes us and we don't experience death, we just get our new body right like that, in a twinkling of an eye.

On the other hand, if he were to die, he would have to wait till the Rapture to get his body because the bodies aren't raised unto the Rapture. First Thessalonians 4 makes it very, very clear. It says, "For even...verse 14...For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, for this we say to you by the Word of the Lord that we who are alive and remain till the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, the trumpet of God, the dead in Christ shall rise first." So when do they rise? They rise when Christ comes...when He comes. "Then we who are alive and remain are caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Well He hasn't come yet. So the saints that have died, their spirits are in heaven, but they haven't received their resurrection bodies yet. Their spirits are there. You say, "Well what are they like?" I don't know, their spirits are there but they don't have a form. Their presence is there without that resurrection body. You say, "Do they have their earthly body?" No, you can check anybody's grave, the earthly body is there, whatever is left of it. They don't have that. They're in a spirit form. And Hebrews 12:23 says, "They are the spirits of just men made perfect." Their spirits have been made perfect, they're perfectly holy and righteous and virtuous, they just have not yet received their

resurrection bodies. That awaits the Rapture of Jesus Christ.

So there is a waiting period for those who have died and who will die before the Rapture. If you live till the Rapture, you won't have that. If you die before the Lord Jesus comes, there will be a period of waiting. Though the sting of sin is removed, there is still a period of waiting.

You say, "Will we have the sense of...Boy, this is taking a long time? Paul's saying to himself, "I've been counting the days and do you realize I've been here for two thousand years? Is it like that?" No, it's not like that because you can't read time into eternity and a day with the Lord is as a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day. And when you get into that dimension you're not talking about time as we know time, but you are talking about the realization that something has not yet occurred.

You have an illustration of that, a perfect illustration of it in Revelation 6. You have the martyrs who have been slain for their faith in Christ and they are in heaven, under the altar in heaven, and they are praying and they say, "How long, O Lord, will it be before You judge?" So they had a sense that something was yet to be accomplished. I don't think there's the sense of time. In fact, I know there's not the sense of time in the eternal presence of God. But there is still the sense that something can be anticipated. It's not hours and days and weeks and months and years kind of anticipation, it's not pulling dates off a calendar kind of anticipation. But there is the sense that something has not yet occurred. I don't think it will be..for them it's not some prolonged period of agonizing waiting. Paul is simply saying if I have my choice I want to go right out of this life, right into the next life with the perfection that God has designed to give me in the image of Jesus Christ. That's what he's saying. If he had his choice. That's why I told you, his number one choice would be to be raptured. His number two choice would to die, if he has to, he'll die and be a spirit until he gets a body, and his third choice would be to stay here.

But he said, "Look, we want to...we want to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, we want to put it on so we're not found naked." He wanted that glorified body which would bring him to the perfection that was like his Lord, his risen Lord.

He didn't want the period of nakedness if he could avoid it. Though death and being with Christ even in that condition was better than life here, he was groaning for the perfection that his glorified body would bring. Look at verse 4, and this kind of pulls it all together. "For indeed while we're in this tent we groan," just like Romans 8:23, groaning for the redemption of our body, we groan. And what are we groaning about? Being burdened, weighed down by afflictions and weakness and limitations and particular by iniquities. Not because we want to be unclothed, we don't want to just float around as disembodied spirits, but to be clothed in order that what is mortal, that part of us which is mortal may be swallowed up by what is immortal, even eternal life. It's a wonderful thought. He's saying I want the fullness of everything God has for me.

I don't want to float in the spirit all over eternity. I want to enter into my full and perfect condition in my glorified humanity. I want to be literally swallowed up by the fullness of all that eternal life can bring. So, believers are not to be satisfied with the redemption of the soul, we long for the body which is the image of Jesus Christ. And that's why 1 John says when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is and he that has this hope in Him purifies himself. We should have that hope, the hope of a resurrection body, of a glorified body. We can't think of ourselves as a disembodied spirit. We know ourselves as a body, as a contained spirit and will be contained in an eternally glorious spiritual body. And that's what Paul longed for, what was holy, what was perfect, what was immortal, what was the fullness of God's intention for his glorious life.

St. Augustine wrote, "We are burdened with this corruptible body, but knowing that the cause of this burdensomeness...listen to this...is not the nature and substance of the body but its corruption. We therefore do not desire to be deprived of the body but to be clothed with its immortality." He says, "If Adam had not sinned, he would not have been divested of his body but would have been clothed upon with immortality and incorruption that his mortal body might have been absorbed by life, that is that he might have passed from his natural body to his spiritual body." If Adam hadn't sinned he would have gone from a natural to a spiritual body just smoothly without interruption. We are intended forever to possess a body through which we can glorify God. And Paul says I'm not satisfied until it comes. He faced death confidently then because he knew the next body is the best and the next life is perfection.

