

SERMON NOTES
II Corinthians 4:16 – 5:10
“Fixing Our Eyes on the Unseen”

Intro:

- Are you a wise person or a fool according this definition found in the book of Ecclesiastes?
- *“A wise person thinks much about death, while the fool thinks only about having a good time now.”* (Eccl. 7:4)
- Of course, if you believe in Darwinian evolution, there’s not much incentive to think about death
- *If Darwinian evolution be true – then what happens to you when you die is no more significant than what happens to a tree or a parrot or an elephant when they die: they go out of existence*
- *Some people think about death – even obsessively – and live in slavery to the fear of death*
- Much more common is to live in denial of the reality of death – and to become enslaved to a thousand different versions of *“Eat, drink and be merry”* in order to avoid or repress this fear of death
- *The anesthetics are numerous – whether alcohol or partying or sex or TV or video games or work or sports – anything to occupy our minds and distract us from facing the reality of our mortality*
- *Then Hollywood script writers and Eastern religions such as Hinduism assure people – with no empirical evidence – that death is not final – that some kind of benevolent spiritual life awaits everyone after death – without any kind of divine judgment or need of saving grace*
- Meanwhile, most people live for the moment and focus on the temporal and take great pains to deny the reality that their bodies are aging and dying
- *By the way, how are you coping with the wasting away of your body?*

Perks Of Being Over The Hill:

- *There is nothing left to learn the hard way.*
- *Things that you buy now won't wear out.*
- *Your supply of brain cells is finally down to a manageable size.*

- ***Your secrets are safe with your friends because they can't remember them anyway.***
- ***You can take advantage of restaurant specials by eating dinner at 4:00 in the afternoon.***
- ***You are no longer viewed as a hypochondriac.***

Did you hear about the elderly woman who talked herself out of a speeding ticket by telling the young officer that she had to get there before she forgot where she was going?

- ***Of course, some of you are working hard to delay the inevitable by careful dieting and exercise and lifting weights and anti-aging creams***
- ***And it is good to take care of your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit***
- ***But there is also a sense in which good Health merely slows the rate at which you are dying***
- ***Only the Good News of Jesus Christ can liberate people from slavery to the fear of death and the denial of death***
- ***Christian hope: To live is Christ – and to die is gain!***

I. Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day

2 Corinthians 4:16 (NIV) ¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

- ***Paul knew what he was talking about***
- ***Paul was probably in his early 50s when he wrote this letter – perhaps 5 years younger than me but having lived a much harder life with many hardships and persecutions and beatings***
- ***He couldn't see the way he used to (and there were no glasses)***
- ***He couldn't hear the way he used to (and there were no hearing aids)***
- ***He couldn't recover from beatings the way he used to (and there were no antibiotics)***
- ***The miles between towns on his journeys seemed to be getting longer and longer***
- ***His soccer-playing days were over***
- ***He could feel a stiffness in his joints – and some wrinkles were starting to appear – and his head was balding even as hair was sprouting elsewhere – and his memory wasn't quite as sharp as it used to be***

- **The wasting away of his body was underway – and natural death was beckoning even as he continued to risk his life for the sake of the Gospel**
- *Yet he did not lose heart – he still maintained his joy and courage and vitality*
- **Why?**
- ***Because inwardly he was being renewed day by day***

- Physical strength and beauty can sometimes be a curse as much as a blessing
- *How common – and how sad – to see youth and young adults who are blessed with strength and beauty and athleticism become obsessed with that which inevitably fades away*
- Meanwhile, their inner being – their spirit – is weak and impoverished and starving for attention
- *And by the time they realize they have wasted their lives on that which is passing away – they end up with fading physical beauty and strength and an undeveloped inner spirit*

- I have observed that cultivating inner beauty of spirit can enhance a woman's physical beauty, whereas physical beauty fades more quickly in women who do not cultivate inner spiritual beauty
- *Inner beauty does not fade – in fact, it can increase with age*
- And, of course, women can be inwardly strong as well as beautiful– *in fact, many women are inwardly stronger than many men*

