



## What Happens When You Die? – 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 January 6, 2007 – GCSP

For as long as mankind has been alive on this earth, he has had a fascination with and/or a fear of death. This fascination is based on the fact that it is an unknown entity. The search for the unknown or the unknowable has consumed countless eons of time. On any given day of the week and at just about any moment of the day, you can find a program on television that deals with the paranormal, or with ghosts, or with spirits, or with the afterlife – and 99.9% of them are nothing but hogwash because they all ignore what God has to say on the subject.

The fascination with telepathy, clairvoyance, mediums, séances, horoscopes, psycho kinesis, out of body experiences, near death experiences, apparitions, ghosts, reincarnation, etc., etc., etc., all have their basis in mankind's search for what happens when you die. And all can very easily be used by Satan if we are not careful to search the Scriptures in regards to what God says on issues like these and how we are to respond to them.

On the other end of the spectrum you have people who want nothing to do with death. They avoid talking about it, they avoid reading about it, they walk out of the room or change the channel when the topic of death comes up on the television, and they find excuses to not attend funerals even when it is a close friend or a family member.

Two weeks ago I told you we would be completing up our series entitled "Chosen by God" this week and next. I have once again lied to you – I think I need to preface all future comments on what upcoming sermons will be with the phrase, "If the Lord is willing."

With the events of this past week, God has not allowed to me to get focused on the "Chosen by God" series. With the death of our friend and brother Wayne's physical body and the homecoming of his eternal soul in heaven, the Holy Spirit has impressed upon me to spend at least this week preaching on the topic, "What Happens When You Die?" So we will do so tonight and see where the Holy Spirit leads next week.

Turn in your Bibles to **2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10**. There are many passages in God's Word that deal with what happens to us when we die, but I think this one probably is the clearest. Let's read.

Let's Pray.

### **4:16**

Verse 16 begins with the word "**Therefore.**" Whenever we see a verse opening with this word, what are we supposed to do? We must back up some to get the proper context of what he is about to say. Sometimes we have to go back several chapters, sometimes to the beginning of the book, sometimes the context is the whole message of the Bible, and sometimes we only have to go back a few verses. In this case we could gain some context by going all the way to the beginning of **2 Corinthians**, but the primary context is only **verses 7-15**. So let's read those before I go on.

### **2 Corinthians 4:7-15**

In the midst of all of the suffering Paul has endured, and in the pain and frustration of his body aging, Paul says, "**we do not lose heart.**"

Let me read for you from the New Living Translation, one of the most vivid and somewhat depressing passages of Scripture concerning old age to give you a contrast in attitudes between the Apostle Paul and Solomon:

**Ecclesiastes 12:1-8** – “Don’t let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and no longer enjoy living. It will be too late then to remember Him, when the light of the sun and moon and stars is dim to your old eyes, and there is no silver lining left among the clouds. Your limbs will tremble with age, and your strong legs will grow weak. Your teeth will be too few to do their work, and you will be blind, too. And when your teeth are gone, keep your lips tightly closed when you eat! Even the chirping of birds will wake you up. But you yourself will be deaf and tuneless, with a quavering voice. You will be afraid of heights and of falling, white-haired and withered, dragging along without any sexual desire. You will be standing at death’s door. And as you near your everlasting home, the mourners will walk along the streets. Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don’t wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. ‘All is meaningless,’ says the Teacher, ‘utterly meaningless.’”

When Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes he had just come out of an extended period of turning his back on God and living a life of sin and idolatry. When you exclude God from your life and disobey His Word, life is meaningless. Depression is natural for those who ignore Scripture. Peggy Lee had a hit song in the sixties called, “Is That All There Is?” It is an anthem that Solomon could have written during his backslidden condition. No matter what pleasures you indulge in while on this earth there, will always be an emptiness; a void; a hole in your life. You will find yourself in the company of Solomon and Peggy Lee asking yourself, “Is that all there is?”

But notice the contrast with the Apostle Paul – “**we do not lose heart.**” Solomon partook in every pleasure known to mankind, whether God approved or not, and he is depressed beyond measure. Paul has faced just about every trial, struggle, persecution, and pain known to mankind, and he is still encouraged, at peace, and full of hope.

Our bodies are in a state of decay, and if we only focus on that we will fall into a deep depression. Paul gives us the solution of how to balance the deteriorating state of our physical bodies – “**our inner man is being renewed day by day.**”

We must resist joining the world in being obsessed with our physical bodies and with our appearance. Yes, we should take care of ourselves, eat healthy foods, avoid the things we know are damaging to our health, and get some regular form of exercise, but we cannot obsess over these things.

The Apostle Paul tells us in **2 Timothy 4:7b-8**, “**Train yourself in godliness, for the training of the body has a limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come**” (HCSB).

Breaking out of the mold of the world requires discipline. Apart from discipline and training for the purpose of godliness you will conform to the practices and philosophies of this world. You will be obsessed with your body, you will be obsessed with what other people think of you, you will be obsessed with having your own way, you will be obsessed with desiring a life of ease, and you will never be satisfied and content with anything. Your life will be a roller coaster of emotional highs and lows. You’ll blame God for all the trouble you face and you will be less likely to acknowledge Him when anything good happens in your life.

#### **4:17**

There is a connection between the amount and level of affliction we experience on this earth and quality and level of glory we experience in eternity. I can’t tell you what that is or how it works but I can tell you that our response to the trials and tribulations we face will also play a part. If we “Count it all joy” as James says in his epistle, meaning we accept what God allows to come

into our lives as a blessing from His hand, we will experience a deeper glory and reward in heaven than if we grumble and complain through our trials on this earth.

And if we can get it through our thick skulls that everything on this earth is temporary and everything in heaven is eternal we may have an easier time dealing with our problems here.

