

Good evening. I'm glad to be here, and I'm excited about what the Lord may have in store for us. Matt is in Australia right now speaking to pastor's conferences, pastors, church planners, young professionals, Australians...all of them. He's on a long 18 day, 11 speaking engagement deal, and I know that he would appreciate your prayers. I know that he would appreciate you guys thinking of him and praying for him along the way. This is my fifth time preaching this message this weekend, and let me say that I'm no less anxious this time than I was all the others. I think it's really because I feel the weight of what needs to happen here and I feel wholly inadequate to do it. That's true anytime anybody preaches, but I just feel the weight of that and I have a real sense that I'm not articulate enough, I'm not clear enough, my words aren't eloquent enough and I don't have enough adjectives to get us to where we need to go tonight. Because my hope is that we would just be lifted a little bit, that we would see just a little bit more, see just a little bit more clearly. So for that to happen the Spirit is going to have to move. So I want to ask the Spirit to do that, and the great thing is, for those who trust and believe in Christ, we have access.

So let's go to the Father. "Father, we thank You for the access that we do have to You anytime and any place that we can approach Your throne of grace in our time of need. I just confess, God, tonight that I need you and I believe that my friends in here need you as well. And certainly for us to really get anything that's going to be said tonight, for us to see what You're saying to us in the Scriptures tonight, Your Holy Spirit is going to have to open our eyes to see. And so I pray that You would do that, I pray that You would be mighty and I pray that You would be powerful. And I trust that You'll do this. I know that You love Your people. You have evidenced that by the sending of Your Son and His death and resurrection. So we're grateful. We thank You for it all. We pray in Christ's name. Amen."

Just a few months before I proposed to Natalie, I had this awkward phone call that I had to set up with her dad to go and talk with him about asking for her hand. And guys, I highly recommend that this is what we should do. So I did it and I get there, and I'm this real mixed bag of emotions. I'm really excited because I'm about to enter this new stage. I've never been engaged before. I'm excited. I want to marry this girl. So there's all this excitement. But then there's also this fear, because this is her dad. And even if he was this little guy, I'm still to respect him. And so there's just this element of fear that's healthy. And there were nerves. I had butterflies. So I walk in his office. He's a pastor. I sit down and said, "Mr. Jeffrey, thank you for your time, sir." We had been dating for five years and I've met him countless times, but this time was like I had never met him before. I said, "I am here because I...um...love your daughter, and I would like to ask you if I can...you know...marry her." It was just that stupid. He said, "Well I love her too, and let me tell you a story." And I thought, "This is not the response I was expecting. It should be a simple yes or no and I'd be out and be fine." He says, "Let me tell you a story. Just this past week a member of our church was dying of cancer, and so I was rushing up to the hospital to be with her and her family. But when I got there, I go there too late. I was walking down the hallway to her room when her husband walked out, and she had just passed away. The husband saw me and came over and we just hugged and cried. And he said, 'Neal, I just had the most amazing moment that I've ever experienced in all my life. God just gave me the privilege of handing my bride to Him.'" And Neal looked at me and said, "I've raised Natalie to know and to fear the Lord, and I'm handing her off to you. And by you asking for her hand and by me saying yes, I'm essentially saying to you that you will be the one that will hand her to the Lord." I was like, "I just got out of college, man. Let's lighten this thing up." But it just hit me. It was heavy. This was a heavy meeting, a good meeting. It was a good time. He said yes and we got married. And at the wedding, he said the exact same thing in front of all the people, just to put the pressure on me to think about that and for me to be that kind of man.

So just a couple of months ago, I'm reading a book about marriage and I'm reading the very last chapter titled, "When Sinners Say Goodbye." It's talking about two finite people just like Natalie and me and when that time comes and it's time for one of us to go. And again the weight of that just hits me. And the author says, "One of you is going to die and the other is going to grieve. This is God's grace in your life." One of you is going to die and the other is going to grieve. So your role, husband, is to prepare your bride for that day. And wife, your role is to encourage your husband towards that day. So I just laid in bed and wept. And here's the deal, it's coming. That day is coming for me. Hebrews 9 says, "It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment." That day is coming. My day is coming. I don't know when it is, but I know that compared to when I pulled into the parking lot, I'm an hour closer to it now. I have one less breath. And so do you. So we can avoid it, we can pretend it's not real, we can insulate our lives in such a way that we eat a certain way and sleep so much and do all of these things to try to prolong life, but we're only adding quality to life, not quantity to life. Our days are numbered. Moses said, "Teach us to number our days, O Lord." For they're like the grass. It's here today and gone tomorrow. And the reality of death is all of us have experienced it at some level. You've lost a grandparent, you've lost a friend, some of you have lost a spouse or a child, so you know the wounds, you know the pain of that the Scriptures call the last great enemy. You know it. I know it. I've lost friends, family members and I'll lose more. And one day, my family will lose me. So as I lay in bed that night, instead of letting all that build up anxiety and fear in me, which is my natural bend, I just went to the Scriptures and wanted to see what the Scriptures would say to me about death, about dying, about future hope and future glory. What awaits me? What awaits those who have confessed and believed in Christ? And so I got in the Scriptures and searched them. I wanted to be refined. I didn't want the world to dictate how I thought about death and dying. I wanted the Scriptures to inform me.

