

Living a life that matters

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- [0 : 00] I want to start by asking you a question, and I want you to be honest with yourself. How easy would it be for you to give up this life in exchange for the life to come? Think about that. Eternal life. The new creation that God is planning that we've heard about this morning already in passages like Isaiah.
- So we know it's coming, Christians. That's part of our faith. It's in our creeds, that belief in a life to come. And my question to you this morning is, if you could go there right now and never come back to this life, how quickly would you take up that offer?
- You see, some people would take it up in a flash. People who are really suffering. People who are really not happy here. Without hesitation, they would say absolutely. But others, probably the majority of us, if we're honest, I think we aren't that keen to leave this life just yet, right?
- I think if we were honest with ourselves, we'd say, oh, I'm not so sure right now. You know, yes, later, but right now I've got things to do here in this world. We've got goals. We've got relationships here. Things we want to achieve in this life.
- And so we're actually still quite attached to it. We're actually still quite attached to life on earth if we're honest with ourselves. And that's why we need passages like this in our Bibles.
- [1 : 22] Because these passages, this passage challenges us to consider how much of our focus is actually still on this world as opposed to the world to come. I mean, look, for example, in your Bibles at what the Apostle Paul's attitude to this life is.
- In verse 2, he says, And in verse 8, for example, We would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.
- We would prefer to be away. Is that true, though? Is that how you really feel? That's how Paul felt. And you can understand through all his suffering he went through.
- You can understand why he felt that. But do you feel that? Would you really prefer to leave this life and be in eternity right now if you had the chance? Because it sounds almost suicidal, doesn't it?
- And yet we know Paul wasn't suicidal. But we also know because he has this attitude, this is the right attitude to have as a Christian. That is why he's sharing that in this passage.
- [2 : 28] He's encouraging us to examine ourselves and ask whether this is our attitude to life on earth. And it's in this passage, as we look at it this morning, we'll find out both why that's the right attitude to have and how we can have that attitude as Christians.
- How we can learn to share that eternal perspective and that perspective on this passing away world. Because having that attitude is actually vital if we want to live the life that God has called us to.
- If we're going to live effectively in this life, we have to have the right perspective on it. And that's what this passage is here to do. So we're going to look in some more detail at this passage.

But before we get into it and answer those questions, it's important right at the beginning to clear up a common misunderstanding of what Paul means in verse 8 in this passage.

Because unless we understand what he's meaning here, we won't really understand the rest of the passage. So he says here, he would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

[3 : 32] So I just want to pause before we get into the rest of the passage. Talk about this verse for a few minutes because this is one of the verses that people use to support a very common popular idea that after we die, our souls leave our bodies.

And we enter into a kind of eternal spiritual state floating around in this kind of ethereal spiritual existence. And it's a very common view.

People often just assume that's exactly what eternity is and that's what's going to happen. And they say, well, that's what Paul must mean here. It's funny. We tend to read the Bible in terms of a framework we've already got.

And we don't realize we're doing it. But people will read this verse, verse 8, where Paul says we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. And they say, well, obviously he's talking about leaving the body in his soul and being in a spiritual state with the Lord.

But that's not what it means. And that understanding of our souls leaving our bodies, very common as it is, is actually not what the Bible teaches. But lots of people still believe it.

[4 : 41] And I think it's also that belief is one of the main reasons that we cling to this life so much. If this is the only place we're going to be physical, then we want to stay here for as long as possible.

I don't really want to be a disembodied soul, to tell you the truth. I like living in a body. I like eating and feeling. You know, a disembodied soul can't enjoy a medium-rare pepper steak with potato wedges on the side.

No wonder we don't want to leave this world. No wonder we cling to this life if we think that where we're going won't be as physical as this life is.

But that's the thing. What we've got to understand, what the Bible teaches, is that it will be, in fact, I think this passage teaches it will be even more so. Even more physical. Physical. It will be the ultimate of what this broken version of a physical world is meant to be.

There will be things far better than medium-rare pepper steaks to eat. And without any animals needing to die, the vegans will be pleased to know. See, the life to come, as we learn in the Bible, is even more of the good things of this life, not less.

[5 : 53] And unless we get that, unless we have a proper understanding of the life to come, we will always be clinging to this life. And so that's why this passage is here.