We are not promised a Garden of Eden life right now – that is for the life to come. Don't fret and whine about your current circumstances – get over it! Your spiritual standing or relationship with God is not reflected in your personal circumstances! God is not ignoring you or punishing you every time things go wrong in your life. This is only temporary and the glory we will experience in the future cannot even compare to the "**light affliction**" we are experiencing today!

#### **4:18**

Some of you read this verse and may think that Paul has been hit in the head one too many times. How can we look at the things we cannot see? He answers that question in chapter 5, verse 7, when he says "**we walk by faith, not by sight.**" But what Paul is saying is that everything around us, everything we can see, and touch, and smell, is not what we are living for. All of the things and the stuff we accumulate on this earth is temporary and will rot away at some point in time. All of the pain we feel, all of the trials we experience, all of the sorrow and hurt will vanish someday because they too are temporary. Get your eyes and your mind off of the things you can see and focus your attention on the eternal things of God.

**Romans 8:18-24**, says, "**I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently**" (NIV).

#### **5:1**

Notice the metaphors Paul uses. He calls our bodies an "**earthly tent.**" What comes to your mind when you think of a tent? I know some of you have experienced camping out and you have spent several days and nights living in a tent. And some of you, God bless you, actually enjoy it. I got to be honest with you, I think you're nuts! Give me a bed in an enclosed building any day of the week and twice on Sundays.

A tent is a temporary dwelling. It is not designed for longevity. A tent gets you through for a temporary time frame. Even those of you who enjoy spending some time in tents would have to admit that you wouldn't want that to be your permanent home. And that's the point Paul is making. Right now, while we are on this earth and in these bodies, we are living in tents. In heaven we have awaiting us a permanent, secure "**building from God.**" And even if we can make a comparison in our minds between a tent and a building; understand that we can't begin to imagine the difference between our physical bodies right now compared to our heavenly bodies in eternity.

#### **5:2-4**

The use of the metaphors in these verses can make it a little confusing. Let's read a few other passages from Scripture and then I will try to help you make sense of this. Go back a few pages to:

### **1 Corinthians 15:50-58**

Paul speaks of our incorruptible, imperishable bodies but he gives us a clue as to when we will receive them in **verse 52** – “**at the last trumpet.**”

### **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

Here Paul speaks of the time when all Christians will be joined together. Those who physically died before this event and those who are still alive when this event takes place. This event is the rapture of the church – and we do not have the time to discuss when this will happen. If the Lord wills we will deal with this at some point in the future.

Don't turn there, but in **Hebrews 12:23**, the writer refers to “**the spirits of the righteous made perfect**” (NASB). In the context of Hebrews he is speaking of believers who have physically died.

With these passages as a backdrop, when we re-read what Paul has to say in our text in **2 Corinthians 5:2-4**, we will get a better handle on what he is saying. With the knowledge that when we physically die we will part with our bodies, or “**earthly tents**” and also with the knowledge that we will not receive our new bodies, or “**building from God**” until the “**last trumpet.**” I believe this means we get our new bodies at the rapture, some believe we don't get our new bodies until the Second Coming. Again, we will not take the time tonight to explore the two theories – for the purpose of what we are trying to accomplish tonight it doesn't matter. What does matter is Paul is saying that if given the choice, he would rather be alive when the rapture happens and thus go straight from his physical body to his eternal body.

When he uses the metaphor of “**being found naked**” in **verse 3**, he is merely speaking of that time period when Christians are in between bodies. Those who have died and are in heaven right now are there in spirit form. Their souls are in the presence of God but they are waiting for the rest of us to join them before they get their eternal bodies.

Don't get too wrapped in thinking about this truth. Your mind will go in circles and you will come up with hundreds of questions that God has not chosen to answer for us in the Bible. The dead in Christ are not simply floating around in limbo. They are in the presence of the Lord, and they are whole, and they are of sound and perfect mind, and they are enjoying the glory of God, and they are experiencing unspeakable joy – they simply are awaiting the day when the rest of the church joins them to experience their new bodies.

So all Paul is saying is that his ultimate desire would be to immediately move from one body to the other. But Paul knows that that is not in his control, so he then expresses his second choice in **verse 6** and **verse 8**.

### **5:6; 8**

Paul is saying that if he dies before the rapture, and he did, he would prefer that to continuing to live on this present earth in his human body. He would much rather be in the presence of the Lord in spirit form, awaiting his eternal body with all the other saints, than to continue living in his “**decaying outer man.**”

Paul gives us his last preference in **verse 7** and **verse 9**.

### **5:7; 9-10**

Paul's third preference is to remain on earth in his present body and to be pleasing to the Lord. He knows and understands that God has a plan for his life and for the lives of all of His children. And he also knows that this plan may include the rapture of the church to be delayed and that his physical death may also be delayed. So if God chooses to leave him with the third choice of remaining on earth in his corruptible body, then he will accept God's will and live a life that is pleasing to Him no matter what circumstances he faces, and no matter what pain he has to endure, and no matter what persecution awaits him.

So what happens when we die? We are immediately ushered into the presence of the Lord and all that it implies.

That is of course, if you have verbally confessed that Jesus Christ is the Lord of life your and you have genuinely believed in your heart that God raised Him from the dead. If you have not done this, when you die you will immediately be ushered into eternal torment in hell. All of these suicide terrorists who are expecting eternal bliss with 70 virgins are awaking to the bleak reality of God's judgment in hell. But you don't have to be a terrorist to go there, you just have to reject God's gift of salvation. You just have to choose to try and make heaven by your own efforts – that's what the terrorists are doing. You just have to stubbornly resist the Holy Spirit's call to eternal life.

Let's pray.