So tonight, we'll be in 2 Corinthians 5. The book itself is written by the apostle Paul. He writes this book with this common theme throughout, that the Spirit of God leads us through our sufferings. It's the interplay of the sufferings of this world and the power of the Spirit. The apostle Paul lived a life that was marred and marked by suffering, and his opponents argued that he was not a true apostle because of how much he suffered. They argued that a spirit-filled man would not suffer. And Paul writes and says just to the contrary. "The fact that I suffer has only crystallized my faith and hope in Christ. God, by His gracious mercies, gives us sufferings that we might press into Him and long for Him more. He starts in chapter 1 and says God is "the God of comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction." That's a hope and a promise for you. If God has ever comforted your depressed heart, if God has ever lifted your down spirit, if God has ever seen you through a valley, Paul says that the God of comfort has done that in such a way that you might be a comfort to other people. He moves on in chapter 2 and says that we know these things because Christ is triumphant and He leads His people in triumphant procession, marching forward as Christ is the victor. He says that as He leads us in triumphal procession there's an aroma. To some it's the aroma of life, and to others it's the stench of death. In chapter 3, he talks about this ministry of the new covenant, and that ministry is the death and resurrection of Christ. When Christ rose again and ascended, He sends His Spirit who now indwells all those who believe. So if you believe in Christ, you are indwelt with His Holy Spirit. And he says, "This Spirit that indwells me is an encouragement." In chapter 4, he links the new covenant with a new creation, saying that those who believe have been made new just like in Genesis 1 when God spoke into the darkness, brought forth life out of nothingness. God has spoken into your dead, dark souls and brought forth life. He has created something that was nothing. And in chapter 5, he says that this new covenant, this new ministry has given him a new motivation for life.

And so what is Paul's new motivation for life? That's where we pick up in chapter 5. Starting in verse 1, "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." So what is Paul's motivation for life? It's answered in this theme, this overarching thread that he runs through this paragraph. It's that a right desire for the future, a right understanding of the future, a correct view of what is coming and what is to come leads to right ambitions in the present. So a right desire for the future leads to right ambitions in the present. So Paul says this, "The way that I view what is coming leads me to live this way in the present. And right out of the gate in verse 1, he starts off and says this, "I have a confident vision. 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." Look what he's doing here. He's comparing and contrasting two different things. He says right out of the gate, "For we know that if this tent..." He's talking about our bodies, your body, my body, his body. He calls it a tent. Paul who is a tent maker uses the imagery that is familiar to him and familiar to you. Do you know that a tent is flimsy and not sturdy? It doesn't last. You pop it up, you tear it down and move it. It's not eternal, it's temporary. It's not home. And so he says this, "Your body is a tent. It's just a tent." And surely you know this. I mean, for some of you, it takes fifteen minutes just to get up out of bed to work out the muscles, to get them moving only to get to the medicine cabinet to get the Aleve just to get the aches and the pains to go away. You can't run like you used to. You get out of breath walking from the couch to the fridge. You have to take some time out before going back to the couch. You can't hear like you used to hear, you can't talk like you used to talk. You call him by her name and her by his name. You just get confused and your leg hurts, your knee hurts and you're in pain. And you're only 31 and you're just struggling. You know that your body is a tent, that it's not built to last. It's not going to last. So that's why he says, "For we know this. It's going to be destroyed. It's going to be torn down. It's not going to last." But then he contrasts this, and this is what gives him confidence. He says, "[but] we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." so everything that the tent is is the exact opposite of this building. The tent is flimsy, is not sturdy, is temporary, but this house is a building. The builder and the architect is God Himself. It's not made by human hands, it is not flawed, it is perfect and it is eternal. And so for Paul, this gives him confidence, because it doesn't depend on him, it doesn't depend on vitamin C, it doesn't depend on good rest, it doesn't depend on exercise or dietary habits. It doesn't matter what you're doing because Paul says, "It just doesn't depend on me. And because that's true, I can just step back and breathe because this is His." So when this tent gets taken down, or Paul uses the word "destroyed," he says, "I know this, that I have a building in the heavens that God Himself has made." He's referring to his resurrection body. Paul's referring to the body that he will receive on the day of resurrection.