And Paul implies that, even in these verses, that idea that the life to come is more of this life. So, have a look at verse 1 in your Bible. He says, For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

Okay, so here he's comparing our life in this world with our life in the world to come, as believers, those who have been saved through Christ. But look how he compares them, the images he uses.

He describes our current life on this earth, in this body, as living in a tent, living in a temporary and flimsy dwelling. But the life to come, how does he describe that?

As a building. A building is better than a tent in every possible way, right? It's not less than a tent. It's exactly what a tent is, but better. Which means that as Christians, who have found the way to eternal life in Jesus, our physical life won't come to an end when we die.

[7 : 06] It'll be replaced by something else physical, but better in every respect. And that's the first thing we need to understand about this passage. It's not talking about a separation of soul from body, because the Bible doesn't teach that.

We get that idea from Greek philosophy, not from the Bible. In fact, I mean, I don't want to go into a study, we can go into this more in detail in our growth groups, but in the Old Testament, the word for soul, the Hebrew, it's nefesh.

It actually means your whole being, not just a disembodied part. The nefesh includes your body. It's never something that is separate from your body. The Bible doesn't teach that.

Anyway, as I say, we can discuss this more in our growth groups, but in the meantime, just understand, Paul's not talking about souls leaving bodies in this passage. He's talking about something else. So let's see what he is talking about, what he's trying to say, by looking at this passage in some more detail.

So it's divided into two parts, this passage. The first one, verse 1 to 5, Paul talks about how Christians should be longing for the life to come. And in the second part, 6 to 10, he goes on to talk about how we are to be living in this life in light of the life to come.

[8 : 19] So longing for eternal life, living for eternal life. That's what we're going to look at this morning. Firstly, longing for eternal life. So Paul was writing to a group of Christians in Corinth, many of whom actually thought that the new creation had already begun.

Now, I know it sounds crazy, but these Christians were actually expecting this life to be the new creation life. You know, they believed in Jesus.

They said, well, Jesus has opened the way to new creation life. I want to start living that right now. And they convinced themselves they already were. They expected this life to have no trouble or pain or suffering.

They expected that if you believe in Jesus, that's what it's going to mean for this life. It's going to mean strength and happiness and victory in every sphere of life, which is probably why they weren't too keen on Paul, the suffering apostle.

You know, the type of life he was living isn't the type of life they were looking to live. And so they didn't have a very good opinion on Paul, hence why he writes pretty much this whole letter.

[9 : 29] But that's also why they preferred the prosperity preachers that we looked at last time. These prosperity preachers were coming to them and telling them that they could claim new creation blessings here and now for their lives now.

But, of course, as we saw before, it's not just then, is it? Today we get exactly the same type of thing being preached, don't we? This premature attempt to bring the life to come into this life.

Your best life now is actually the title of a book that one of these false teachers wrote. And it's very popular. Although, as John MacArthur rightly says, the only way you're living your best life now is if you're going to hell.

But these Corinthians were chasing after their best life now, and so Paul writes this passage to correct them. And he says this from verse 5. I mean, sorry, from verse 1 of chapter 5.

Now, the one who is faithfulness, fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

[11 : 02] Let's pause there. So you see in these verses how Paul wants the Corinthians to realize that what God has secured for them through Jesus is by and large something they've got to wait for.

It's not fully fulfilled here and now. And it's the message we all need to hear as Christians. The salvation God has afforded, while there are certain aspects of it that we do experience in this life, the primary and majority of our salvation is still coming.

Of what God is, what Jesus has secured for us and bought by His blood on the cross for us is still coming. And while we're waiting, Paul says here, this life is not meant to be a bed of roses.

In fact, most of the time he says we groan. We groan. We get sick. We get frustrated. We get stressed out. We're weak.

And that is pretty much the universal experience to a greater or lesser degree. And yes, God does give us moments of joy and happiness to His children because He loves us.

[12 : 17] But those moments can never last for too long in this life because of sin. Sin always comes in and limits how much those moments can last. It always comes in and messes them up.

Rather, Paul says, groaning and burden are the norms of life here in this broken world. It's groaning and burden. And we've got to come to terms with that.

We've got to stop pretending this life is going to be great. Because coming to terms with that is actually a good thing. It's a necessary thing. It means that we don't have to pretend that we've got it all together.