Thirdly, he also knew the next existence fulfilled God's purpose...the next existence fulfilled God's purpose. Look at verse 5. "Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge." This is great, this is just so rich. "Now He who prepared us for this" is God, past tense, the verb "prepared." In eternity past, by God's sovereign election, He chose us. In time, He redeemed us. All of that in order that He might fulfill in us His purpose.

What is future for believers, beloved, is prepared by God in the past. It all started in eternity when He made a covenant with the Son, when He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world and wrote our names in the Lamb's Book of Life, and that purpose of God in eternity past is not fulfilled until we get to heaven.

"This very purpose," very emphatically stated, this very purpose is God's purpose. God is the most emphatic word here in the Greek order of this sentence. God fulfilling His very purpose for us prepared us for a resurrection. That's God's purpose, for no other purpose, for not greater purpose and for no lesser purpose did God prepare us. It is His sovereign plan from all eternity bound up in His elective decree.

Go back to Romans 8, listen to these familiar words. "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God...verse 28...to those who are called according to His...what?...purpose." God makes everything work together. Why? Because He has a purpose. And He has to make everything work together to achieve His purpose. What's His purpose? "Whom He foreknew He predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son," that's His purpose. His purpose was to predestined some to be made like Jesus Christ. Now to be made like Jesus Christ you would have to have a glorified body as well as a perfectly holy nature because Christ is perfectly holy and He has a glorified resurrected body, doesn't He? So to be made like Christ was God's purpose. And that's why everything in your life and mine as Christians works out for good because God is moving us toward the fulfillment of His purpose which is to make us like His Son. He predestined us, verse 30, then He called us, then He justified us, and whom He justified He glorified. He'll bring us all the way to the fulfillment of the purpose. But the purpose isn't fulfilled in justification, it is fulfilled in...what?...glorification. It's only when we're glorified that we're made like Christ, when made in the image of Christ, and that's the purpose. We were chosen, predestined, justified, sanctified to be glorified in order that we might be made like Christ and to be made His image means to have both a resurrection body as well as a perfectly holy spirit.

And so, here is Paul looking at the purpose for which he exists. It transcends time. It's from eternity to eternity. Planned in eternity past, fulfilled in eternity future, time is a blip in the middle. Sometimes we lose sight of this. Sometimes we think we fulfill our purpose here, we don't. We look at our young people and we say, "You ought to make something out of your life. You need to discipline yourself, you need to learn a good work ethic, you need to read, you need to stimulate your mind, you need to grow and develop as a person. You need to study hard as a student, at school, you need to achieve something in the area of your giftedness, maximize your potential. Get to college. Do your best. Shine in whatever area you are able so that you can make something out of your life, so that you can achieve something." And that's all good advice, and that's all fine but when it's all said and done, it doesn't tell one millionth of the tale of what God's purpose is for you because that can only be fulfilled in eternity future. So in one sense, let's not get overburdened by that process, since life appears for a little time and then vanishes away like a vapor. Let's not overstate the case.

Ultimately, only what you do for the glory of Christ and what impacts your eternity is going to matter. And if that does, then that's marvelous. You say, "Are you saying we shouldn't fulfill our potential?" Not at all, I think you should use every ability God has given you. You should use every capability He has given you, become all that you can possibly be, make whatever contribution you can to the richness of life here, and to others around you. Do good unto all men through the skills that you have and the effort that you make and gain the self-respect and the measure of attraction that you can as a Christian who is the best at what he or she does. But when all that is said and done and you've done your very best, realize that that is a pittance compared to what God is going to make you into in the glory to come because His purpose is so vastly beyond anything we could ever imagine.

It's pretty heroic and grand for a poor persecuted man to stand erect in the presence of his enemies in the immediate prospect of death and avow such superiority to all sufferings and such invincibility and such confidence of glorious immortality. But it was how he thought and how he felt and it had nothing to do with a passing fancy. He didn't feel this way because some friend had pumped him up in the face of death or because he had a moment's boost in adrenalin. He didn't feel this way because he was feeling on the upside of his emotions. He faced death the way he faced death because he knew that this was the unfolding of God's purpose. And once he got past death, the purpose would be fulfilled.