So Paul's confidence leads to longing, and you'll see that in verse 2, "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." And I love that he uses the word life when he's talking about death. He says, "I groan in this tent. I long for this day. And my confidence leads to longing, my longing leads to confidence." He says, "I'm groaning, I'm longing for these things—not that I would be naked but that I would be further clothed." You see, here's what would have happened if I would have died yesterday. It's what is called the intermediate state. Because Christ has not returned. What happens when believers die is they are consciously and immediately in the presence of God. There is not soul sleep, you do not go to sleep and wake up some time down eternity's road. When a believer dies, he or she is immediately ushered into the presence of the King. Jesus said this to the thief on the cross, "Today I will see you in paradise." In the parable of Lazarus and the rich young ruler, Lazarus knew that he knew that he knew, consciously aware of the fact that he was with the Lord. But Paul knows this, at this point he doesn't have his resurrection body. So he's in the intermediate state, so that's why he says this, "I long to be further clothed. I long to get what is coming. Because that means that the consummation of all things has come. It means that the end is finally here. It means that the new heaven and the new earth and have come, that Christ has come down and judged and has set all things right and created a new heaven and

a new earth. Where God dwells with His people. It is done, finished, over, and now we enter into the presence of what He has for us in the new heavens and the new earth." So Paul says, "I long to be further clothed. I long for this. I deeply, deeply desire this."

And I know that these terms are new and you might not be familiar with them, so I want to point you to a couple of resources that might be helpful for you. There are a couple of things that you might want to check out. Go to the website www.thevillagechurch.net, click on the resource tab, under the resource tab you can click different categories or subjects. Go under the category of eschatology. This week we've written a couple of papers and we've posted them there. You can read about what happens to believers when they die, what happens at the judgment. There's not enough time to unpack it all here. But there's more. And why would you want more? Because Paul says this is his hope. Why would you care? Because Paul says this is what gives him confidence to face sufferings in this world and to long for the day when he departs it. So why wouldn't you want to know? Why wouldn't you want to know what God has in store for those who believe? And if I could just push you to a message, if I could just push you to a sermon, I would recommend that you go to the 2003 Desiring God sermon by Sam Storms called Joy's Eternal Increase and just listen to him describe the glory of God in the heavens. You need to hear it. And so Paul says, "I long for these things. My body is burdened. The present suffering have engulfed me; they suffocate me at times. He's been shipwrecked, he's been beaten and he's been stoned. All of these things are pressing in on him. So in your life as things are pressing in around you, whether it be depression, financial troubles, marital issues, whatever it might be, Paul says that those things are gracious reminders that this is not home and they should give you a longing for the day that you will be further clothed. That's what he's pushing you toward. He says in chapter 4 that these are but a "light momentary affliction that are preparing us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."

So Paul has a confidence. He has a confident vision. And in verse 1, you saw that his confidence was because he knew that this was from God. Look what he says in verse 5, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." In Ephesians 1, he uses the same word where the Spirit was given to those who believe as a deposit of their redemption for the fullness of time. When you believe and trust in Christ, Christ then indwells you by means of His Spirit which marks you, seals you and secures you as His. And that Spirit, His Spirit is a guarantee, a deposit that He is coming to take claim on you, so that you know that you know that you know that He's coming for you. And what He has for you is a new resurrection body in a place that Paul calls home, and he says, "I'd rather be there than here." That's what He has for you, and His Spirit is a guarantee that it's yours. So Paul's just confident.

And then he moves on and says a right desire for the future leads to right ambitions in the present. Verse 6, "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." Because we don't see fully yet. We see in part, and while we see in part, we walk by faith, longing and hoping and desiring for the things to come. But in verse 8, he says, "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." So Paul, who lives his life this way, said another way in Philippians 1, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Whether I'm at home or away, whether I'm with the Lord or here, I make it my aim to please Him. My confident vision of what is to come leads me to live a courageous life here and now. Not a life where I try to insulate myself and comfort myself and protect myself from what might beset me or come against me. Paul says, "Rather, I walk squarely into it. I face the reality that wrinkles are here no matter how many needles I stick into my head to flatten it out. I have wrinkles, I'm aging, my hair is falling out and graying." So Paul says, "I look at it squarely in the face, and that reminds me of what is coming and gives me courage to live boldly for the Lord Jesus now.