You know, lots of Christians think, I've got to put on this front, this impression that everything's going well because I've got Jesus. And I don't want people to think that Christianity is not true.

So I've got to prove to them that my life is all together. But that's not true. If we come to terms with what Paul's saying here, we don't have to pretend like we're living the victorious life.

[13 : 19] In fact, of all people, Christians can be realists. And we can admit this life is actually quite rubbish. You know, Christians of all people are able to openly admit that.

And it's not going to change this side of eternity. And we can do that because we know this is not how the world is meant to be and we know something better is coming.

People without that hope, people who don't know that, well, they have to pretend that everything's okay here, that they can achieve some kind of lasting happiness in this life, that they can make something good of it, and that they can have their best life now because it's the only life they've got.

Christians, on the other hand, we can be realistic about life because we're certain of the life to come. Because we know we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands, far better than this earthly tent.

And groaning and coming to terms with the discomfort of this earthly tent actually helps us to anticipate our eternal home even more.

[14 : 30] So, many of you will know that my family and I enjoy camping. We like going camping on holiday.

But you know, one of the best parts of camping is actually coming home. It's strange. I mean, camping's fun, but fun as it is, coming home, even though it's at the end of the holiday, you look forward to it, to be in your own home, in your own bed, things that you didn't experience while you were camping, because it's fun but it's uncomfortable.

And that also helps us. I think one of the reasons we like camping is because it helps us not to be disappointed when our holiday comes to an end because we enjoy home all the more. Well, Paul's using the same kind of comparison between this life on earth and the life to come.

A tent, he describes this life to be, which is temporary and mostly uncomfortable versus a permanent building that is far better. And because we know our home is actually the building, we long for it while we're in the tent.

So look in your Bible at verse 4. While we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed, but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

[15 : 48] That's a Christian's hope. Notice though, a Christian doesn't long for death itself. We don't wish to die. We don't want to die. Paul says, we do not wish to be unclothed.

And in verse 3, when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. And so this talk of being unclothed or naked, as we've seen, it doesn't mean being a disembodied soul.

It actually just means being dead and being dead and under God's judgment, like Adam was in the garden. Remember Genesis? Chapter 3? Remember the moment Adam and Eve sinned?

What happened? They realized they were naked. Okay? They didn't realize that before. It wasn't an issue for them, but now it's an issue because they're ashamed. Nakedness, especially in the Hebrew culture, is a sign of shame and vulnerability.

And what did Adam do and Eve? They hid from God. They didn't want to be seen. So his nakedness, Adam's nakedness in the garden, and his awareness of his nakedness was a sign of his sin and his shame and his vulnerability of being under the judgment of God.

[16 : 57] And I think that's what Paul's referring to here when he says, we do not want to be found naked. When we are clothed in our heavenly dwelling, we are not under God's judgment.

We're not cut off from God like Adam was. And then we will not be found naked. We will not be exposed to God's judgment for our sin because Jesus took that sin on the cross and he, the Bible says, clothed us in his righteousness.

That's the way it puts it. And so that's what we long for. That's what Christians long for. That's what we should be passionately pursuing.

Life. Righteousness. Resurrection. Not death. When you see a Christian going happily to their death, as many heroes of the faith have done in history, it's not because they're looking forward to death or even looking forward to resting in peace or release from this world like the Buddhists would want.

no, when you see a Christian looking forward, going happily rather, to their death, it's because they're looking forward to life. Not death.

[18 : 10] They're looking forward to real life better than any life they've ever had here. Christians can go to the grave confident that life is waiting for them on the other side.

More life than this. Not death and judgment because they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ. Can you go to your grave with that assurance?

Because one day you will face the end of your life. It might come quickly and you won't really have time to prepare for it in a car accident. It might come slowly through a terminal disease, but it's going to come sooner or later.

Can you face death with that assurance? Ask yourself. Or, when you die, will you be found naked like Adam and exposed to God's judgment?

Do you know what's on the other side of death for you? Are you sure? If not, if not, then the most important thing, the most important thing you can do in this life, the priority that must come before anything else is to prepare for eternity.

[19 : 16] You've got, you know, a few passing decades in this world to prepare for eternity. Have you done that yet? Because Jesus has done everything necessary for you to be ready for eternity.

He's done everything necessary to take your sins away, to make you righteous before the judge of the universe and give you eternal life, but you need to take that on board.