And then he says in verse 5, "Who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge." The fact that the Holy Spirit lives in the life of a believer is God's pledge that the purpose will be fulfilled. Whatever the Lord begins, He finishes. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6, I don't see how you can equivocate it, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." When God starts it, He brings it to its end. When He started with predestination, He'll finish it with glorification. When He started with a promise in eternity past, He'll bring it to pass making you into the image of Jesus Christ. Nothing is going to interrupt that. Nothing is going to separate you from the love of Christ. That Romans 8 chapter goes on to say that, nothing is going to be able to change it...not life, death, principalities, powers, not things to come, things present, nothing. The purpose of God is fixed and to guarantee it He gives us the Spirit as a pledge. Pledge is arrabon in Greek, it means engagement ring, it means down payment. It means first installment. It means pledge. It means security. It means guarantee. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee. The fact that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit which you have of God, the fact that the Spirit of God has taken up residence in you, and leads and guides you as Romans 8 says, that you by the Holy Spirit can call yourself a child of God, the fact as Romans 5:5 says that the Spirit of God is shed abroad in your heart along with a love of God, the fact that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, that He abides in you, that every believer possesses the Holy Spirit, that Romans 8:9 says if you don't have Him you're not a Christian, He is the pledge, He is the guarantee that you will get to glory. It's a tremendous truth.

Back in chapter 1 of 2 Corinthians, verse 22, he said this right off the bat in the beginning. "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God...verse 21...who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge, as a down payment, as a guarantee." Ephesians chapter 1 says it most explicitly, verse 13, "You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession to the praise of His glory." The Holy Spirit is given as a guarantee that God is going to redeem His own possession and bring them to the praise of His glory. That's why we talk about eternal security. That's why it is ludicrous to believe that you could lose your salvation. It is absolutely absurd to believe that when you understand that this whole plan was set in motion in eternity past and will be brought to its fruition in eternity future, and you have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit who is the

pledge of God's promised inheritance to you in view of the redemption of His own possession to the praise of His own glory.

You see, if you lost your salvation, who's glory would be diminished? God's. It would detract from His glory because He couldn't pull off His purpose. The culmination of God's plan in redemption is to rescue His own possession, bring them to heaven so they can be forever testimonies to His amazing glory. And all who are saved are saved because they will be brought to the intended purpose of God in redemption.

And so, Paul says...Look, I look at death confidently not only because the next body is the best, and the next life is perfect, but because the next existence fulfills God's purpose for my life. This is why I was made.

One last point, Paul faced death confidently because the next dwelling was with the Lord...the next dwelling is with the Lord. And here, as so often, we come to the pinnacle of heavenly anticipation...a new body, that's one thing; perfection, that's another thing; fulfillment, that's another thing. But beyond all of those here is the greatest reality, verse 6, "Therefore," with all of that as a background and a foundation, "being always of good courage." That's not a temporary feeling, as I said, not a passing emotion, but always confidently facing death. Why? "Because we know that while we are at home in this body we are absent from the Lord, for we walk by faith and not by sight, we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather than to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord." There's the final point. He wants to be with the Lord.

You say, "Well doesn't he love the people here?" Yeah, but he loves the Lord more and really it's that simple. Who do you love the most? Always of good courage. He faces his funeral with complete confidence, cheerfully. Literally it means to be of good cheer, to be happy. His attitude is not the result of an emotional high, as I said, it's a settled confidence. And, frankly, as I pointed out at the beginning, to despair about death is un-Christian. Life is just a race to finish. It's just a battle to win. It's just a stewardship to honor. And when the race is done and the battle is over and the stewardship is discharged, then the victory, then the triumph. There's no reason to clutch this life, to try to hold on as long as possible.

The only reason to stay here is service and when service is done we should be as eager as Paul to leave. There's no reason to sorrow when a beloved Christian leaves to have some morbid feeling of loss. Oh there's a natural feeling of loss, of course, but it should never descend to anything morbid because when a believer goes into the presence of the Lord, that's...that's the fulfillment of everything.

He says we're of good courage because of what we know. How do you know these things? We know them from Scripture. And what we know is that while we're at home in the body, we are absent

from the Lord. That's pretty clear. While we're in the physical, in the flesh, in the world, we're away from the Lord.

Now he is not saying that we have no contact, we contact through prayer, He's with us, He lives in us by His Spirit, we are in communion, He's intimate, He's a friend sticking closer than a brother, all of that. But there is a sense obviously in which we are separated from God. And we long for that separation to end. As the deer pants after the waterbrook, so pants my soul after Thee, O God. Whom have I on earth beside Thee, whom have I in heaven but Thee, the psalmist says in Psalm 73. First Thessalonians 4, the good part is, "Then shall we always be with the Lord." It's heavenly homesickness that he's talking about here. It's the longing and the passion and the desire to be with God. It's what Abraham felt when he said he was looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. In Revelation 21 we've been studying about heaven, in verse 3 it says three times that God will be among them, and God will be among them, and God will be among them. And down in verse 23 it says the same thing. And the Lamb will be there, and God will be there. In chapter 22 verse 3, and God will be there, and the Lamb will be there. And heaven is where we have intimate fellowship without separation in the presence of God and the Lamb.

