

2 Cor 5.1-10 – Longing for heaven

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Main Point – As you groan in this life, and long with hope for heavenly life with Jesus, please him now.

I once received a call that man named **Norm didn't have long to live.**

He was in his 80's, he'd been exposed to asbestos decades ago, and now he was dying of lung cancer.

He wanted to see a minister.-----

When I arrived at his home I was told he was having trouble breathing, and they, his wife and two sons, were waiting for an ambulance.

Norm was so weary, his breathing was laboured.---- He groaned.(**SLIDE**)

In the 10 mins I had, I listened much less than I normally would.

I just spoke with him about Jesus, who could get us to heaven and give people life from the dead.-----

Norm was taken to hospital. I didn't know if I'd see him again.

But I'm very thankful I did. I visited N quite a number of times. I listened to some of his life-story, and about his deteriorating health and weakening body.

N had lived a good life, had a loving family and enjoyed retirement.

But as his own mortality confronted him, N had a real openness to hearing about this Jesus who could get us to heaven.-----

N put his faith and trust in Jesus, and I saw a real hope of heaven in his eyes.

More than the pain ending, the last time I saw him conscious, he was longing to be with Jesus.

And that warmed my heart and filled me with joy.-----

N knew what it was to groan. Yet he died looking confidently to heaven.

And that's what we're thinking about today.(**SLIDE**)

Last week in ch4 God told us, life and ministry is hard, but worth it.

Worth it for our growth, for life in others, and for Jesus' sake.-----

We are weak jars of clay,(**SLIDE**) but we have a treasure in us.-----

For now, our bodies are being 'destroyed', withering, dying.

But an incomparable eternal weight of glory is to come.-----

And it's the themes of death and life that Paul expands on in our passage.-----

My sermon is **structured under these headings(SLIDE): Groaning and Longing, then**

What now? What difference should the future resurrection life make to our lives now.-----

First, we'll consider the groaning and longing in vv1-4.-----

In verse 1& 2 he talks about our physical body in this present age, as 'our earthly tent'.

Paul actually made tents, he was a tent-maker.(Acts 18.3)-----

I grew up going camping every Summer and every Easter, and let's just say that Easter in March-April was colder.

We'd be staying in sort of 3 tents combined – for my Dad had a great set-up.

I'm not such a handy man, but enjoy a bit camping.

But when a tent gets older, and the rain pours, if the roof fills with a pool of water, and drips inside, it's not fun.(**SLIDE**)

Many of you will have experienced a leaking or soaking tent.-----

Tents you see, are not made to be permanent structures, they are by nature temporary.

Vulnerable and temporary dwellings.-----

And like that, life is temporary, life in these bodies is fleeting and vulnerable.

We get old, we get sick, we get weak and can waste away.-----

V1 speaks of our earthly tent being 'destroyed'.

That's a different Greek word to that used in ch 4v9, and also v16.

This one speaks about being dissolved or demolished; so our falling apart, death and decay.-----

Verses 2&4 say, **we groan**, we groan and are burdened.

Norm knew suffering and he groaned.-----

We groan when we are weighed down by something, old age, illness, pain, worries.

Suffering makes us groan.-----

Maybe you're groaning and burdened at the moment?-----

In Ed Sheeran's new song, Old Phone he sings,

I found my old phone today

In a box that I had hidden away

(And he found-**SLIDE**)

Conversations with my dead friends Messages from all my exes

I kinda think that this was best left In the past where it belongs

I feel an overwhelming sadness Of all the friends I do not have left

Seeing how my family has fractured Growing up and moving on.

Arguments that I tried to keep at bay

The ones who loved me, I just pushed them away

(**SLIDE**) I found my old phone today

So full of love, yet so full of hate

I put it back inside there from whence it came

Nothing good will come from regretting

And I think these sad, regretful words and memories for Ed, remind us of how broken we are, and how broken the world is.-----

Life in this world is filled with groans and sighs, suffering and grief.

But instead of just squashing down those sad memories, like Ed put the old phone back in its box, our passage today gives us hope, hope of life with Jesus.

And we long for that, we should long for that.-----

Even though groaning, Paul says we're **longing**, for our heavenly dwelling. (**SLIDE**)

v2, we groan, 'desiring or longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling.'-----

The **first image** we're given is that of a building; **housing**.

He says, 'we know that if our earthly tent (our physical body) we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal dwelling in the heavens'.-----

It contrasts the weak & temporary tent with a durable and strong house.

And if you've been camping n' been washed out, you know the longing to be back in a house.-----

In this case the house is eternal. It lasts forever!-----

And that is not talking about heaven as such, but our resurrection bodies which we'll be given in heaven.

Or rather, in the new heavens and earth, after Jesus comes.

As **Phil 3.20-21** says. (**SLIDE**)

We'll have new resurrection bodies like Jesus has.

No longer weak but imperishable (**1Cor 15.43,53-54-SLIDE**) and immortal .-----

We long for, ache for and earnestly desire to have a body, a life, that won't suffer anymore;--- a life without sickness and sorrow, without death and dying.

That heavenly dwelling, that resurrection body, will be free from sin, free from suffering, immortal, and glorious.