You need to trust and follow Him if you want that assurance for yourself. This short life on earth is not about trying to live well.

It's about being ready to die well. And a believer in Christ is the only type of person who can die well. And therefore, they're also the only type of person who can live well, actually.

As Charles Spurgeon says, to be prepared to die is to be prepared to live. And that's exactly what Paul goes on to explain in the rest of this passage.

[20 : 18] How being prepared to die well, how having the longing for eternal life and that assurance as a Christian actually helps you to live well.

So that's the next section, verse 6 to 10, where he speaks about how to live here and now in light of the life to come. And there's basically two main ways, he says, in which a Christian with a longing for eternal life will live differently to someone who doesn't have that longing or assurance.

The first, he says, is courage. Verse 6, therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we live by faith, not by sight.

That word, confident, in the NIV, in verse 6, also can be translated as courageous, full of courage. So, it's not just talking about an inner confidence.

That's what the English word only really means, an inner state of confidence, but it's talking about an outward courage in the way we live, where that confidence comes out in what we do, the steps we take, the decisions we make.

[21 : 27] Which we can have, Christians can have that courage because we know this life is only temporary and passing away in the life to come. Our real life, our permanent life, is coming, and so we can hold loosely to this life.

That's really what Paul is saying, talking about courage here. We can hold loosely to this life. We don't need it as much as other people do. And what that does, a holding loosely to this life, it gives us courage to serve God and to work to extend His kingdom at the cost of what would otherwise have made us happy in this life.

If this life is all you've got, or if you think that the best life is this life, or if you don't long for eternal life, you will invest your time and resources in making this life better.

But if you long for the eternal life, if you hold loosely to this life, then you will have the courage to invest in the life to come. See, if we have that assurance and that longing, we don't have to save up and invest our money in a good life here, we can rather use it for things that matter.

Eternally. You are able, you are able in this life to use what you have to make an eternal difference. You're also able not to. It's your choice what you do in this life.

[22 : 47] You can invest it in eternity. You know, that's exactly what Jesus said when He said, don't store up for yourself treasures on earth, which will be destroyed. Rather, store up treasures in heaven.

There is a way that you can invest your resources in this life for eternal gain. And those treasures in heaven, Jesus says, won't be destroyed.

But you know what? Doing that, doing what Jesus encourages us to do, storing up treasures in heaven, actually takes courage because it means you must not store up treasures here. You can't do both.

If you're going to invest your life and your resources in the life to come and in things that matter for eternity, you have to make sacrifices on investments here in life, in this life, in this passing away life.

That's your choice. It takes courage. And that courage only comes from living by faith and not by sight. If you don't have true faith, you can't.

- [23 : 44] You can't invest in the life to come. And so can you? If you examine yourself, look at the way you spend your money and your time and your resources and the talents that God has given you.

Are you spending those things to improve this life? Or are you spending those things to invest in eternal things that matter? Do you have a faith that gives you the courage to take risks for God?

Are you willing to sacrifice what you have in this temporary life for eternal things? Ask yourself. Your money. Are you willing to sacrifice that? And that's easy to check.

Just look at your bank statement. See where your money is going. Your safety. Are you willing to sacrifice your safety and go to places and do things which other people might not do because it's serving the Lord and accounts for eternity?

Your comfort. And if it comes to it, even your life, would you be willing to sacrifice that for eternal good for you and others? Because a true longing for eternity, which Paul talks about in this passage, a true longing for eternity, which is true Christian faith, will encourage you to do just that.

- [24 : 56] It will encourage you to take risks, to have the courage to invest in the life to come. That's the first way. We live differently if we have that longing.

It's courage. The second way is holiness. Look at verse 9. So we make it our goal to please Him, that is Jesus, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

these are some sobering words. See, because we know that eternity is waiting, Paul says, because we know eternity is coming and that we will all stand before God one day, we are very careful how we live now.

So he talks about a judgment seat in verse 10. We all appear before the judgment seat. That was, the Greek word was a bima. It meant, it was actually referred to the seat that the Roman chief justice would sit on and decide between cases that were brought to him, decide a person's guilt or innocence.

- [26 : 15] Paul has good experience of this judgment seat because he actually stood before a Roman proconsul, Galio, you can read it in Acts 18 at home, right here in the city of Corinth.