At this point he adds in verse 7, "We walk by faith, not by sight." This explains how we can live and serve an invisible God. How we can hope for an invisible place, a place we can't even see. We do it by faith. It's not a vague superstition. We believe and we live by that belief. It's not a belief in nothing, it's a belief in the Word of God that tells us all of this. We believe in the Word of God that tells us about heaven. We believe in the Word of God that tells us about a resurrection and a resurrection body. So we live by faith, faith in the Word of God.

We're not familiar with the forms of heaven. Look, I do my best to understand Ezekiel's description. I do my best to understand John's description. I don't get any help from Paul because when he came back he couldn't tell us anything. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who do not see yet believe." We believe, we don't see. I can't see heaven, none of us can see heaven. We walk by faith...faith in the fact that the Word of God promises heaven, tells us about heaven, tells us how to get there and that the Word of God is true and we bank our eternal destiny on that truth.

And so, Paul says we face death with resolute, constant confidence, even in the most severe suffering and affliction because we walk by faith, faith in the Word of God. We haven't seen it, except with the eye of faith.

And then verse 8, "So we're of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."

What's he saying? He's saying heaven is a better place. The Word of God says so and we believe it. And because it's a better place, we'd rather be there. And what makes it a better place is it is at

home with the Lord. I love that phrase. We're of good courage. In the face of death we have hope, joy, confidence, because we prefer to be with the Lord. It's again heavenly homesickness. I hope you understand what homesickness is. I hope you had that kind of home where there's something really wonderful and special about going home and being with mom and dad. I hope you have that kind of home now where when you're away for a long period of time, over a prolonged absence, there's something in your heart that is excited about coming home. I hope you have that toward heaven. I hope you long to be so much in the presence of God and Jesus Christ that you have a heavenly homesickness. Paul says we prefer to be absent from the body. If you want to know what I want, I'd like to get out of this body and get there where I belong.

He didn't want to be a disembodied spirit but he was willing to be that for a period, if necessary, if he could be with the Lord as soon as possible. This is not a morbid death wish, by any means, this is triumphant hope built on love and love seeks its highest, purest form of fellowship with its object. If you love somebody, it's nice to write them a letter, personally I'd rather make a phone call, wouldn't you? And if I had my choice, rather than make a phone call, I'd rather be with them. And personally if I would rather have my choice, I'd rather be with them alone than be with them with a bunch of people.

I understand that my communication with the Lord is through letters and phone calls spiritually, isn't it? I have the letter in the Word and the phone calls are in my prayer life. But if I had my choice, I'd like to be with Him. And if I had my choice, when I'm with Him I'd like to be with Him alone in the sense that He would give me some personal attention, and that's exactly what's going to happen in heaven. And Paul says I'd rather be there, nothing in this world can match that.

Well, you're dying and so am I...the question is, are you facing that reality with confidence and anticipation? Psalm 115:16 says, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." The death of the saints is precious to the Lord, it ought to be precious to us if it's precious to Him. "In My Father's house are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am there you may be also." The whole issue is being where He is.

Do you love Him enough to be homesick to be where He is? A new body, perfection, fulfillment, and communion without interruption in the presence of God and Christ, that's what gave Paul confidence in dying. Let's pray.

Lord, God, we are so blessed to have this great truth given to us and not just the truth but the promise that it will be applied to us. We thank You that You have set us on a heavenly course and we dropped our burdens at the cross and we've been making our way like pilgrim to the celestial city. And we long to be there. This world holds nothing for us and we do need to confess our sins, sins of settling for passing things, fading joys, being content with sinful surroundings, accepting and

cherishing our fallenness and overestimating earthly relationships. We've been disloyal to You, we haven't appreciated heaven, we haven't really seen the comparative worthlessness of earth's vanities. Our disinterest in heaven is evidence of our coldness of love to Christ and the fact that we really aren't weary of sin. Forgive us for that. And may we be numbered among those who love His appearing, who love the thought of being with You. As the psalmist said, "I will be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness." Till then, no satisfaction. That's our prayer. And our first choice would be like Paul's, Lord, we just as soon live till the Rapture and be transformed, rather than have a period of waiting for our glorified body. But, Lord, our second choice would be that we would be with You when our work is done. Help us to be faithful to the end and then take us to be with You.

Father, we pray for those who are not ready to die, who do not know Christ, who do not have the hope of eternal life, whose sins are not forgiven, who will bear the punishment of their iniquity forever. O God, may this be the day when they fall before You and repent of their sin and accept the provision of Jesus Christ and by humble simple trust in Him receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. In the Savior's name and for His glory, we ask. Amen.

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