And a life where you are truly and fully known and loved, and love.

In intimate closeness with our Lord.

It'll be Absolutely awesome and beyond my imagination

Don't you long for that?-----

If you've suffered lots you will long for that.-----

To us this present existence is solid and real, whereas our coming existence seems shadowy and insubstantial. Paul teaches that the reverse is true.

The life which is to come is permanent and real, and awesome.-----

Paul's **next image is one of clothes.**

V4 we want to be clothed", (SLIDE) as our mortality is swallowed up by life, and our heavenly dwelling.

Being 'naked' v3, and 'unclothed' v4, is likely describing the state after death and before Christ comes again.

(SLIDE) This is called the **Intermediate state**.-----

We're told that the soul to be without a body is unnatural; it's not right; and compared with nakedness.-----

So at death our physical body is destroyed, dissolved, v1.

And until Christ comes, our souls go to be with Christ.-----

When believers die they go straight to heaven, we, our souls go immediately to be at home with the Lord, as **v8** says.-----

In **Phil 1**, Paul says to depart and be with Christ, is far better (**Phil 1.23, SLIDE**).-----

For the Christian, dying and going to be with Christ is better than life in this world.

We don't enter a soul sleep.

Being with Christ is something to truly look forward to.-----

Yet the soul being separated from the body is a temporary state.

It's not what we desire and long for.

The disembodied state is incomplete and unsatisfying – pain-free, sin-free, but not fulfilled.

What we desire is to be clothed with our heavenly body.-----

New resurrection bodies, in the New Jerusalem, the new heaven & earth, when Jesus returns.-----

So for Christians the body is not something to escape from.

Buddhists teach a non-attachment to the body.

Their hope beyond this life is nirvana, which is not a personal, bodily, eternal life.---

Today our culture says the real you, is you on the inside, your feelings.

And you can ignore or change the body you have, to align with your feelings and perceived identity.

But God made us as people with a united soul and body.-----

God made us for bodily life.-----

And we want a body and a life where we'll never endure gender confusion; or pain or weakness; aging or death. Don't we long-for that?-----

Life in new bodies in a new creation will be THE BEST!

When mortality is 'swallowed up by life'.-----

We want life to win and conquer the grave?-----

And because Jesus died and came back from the dead.

He has conquered the grave.

And he's coming back again to give us immortal and glorious bodies like his.

He has obtained the best life, forever life, glorious life, for all who come to him.

I hope you've come to him in faith.

Because Jesus' life will swallow up death for all who trust in him.-----

Next point is What now?(SLIDE)-----

Two things God says through Paul: Have confident hope, and we make it our goal to please Jesus now.

In **v6 and v8** Paul says we are confident, always confident.

The word can also mean hopeful, and so I combine those thoughts to speak of **confident hope**.-----

We know that life in this body and world means being away from the physical presence of the Lord Jesus, who's in heaven.

The real home we're waiting for is heaven, with the Lord.

And we can be totally confident of being at home with the Lord when we die, because of the Spirit.-----

Eph 1.13 says, (SLIDE) that when we believe the Gospel, we're given the Spirit.

In **2Cor 5.5** we're told God has 'given us the Spirit as a down-payment, or deposit.---
When buying a car or a house, the commitment really starts with giving a deposit.(SLIDE)
And that 10% deposit is our guarantee that we (or the bank for us), would provide the rest.---
The point is, us having the HS is God's guarantee of the rest.

God's guarantee that He will give us these new live-forever bodies.-----
God's already paid the deposit, and the life and renewal of the Spirit in us now, anticipates the full-blown life to come.

So no matter what you feel, even if you don't feel God's presence with you, if you've trusted Jesus, God's Spirit is in you and you will go to heaven.-----

From **v8**, Paul's confident, that after death he'll be at home with the Lord.-----

That's what he'd prefer. That's where he'd rather be. And it's only a matter of time.---

He has assurance of this – a certain sure-hope that gives him courageous faith in the present.-----

Years ago I were driving my kids to school and passed a Roman Catholic church and school, one of my kids asked me, **if Catholics** are going to heaven.

I said, it's all about whether people trust in Jesus for salvation and heaven, or rely on their own good works and performance.-----

I have met many Catholics who do truly trust in Jesus for their salvation, and read their Bibles.

Sadly, I've met many more, who pray more to Mary, and are straining to do good works, and be good enough.

Sadly, so many don't know the Gospel, and so have no certainty of heaven.-----

In the words of this excellent book,(SLIDE) 'Nothing in my hand I bring: Understanding the differences between Roman Catholic and Protestant beliefs,' **Ray Galea**, a former Catholic says, 'For the Roman Catholic, there can never be any assurance of salvation, because the final verdict hinges on how well the believer has cooperated with God's Spirit through the sacraments in the church.'

Ray says he once spoke at a Catholic School and asked the 13 year olds, "How many of you are certain that if you died tonight you would go to heaven? Not one child put up their hand'.-----

Would you put up your hand?-----

When Ray asked the students why Jesus should let them into heaven they all appealed to their good works to save them.-----

Are you confident of your salvation, and sure of heaven?-----

Through Christ you can be.

