

Hope

ETERNAL HOPE

Focal Verses • 2 CORINTHIANS 4:16–5:10

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **ACKNOWLEDGE** the hope Paul, faced with death, manifested in God's eternal promise; **EXPERIENCE** awe in the faith of family and friends who are facing their mortality; and **DEVELOP** a growing trust in God's promise of eternal life through faith.

In Focus

Selena knew that if she didn't hurry, she would be late for the funeral at the church this morning. As the lead usher, she was responsible for ensuring the other ushers were in place, handing out funeral programs, and seating guests.

Her hands were shaking as she combed out her hair. Fred, the 24-year-old son of one of the church's long-time members, had been killed in a car wreck on Saturday night. The two passengers in Fred's car were still hospitalized, both in critical condition. Fred had been thrown from the car and died at the scene. He came from a large family and had been a popular young man in high school and at the local community college.

Although Fred's parents were faithful church members, Selena had only seen Fred in church on Mother's Day. She ran into him several times outside of the church and had even invited him to come and visit more often. Fred always laughed and teased that he was too young for that "church stuff."

Selena had ushered at enough funerals to know that there would be a lot of crying; she didn't mind that part. It was the screaming and having to restrain guests from throwing themselves into the casket that bothered her. While Selena understood that grief was natural, the funerals of young people were always chaotic. She wondered what Pastor Bob Jenkins would say during the eulogy to provide hope and comfort for Fred's family and friends, because Pastor couldn't possibly have known Fred that well.

How do you offer hope and comfort to others in the face of death? How does knowing Christ change how we understand death?



Keep in Mind

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Corinthians 5:1, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV 2 Corinthians 4:16 For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:)

8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

The People, Places, and Times

Heavenly Bodies. Today, we spend so much time and money on our physical bodies while trying to ignore the fact that the aging process is an inevitable part of life. That is not to say that we shouldn't take care of our bodies by developing healthy eating habits and getting proper rest and exercise. But we must realize that the bodies we now possess are not going to function forever. Still, Christians can rejoice that one day we will receive a heavenly body that is specifically designed for heaven. Our earthly bodies are contrasted with that which is spiritual, which can exist in the heavenly realm. There is a realm for physical (natural) existence and there is another for spiritual existence. Each realm has a distinct body fashioned for it, just like each season has its own clothing.

Judgment Seat. The judgment seat was found in a palace or tent where court proceedings were held. The emperor or general would sit in this highly elevated, throne-like chair to conduct trials and make pronouncements of extreme importance. Pontius Pilate and King Herod conducted business from such a seat. In the great halls, all eyes could easily find this focal point as the chair's importance was obvious.

Background

Paul founded the church at Corinth and reminded the young assembly of believers that, because he was their organizer, he had a right to speak regarding their management. The big issue rampant in the church was whether Paul was a genuine apostle. Paul asserted that he was and sent Titus to deliver that message. Titus was

well received and Paul rejoiced at the happy news when he met his messenger in Macedonia.

In addition to this issue of apostolic authority, the Corinthians wondered about how they were to deal with persecution and death. Shouldn't God protect them from these harsh realities since they are faithfully following Him? Paul turns the question on its side, saying that these harsh realities are nothing compared to the glory that awaits the Christian in heaven after death. Chapter 5 begins with Paul comparing the earthly body with the heavenly body as the difference between a tent and a building. The tent is a temporary dwelling while the building is solid. Paul hoped to be transformed into his heavenly body rather than go through the nakedness of death. The Platonists, Pythagoreans, and Gnostics during the time of Paul's writings saw the body as a prison for the soul and yearned to be rid of it. Paul saw the new body as a desirable garment which would cover the soul.

At-A-Glance

1. Light Suffering (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)
2. New Clothing (5:1–5)
3. Confident Living (vv. 6–10)

In Depth

1. Light Suffering (2 Corinthians 4:16–18)

Part of the means used by God in this transforming, renewing process is suffering (cf. 1 Peter 4:1, 13–14). Paul compared the sufferings he had experienced, severe as they were, to light and momentary troubles, pressures, and hardships. They were nothing in view of the eternal glory that would be his when he would be in Jesus' presence and would be like Him (1 Corinthians 15:49). Paul is here weighing his sufferings on God's scales. He discovers that his sufferings are light

when compared to the weight of glory God has stored up for him. These verses bring wonderful assurance to the believer in times of suffering. How important it is for us to live with eternity's values in view. Life takes on new meaning when we see things through God's eyes.