And he says in verse 10, "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." Now here's the deal. For Paul who uses the image of a

Bema Seat, which is a tribunal or counsel that renders a judgment for those who must render an account. Paul stood before a Bema Seat before the Corinthians, before the Romans. He was tried and persecuted. So again Paul is using imagery that he understands, and this time it's the imagery of a judge. And he says that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account. Notice he says "we all." That includes you and that includes me. And I realize that some of you in here were raised under a theology of a heavy handed, dictatorial, ruthless, mean-spirited view of God. He was a grumpy old, vindictive grandpa who only looked to crush you. And I'm sorry that you had a distorted and perverted view of who Christ was as you were growing up. But to swing the pendulum to the other side and present to you a flimsy God who does not judge and a weak God who only says "Whatever," is to do the same disservice to you. So the balanced view of God is the one where He is both the lion and the lamb, the gentle and meek Savior who says, "I come in grace and truth and offer you an opportunity for salvation and reconciliation to the Father. But know this, people, I am coming back and I rule with an iron scepter and I'm putting all things under My footstool. Because I'm the righteous judge and I judge the living and the dead." And so Paul says, "I don't skirt around this. I don't pretend that this isn't coming. In fact, I long for this day. It's because of this day that I live differently. Because I know I will give an account. I will stand before the King and give an account for every careless word, every gracious deed, every spirit-filled sermon, every spiritless argument. For every action, non action, event, moment in my life, I will give an account." And if that does not make me press into the mercy and the fullness of the Spirit of God, I don't know what will. I can pretend that's not going to happen and I can wish it a way, but judgment is coming. You can skip over verse 10 and verse 10 is still there. But for Paul, he says, "I run into it headlong. I make it my aim to please Him. For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account."

I read this this week and thought it was great. "The judgment seat of Christ is the privilege of Christians." It's not be feared in an unhealthy way, it's not to well up an anxiety in us. It is the privilege of the believer to stand before the One who has redeemed and set free and renewed and purchased and adopted and reconciled and justified and say to Him, "You are my King. My life I live because of You. You are the reason I am here. You are the One who justified me." It's the opportunity for me to look for the first time squarely in the face of the Lamb, as it says in Revelation. It's the privilege of the believer to stand there clothed and covered by His blood as He renders judgment over my life. It's a privilege. It's the terror of the unbeliever, but for the Christian it's a privilege. It's the place where you bow and plead the blood of Christ.

So if I could encourage you from this passage, it would be this. Where we just ended, consider the coming judgment. Don't pretend it's not going to happen. Don't pretend that what you do here doesn't matter because grace makes up for it in the end. Although you might be justified, God is expecting something from your life. It's not that you were just changed, but now He has changed you that you might be an agent of change moving forward. What you do here matters. Your life matters. If that doesn't well up in you some divine purpose, I don't know what will. So consider the coming judgment. Consider these realities. Paul says it motivated his very life.

So consider the coming judgment, and finally cultivate a confident vision of what is to come. I love Jonathan Edwards and I love his resolutions. If you've never read those, you need to look them up. He wrote 50+ resolutions and says this in resolution number 9, "Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death." So for Edwards, he says, "As I think on these things, as I think on my own death, how it will effect others, how it will effect me, I want to think on these things because it will change the way I spend tonight. It's going to change the way I spend tomorrow. I want to think on these things so that I might be prepared and that I might be one who is preparing others, because that day is coming. It is just going to come." And so for Edwards and for the apostle Paul, instead of skirting and avoiding the issue and pretending it's not going to happen, they pull back the veil and step into reality and say, "Death, where is your victory? Where is your sing? It has been swallowed up." The last great enemy, because of the resurrection of Christ, death has now become the servant of every believer ushering him or her into the presence of the Almighty. That's spectacular. So let me think on that. Let that change me. Let that effect me. Let me

feel the weight of that. For me to avoid that is to continue to float on a superficial, surface life that never understands the depths and the reality of my salvation and what God has revealed in the Scriptures. So let me think about my death and dying as often as I can, not in a morbid, masochistic way but in a healthy way that is preparing me and that I might be one who is preparing others. Cultivate a constant vision.

