

## 2 Corinthians 5:1-10

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Series B, Proper 6)

Lessons for the Day: Ezekiel 17:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Mark 4:26-34

How's Your Aim?

June 13, 2021

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I have always been a fan of the C. S. Lewis *Chronicles of Narnia*, which I have read many times. In fact, I had to replace my copy of the books a couple of years ago, so I also decided to get a set for each of my children and grandchildren. The books are allegorical fiction, written to express biblical truths. The creation story is told in *The Magician's Nephew*; the last days and the end of all things is described in *The Last Battle*. In the best known book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* we see the story of redemption as Aslan, the great Lion, who is a symbol of Christ, the Lion of Judah, gives his life to redeem a traitor, and rises again from the dead. The message of sin and grace and redemption finds its way into every book, as Aslan redeems, restores and forgives his children.

We can also see that in each of the books either the Pevensie children, or their Narnian friends, need to learn some sort of lesson that is usually taught by a task or adventure that also helps them to see and understand the grace of God at work **for them**. This grace also inspires them; in fact, the British children who travel to Narnia are more loyal to that kingdom than they are to England, as they realize the privilege and joy of serving in the name of Aslan. The life they have under Aslan (or, as we understand, in Christ) is in contrast to the indifference and unbelief of so many people. It is a life of freedom and joy; a glorious life that is not idle, but active, as they live to honour Aslan, that is Christ, in all that they do.

In a similar way Paul looks at all that God has done for us in Christ. He sees that God has *given us the Spirit as a guarantee* of all that still lies before us, especially that glorious life in the heavenly dwelling, free from the afflictions and problems of this world. There we will enjoy the permanent, secure and blessed eternal life God has prepared for us in Christ. But even now, Paul says, *we make it our aim to please him*.

So how's your aim? Do the day to day things of your life bring glory to God, or are you missing the high, glorious calling that you have in Christ? As those redeemed from sin and death through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and who know heaven is our home because of the resurrected, living and ascended Lord, *we make it our aim to please him* as we live in the power of the Holy Spirit; as we live by faith in the dying and rising Christ.

Paul begins our text today with with a study in contrasts—a comparison between the present, temporary, decaying world and the future, eternal, glorious age to come. He speaks of *the tent that is our earthly home*—this world's physical existence, and the less than ideal reality of life. We groan through the cares and troubles of this world, longing for heaven's peace and rest. We groan when we hear of another sordid story of child abuse and murder. We groan when a friend calls us to tell us they have just been diagnosed with cancer. We groan when our jobs are jeopardy; we groan when work or school isn't going the way we would like. We groan, as we say with Erma Bombeck: “If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?”

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to assure us that even in the struggles of this world's existence, we have the confidence, guaranteed by God Himself, that the best is yet to come. Right now, we are *away from the Lord*—not in the sense that God isn't with us, for our dear Saviour has promised us: *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* (Hebrews 13:5 - ESV) We don't have the blessings of our heavenly life in its fullness, but what a marvellous day that will be, when we finally set aside the weakness, the worry, and the burdens of this world to be at home with the Lord in splendour of His holiness.

Even now, as we live in these leaky earthly tents, clothed with the frail rags of sinful humanity, Paul is sure and certain of one thing: God has been gracious to His people. We are of good courage, because we know the victory that is ours in Christ. And that wonderful confidence is shown in our lives in Christ. Paul says that whether we are home with the Lord or still in this earthly life, *we make it our aim to please him*.

Again, I ask, “how's your aim?” If we are honest, we typically don't think of pleasing God. We tend to please ourselves. We are determined to have what we want; to do what we want. We were made for life with God, yet we often become trapped into thinking that this world is all that matters. The psalmist says: *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.* (Psalm 73:25 - ESV) Can we say that? So much of our time, our effort, our energy is spent on chasing things that we desire more than God. Oh, yes, deep inside we love the Lord and we trust in Him as our Saviour. We do want to live as His obedient children. But wouldn't you know it—the devil gets in the way with all the temptations that draw us away from God. When David saw Bathsheba, he wasn't thinking about the ways of living to please God—he thought only of her beauty and his lustful desire for her. When Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest, he wasn't thinking about the Lord whom he said he would never deny. He was thinking of saving his skin. The devil uses the world and the desires and fears of our hearts to lead us astray. Money, power, fame, beauty—anything in this world can keep us from making it our aim to please God. James reminds us: *But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.* (James 1:14-15 - ESV)

When Paul says we *make it our aim to please him*, he uses a word that may be translated as *aspire* or *ambition*—we aspire to please Him, or we make it our ambition to please Him. The word for aim in our text can also mean to consider it an honour to please Him or to be pleasing to Him. I believe this is really what Paul is saying. What a glorious privilege is ours, to be the people of God through Jesus Christ! As such we consider it an honour to please Him. We can learn what this means from the wonderful example of Christ Himself. The Eternal Son, who is True God, and equal in every way with His Father, willingly comes to live among us and lives to do the will of His Father. Remember how Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane: saying, *“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”* (Luke 22:42 - ESV) That will of the Father led Christ to the cross, where He gives His life for those who were not pleasing to God. He died to set us free from sin and the condemnation that would lead us to eternal death in hell. He rose, and assures us that He is preparing that wonderful home in heaven that is not made by hands, but by the grace and mercy of the Living God.

What a joy and honour it is, in light of our redemption in Jesus Christ, to live to give glory to God. In the extended reading of this epistle lesson, Paul says: *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 - ESV) He also says *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* (2 Corinthians 5:17 - ESV) Everything is—or should be—different because we are in Christ. Paul isn't talking about earning our salvation, but living in the light of Christ in all that we do. We consider it an honour to show love to Him who has taken away our sin and given us the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Him in heaven. We consider it an honour to please Him who gave His very life for us. It is an honour to show our love to Him who has loved us and marked us as His own in our Baptism, and who comes to give His very presence to us in the bread and wine of Holy Communion.

It isn't hard to find the things that honour Him in our lives. Paul tells us: *Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* (Colossians 3:12-17 - ESV) We can sum up the life that is well-aimed in three simple verses of Scripture: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* (Matthew 22:37-39 - ESV)

As we draw ever nearer to that day of the Lord's return, we look forward in joy to the life we will have in the glory of heaven. But even now we know how we want to aim our life—especially as we remember that we are washed, sanctified and justified in Christ. Freed by His grace and love, we aim to please Him, for this is, indeed, our greatest joy. Amen.