Paul introduces a paradox to the unbeliever, but a precious truth to the Christian. We live by faith, not by sight; this faith enables the Christian to see things that cannot be seen (Hebrew 11:1–3). The world thinks we are crazy because we dare to believe God's Word and live according to His will. We pass up the things that people covet because our hearts are set on higher values.

How are Christians supposed to "look" at "things which are not seen"?

2. New Clothing (5:1–5)

The human body is the vehicle of expression for the soul, the inner man. It is referred to as an earthly tabernacle, a temporary tent. In this body, we "groan," indicating both physical and mental expressions. The body, wonderful though it is, has a built-in mortality factor, and will be torn down and dissolved. When it is dismantled, we call it death.

In stark contrast to the temporal scene, is Paul's emphasis upon the future—our heavenly, eternal abode. In heaven, we will be at home with the Lord. Paul voiced his strong desire for this state of permanence (Philippians 1:21–23). Our heavenly, or eternal, body is compared to fresh, new clothing. In Paul's thought, clothes really did "make the man." The life that now is will be engulfed by the life that is real—life eternal.

How does the Spirit act as a guarantee of our new life in heaven?

3. Confident Living (vv. 6–10)

The Apostle Paul affirms that the tug toward heaven continues while we serve on earth. The brave continue to live as a testimony to the Lord. Even death is a testimony as we express

confidence in what lies ahead. Death is not the worst thing that can happen to a Christian. He who created us has risen from the grave, and He will keep His promise to raise us also!

Paul also tells his readers, “to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (v. 8). We cannot live in both our temporary and our eternal, glorified bodies at the same time. Our temporary bodies are temples of the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:19) but more is yet to come. Our incompleteness urges us to desire the permanent house Jesus is preparing for us.

Paul ties it all back together. They should not fear painful trials on this earth because it’s all going to be worth it when we get our heavenly bodies and God judges our perseverance. One day believers will have to stand before the judgment seat of Christ to be judged for what they have done. When God inspects us, He expects to find the fruit in our lives. In making choices, we should first ask whether God will be pleased with our choices.

Can others see Jesus Christ in you? Do you live to make a positive difference in the world?

Search the Scriptures

1. What do the afflictions that we face today actually do for us? (v. 17)
2. What are the things seen and the things which are not seen according to Paul? (v. 18)
3. What should be the aim of a believer? (5:9)
4. What will happen to a believing Christian at the judgment seat of Christ? (v. 10)

Discuss the Meaning

1. Paul says that our temporary earthly dwelling is a tent, while our permanent heavenly dwelling is a house. Where else do we see this imagery in Scripture? What implications does that have for understanding Paul here?

2. Discuss the following phrase: We are not free to live until we aren’t afraid to die. How would such an idea affect our living? How can this idea be blended with an attitude of safety and caution?

Liberating Lesson

Adversities can serve a definite purpose in our lives. C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Problem with Pain*, says, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Think of our society today. Most of the world’s achievements have come through hardship and pain, including most professions, inventions, personal accomplishments, relationships, parenting, great leaders, and church ministries. Take time and talk about how pain has been a driving force even in your life. There is truth to the saying: “No pain no gain.”

Application for Activation

While we still do not like pain in our lives, we must see the value that it plays. Think of someone who is going through tough times. Using the lesson today, think of ways you could encourage them. Spend time this week praying that God would give you the right words to uplift and motivate others.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Paradox. PAIR-uh-docks.

Platonist. PLAY-ton-ist.

Pythagoreans.

Puh-THAH-gore-EE-ans.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 267

Luke 20:1–47
Psalm 107:9–22

DAY 268

Luke 21:1–38
Psalm 107:23–32

DAY 269

Luke 22:1–46
Psalm 107:33–42

DAY 270

Luke 22:47–71
Psalm 108

DAY 271

Luke 23:1–56
Psalm 109:1–15

DAY 272

Luke 24:1–53
Psalm 109:16–25

DAY 273

John 1:1–51
Psalm 109:26–31

Notes