This past week, I was reading to my daughter, Lilly. We have this Jesus storybook Bible, and we get to the resurrection chapter. She says, "Daddy, why does Jesus get to come back to life, but when you die you're going to be dead forever?" I said, "Well, that's actually not true, baby. I'm not going to be dead forever. The fact that Jesus came back to life has ensured for me that I too will rise. And you know what, sweetie? If you put your love and trust in Him, the same promise is yours." I want to cultivate a confident vision. I don't want to skirt the issue and tell her not to worry about what's going to happen to daddy. Let's dive into it head long. It's heaven for crying out loud. And if you don't long for heaven, you have a low view of God. And if you have a low view of God, you won't long for heaven. You see, we have absolutely perverted and distorted what heaven truly is. We say, "Oh, it's this eternal sexual fantasy. It's just this eternal time where I just get to do whatever I want and it's going to be awesome because no one is ever going to nag me and I'll never get tired and I won't cry as much. In fact, there won't be any tears." And all of that's really cool, but that's not enough. Heaven is only heaven because God is there. And if you don't love Him and you don't know Him and you don't long for Him, why would you ever want to spend eternity with Him? Heaven is not a family reunion. Heaven is not a time when I will finally be reunited with Natalie and we'll be married again just like we are here. Jesus says that we are not married or given in marriage in heaven. Heaven is not about me looking at her and saying, "I'm glad that you're here," although I am. I'm not looking at her, I'm looking at Him. And with the rest of the tongues and tribes and every nation that has ever been created and believed in the Son, worshiping Him, "Worthy, worthy, worthy is the God Almighty, who was and is and is to come," so that I won't even be thinking of those peripheral ideas, but my heart will be fixed on Him. Heaven is heaven because God is there. That's what makes heaven great. That's what makes it heaven. It's His presence. So for your loved ones, tell them about heaven. Tell them about the glories of God. Tell them about the majesty of the Creator. Tell them about the One who sent the Son so that they might be saved and redeemed and given the Spirit as a guarantee that one day heaven is theirs and that it's not a place where you're safe from hell, although that's something, but that's not what makes heaven great. Heaven is great because it's where God dwells. Heaven is great because He has invited us to dwell with Him.

So lift your view of heaven. Lift it up. Cultivate a confident vision that you might pass it on to others, that you might prepare others. Husbands, talk to your wives, not just when you are making your will, but talk to them about what it would be like in rapturous glory to spend eternity with the king. Spouses, talk to one another, talk to your kids, talk to your neighbors. Don't paint a low view of heaven; lift it up. Lift up the glories of what is to come that they might confidently long as the apostle Paul, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Spurgeon and the saints who have gone before that we might long for that day. So let's cultivate a confident vision. Let's do this. Let's press in and long for that day.

So that night when I was reading that book in my room, Natalie came back in and by this time I'm weepy and just borderline about to break. I said, "Hey, can I read this last section to you?" And Natalie listened as I read and cried and cried and read. And I read to her a little section, a little sermon by Charles Spurgeon on the marriage supper of the Lamb. I want to read it to you, because Spurgeon caught it, he understood it. He says this, "Heaven is always heaven, and unspeakably full of blessedness; but even heaven has its holidays, even bliss has its overflowings; and on that day when the springtide of the infinite ocean of joy shall have come, what a measureless flood of delight shall overflow the souls of all glorified spirits as they perceive that the consummation of love's great design is come 'The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready!' We do not know yet, beloved, of what happiness we are capable. . . Oh may I be there. . . If I may but see the King in his beauty, in the fullness of his joy, when he shall take by the right hand her for whom he shed his precious blood, and shall know the joy which was set before him, for which he endured

the cross, despising the shame, I shall be blest indeed! . . . Oh, what a day that will be when every member of Christ shall be crowned in him, and with him, and every member of the mystical body shall be glorified in the glory of the Bridegroom! . . . A day will come, the day of days, time's crown and glory, when, all conflict, risk, and judgment ended for ever, the saints, arrayed in the righteousness of Christ, shall be eternally one with him in living, loving, lasting union, partaking together of the same glory, the glory of the Most High. What must it be to be there!" And that's our hope, and that's our prayer.

And so, Father, we do hope for that, and we do pray for that. We do long for that. And I pray that You would lift our feeble view of heaven, that You would lift our pathetic view of You beyond what we're capable of, beyond what we're used to, beyond what is normal for us and that You would raise our hearts that we might see You in a new way. God, what makes heaven great is You. What makes eternity amazing is that we're with You responding in worship as we sit around the throne lifting the name of Your Son on high. Heaven is not a serene, placid lake of stillness; heaven is an unending flow of waves that continue to crash in unfolding joy in eternal increase of pleasure and wonder and delight and mercy and majesty and splendor and beauty. It continues on and on and on and on, and we never tire. It never grows old. There's no jealousy or envy or strife. All shame is forgotten, all sin is erased, there is no better place. And so like the apostle, could we be a who are filled with courage. We make it our aim to please You, but in our heart of hearts long to depart from this tent that we might be further clothed. So God, fill us with a deep and powerful vision of heaven with You."

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