Maybe you should come to the Winter Teaching on the Protestant Reformation.---

v7 says, we walk by faith and not by sight.

We can't see heaven yet, but we believe it.

We believe God's word and God's promises.

We believe Christ gets us there, that the Spirit guarantees it, and so we keep believing in Him.

So what should you do now?

Live by faith!----- Confident hope-filled faith!-----

The other thing we're told to do now is, **make it our goal to please the Lord, v9.(SLIDE)**

Having said that he's looking forward to being with Jesus, Paul says in **v9**, So.

'we make it our aim to be pleasing to him'.

Our aim, our goal and ambition, should be pleasing the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or as Paul says down in **v15**, Jesus died for us so that we should no longer live for ourselves but for him who died for us and rose again.(cf. Rom 12.1-2)

I was once talking to someone about their job interview, and they shared that it was really hard to be honest in one sense.

Because in the interview they were asked about their future plans and ambitions if they got the role.

You know, did they want to progress to management and rise the corporate ladder.
 And it was hard because the person didn't want to stay in the role very long.
 But the question of goals and ambitions is an important one.
 If you're honest, Is your greatest goal in life, pleasing the Lord?-----

Not yourself.

None of us are perfect in this.

But for the Christian, life is about, **pleasing the Lord** who has given us life.

This ambition should be our number one goal.-----

In the context of 2 Cor ch4, pleasing the Lord means proclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord (v5), making costly sacrifices in service so life can be at work in others (v12).

Or even when afflicted, not giving up our faith; keeping-on in hope, v16-17.

And we'll see next week it includes asking people to be reconciled to God through Jesus (5.18-20).-----

But pleasing the Lord is an all of life thing, especially in **how you use your time**.

Are you reading God's word each day, so his promises can penetrate your heart?

Is Jesus your Lord when you relate to people in your house?

When you love a struggling brother or sister in Christ?

And in how you approach your exam study or work, remembering you serve Christ in that too.----- (Col 3.24)

Why not set yourself a goal right now, to change something to please the Lord?-----

He died for you, he's given life to you, he is with you by the Spirit, and one day you will be with him.-----

But **v10** gives us another reason to please the Lord.

'For **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.'

When Christ returns, it shall be Judgement Day, and on that day all will be laid bare.

For every person who's ever lived, their life will be an open book.

Their thoughts and desires, attitudes, actions and words, will all be revealed.-----

All the good and bad things we've done and the good we've failed to do, will be brought to light.-----

And for anyone who's not relied on Christ it will bring condemnation, and hell.-----

But for believers, we will not be condemned.

'There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus'. (Rom 8.1)

We can have assurance of salvation and heaven.-----

No condemnation. But there will be an evaluation.-----

We won't lose our salvation but some believers will lose their commendation.

Some will hear 'Well done good and faithful servant,' (**SLIDE-Mt 25.21**) and some will not.

1 Cor 3(SLIDE,v11-15) says, some will escape through the flames as it were, but have nothing left to show for their lives.-----

The point is, some will escape the flames of judgement yet miss out on some rewards.-----

May this judgment-day evaluation inspire us, to 'please the Lord'.-----

What we do now matters, really matters!

Jesus is worth living for.-----

May Judgement Day and meeting Jesus face to face be your Energy Drink. (**SLIDE**)---

We've heard it's good to live to please the Lord Jesus now.

Though when we die, being with the Lord Jesus will be better. (**SLIDE**)

But our ultimate hope is new bodies in the new creation.

That will be the best.-----

Good, better, best.

Good now, better is to come after death, and the best when Jesus comes again.

We have a great hope.-----

And when you feel weak, when you groan or suffer, or face death like Norm did, we need that mindset, that confident hope.----- (**SLIDE**)

I close with words **Jean Williams** wrote 11 yrs ago.

'When you're young, life seems long and full of promise. A young woman told me she hopes Jesus doesn't come back till she's experienced career, marriage and children. I remember thinking the same when I was 18. Life stretched ahead, and I wanted to see and do it all... [maybe for you it's grandkids]. As you get older, life sometimes seems very sharp and short. Family members become ill. Friends get divorced. Parents age. We go to more funerals. We grow weary of the long battle with sin. On the bad days, when another burden is added, we wonder if we can bear any more. The years that once seemed endless now speed fast, and they are often full of pain.

We'd rather be comfortable in this world, but suffering, mercifully doesn't allow it.
 We share this world's groaning. This life is a blip and a shadow.
 Always there is this longing for something more.
 We feel this acutely, for God has placed eternity in our hearts.
 Suffering fuels this longing. "Look there is something better!"
 We hold so tightly to this world but suffering loosens our grip.
 Suffering weans us from this life and sets our hope on the life to come.
 If there's one thing suffering has taught me, it's that we really don't belong here.
 It has taught me to fix my eyes on the unseen.
 It has taught me to long and live for our true home.
 Come Lord Jesus.

(<http://thebriefing.com.au/2014/04/gods-gifts-in-suffering-8-suffering-teaches-us-to-number-our-days/>)

Let's pray.