So these people he were writing to saw him stand in front of the judgment seat of Galio. They saw his trial. They probably came and watched. It was quite a high profile case.

And maybe, maybe they thought badly of him because of it. I mean, it would be very Corinthian to do that. We've seen already. They probably, that's one of the reasons they weren't so sure of Paul because he, you know, he stood trial.

He had this, this, this, this, uh, messy case that was all over the newspapers and we're not so sure of him. He stood before Galio's judgment seat. What should we think of him?

And so you know what he says here? He says, don't you know, you're all going to stand before the judgment seat too. Not of some Roman official, but of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you ready for that? And they needed to get that into their heads.

- [27 : 18] They needed to understand that's what's coming and so do we because it is true for all Christians. Look at those words again. Paul says, we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

each one of us will stand before Jesus Christ, the ruler of this universe and we will be held accountable for how we have lived this life on earth, what we have done with the time and the resources that he gave us and no one of us will escape that and how we have lived, how we have lived this life will actually prove on that day whether our faith was true faith or whether it was just a show.

You might be able to pretend you're a Christian to these people here this morning but when you stand before Jesus there will be no pretending. That's when the truth will come out.

So be careful how you live now and just because this life is temporary and passing away and we groan and we know it's not the world it's meant to be it doesn't mean we can live how we want and continue to entertain sin in our lives.

Now don't get me wrong, Paul's not saying here, salvation is by works but he is saying that our works will be proof of our salvation on the day of judgment. So be careful how you live and know as well that if you're saved, if your life has vindicated and proven that your faith was in fact genuine and your sins have been covered by Jesus on the cross then not only does Jesus declare you not guilty, not only will your works prove that but those good works that you've done for the kingdom will be rewarded.

[29 : 15] That's what the Bible teaches, that's what Paul's saying here, we will receive, what does he say, we will receive, what is due for us, things done in the body, good or bad. Now hopefully if you trust Jesus and your good works prove that, then you'll, not hopefully, definitely, if that's the case, then those things that you've done that were bad will be covered by the blood of Christ and you will be justified.

But your good works, those things that you have done through Christ, for him, investing in the kingdom, will be rewarded on that day. You will receive back good for the good you have done for Jesus while in the body.

And so how you live now matters for eternity. You know, it reminds me of a scene from Gladiator, you know, Russell Crowe?

No, he was a pagan Roman. And the theology of that movie is totally off. But the one thing he says rings true. Just before the cavalry charge down to the Visigoths or whoever they were, the Germans, he's giving his cavalry a rah-rah speech to encourage them.

And he says, how's it go? What we do in life echoes in eternity. It was a great moment. But it's true, actually. It's funny, even in bad, you know, bad and wrong understandings of the world, even in paganism, there's these little things that actually do ring true for what the Bible says.

[30 : 40] What we do in life echoes in eternity. What you do now, day to day, will have results in eternity. Every day, therefore, you have a chance to make decisions that affect both your eternity and the eternity of other people.

And so, in closing, I guess I want to ask you, are you living a life that matters for eternity? Is it a life that you will look back on in eternity and go, I didn't waste my time on earth?

Are you living a life that matters? Well, you will be only if you're longing, truly longing for the life to come, rather than clinging to this life.

And so, are you going to live a life of courage here? Holding loosely to what you have here because you're looking forward to the life to come. Are you going to seek to please Christ because you know one day you will stand before him and answer for how you spent the time he gave you here?

And are you going to seek holiness in your life, knowing that how you live now will show on that day whether or not you ever were a Christian in the first place? Let's pray.

[31 : 54] Lord, we do thank you for this revelation of truth, of truth about things we can't see. We thank you that through your word, exposing these unseen things, we can look to the things that are unseen rather than the temporary things that are in front of us.

And so, help us to do that. Help us to look to the things we can't see and to long for the life that you have secured for us on the cross. I pray for those here who do not know where they are going and aren't ready for death.

Lord, I pray that you would speak to them in a very special way. Help them to see the truth of what Jesus has done. Help them to realize they will stand before him one day and help them to set things straight, to make a decision to follow him truly and to trust him.

And Lord, we pray that you would help us to live every day in light of the world to come. Help us to invest, to store up treasures, not here, but in heaven.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.