- **Men: do you want to be the spiritual weakling in your family?**
- *If so, then keep playing those video games // stay glued to that TV set // keep returning to those porn websites // keep that Bible on the shelf gathering dust // let your wife take charge of the spiritual leadership of the home – and by all means – avoid prayer meetings like the plague*

- **But if you want to grow strong in your inner man and be renewed inwardly – we have a number of men in our church who are strong spiritual leaders – spend some time with them and learn from them how to grow into a spiritually powerful man**
- *Spiritual strength takes time to develop – so don't procrastinate*

- Today is Sept. 6 of the year 2009
- *If I live to be 83.5, today is also the Sept. 6 of my lifetime*
- Long gone are the April and May and June months of my life

- Now, September and October can be very good months – *in fact, I love September and October in Iowa*
- **September and October are the months of the harvest season**
- Right now in our garden we are enjoying a plentiful harvest of tomatoes
- **I am hopeful that September and October will be months of an abundant spiritual harvest in my life and ministry – hopeful that seeds that were planted 10, 20, 30 years ago in April & May & June will produce a rich crop in the September and October of my life**

- How about you?
- *Are you investing your best energy cultivating that which will bear fruit in September and October rather than being preoccupied with that which will be fading away when the frosts come?*

- **Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day**
- What is the secret to that inward renewal – that renewal of the inner man or woman?
- *What is the source of a vitality and fruitfulness that is indestructible?*
- **The resurrection life of Jesus Christ**

- **With the risen Christ living in us, our inner being can be strengthened to overcome any adversity**
- When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives as our Savior and Lord, He comes to live within us by His Spirit
- *His Spirit imparts to us a powerful spiritual life than can never die – a spiritual life that will outlast physical death – a spiritual life that is infused with the very Life and Power and Character of Jesus Christ*
- **Every day – every hour – every moment that we abide in Christ – that we rely upon Christ – that we remain connected to Christ and His Resurrection Life within us – we are being renewed and transformed in our inner being**
- *As we abide in Christ day by day // as we walk in the Spirit day by day // as we yield to the leading and control of the Spirit day by day // as we renew our minds by feeding on God's Word day by day // as we obey the teachings of Christ day by day // as we fellowship with God in prayer and Bible study day by day // as we appropriate the saving grace of Christ by taking Communion in personal faith – we are being renewed inwardly*

II. **Fixing our eyes on unseen glory**

2 Corinthians 4:17 - 18 (NIV) ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

- *Paul's inward renewal was sustained by his looking in faith to an unseen future glory*
- **When he was hurting, he fixed the eyes of his heart not on the burden of his pain and troubles– but on the immense weight of glory being prepared for him through and by means of his suffering**

John Piper (*Future Grace*): *“The renewing of his heart comes from something very strange: it comes from looking at what he can't see. What did he see? ‘We walk by faith, not by sight.’ This doesn't mean that he leaps into the dark without evidence of what's there. It means that the most precious and important realities in the world are beyond our physical senses. We ‘look’ at these unseen things through the gospel. We strengthen our hearts – we renew our courage – by fixing our gaze on the glory of God in the face of Christ.”*

- One day we will share in this eternal glory – and even now we are being transformed with ever-increasing glory into the likeness of Christ by the working of His Spirit within us
- ***This Life of Christ within us through the Spirit is our hope of glory***
- *We walk by faith, not by sight – fixing our gaze on what is unseen and eternal rather than on what is seen and temporary*
- This takes practice – and concentration – it doesn't come naturally
- *What happens when we fix our eyes on what is seen?*
- **We will either be seduced by the fleeting pleasures and possessions of this world – or else we will be disheartened and crushed by the temporary troubles of this world**
- *In either case, our gaze will be directed away from God – and our inner man will be weakened*
- *The fool thinks only about having a good time now*
- *The fool thinks only about making more money and building bigger barns and storing up treasures on earth and saving for retirement*
- ***The man who walks by sight will store up treasures on earth and come up empty – the man who walks by faith with the eyes of his heart fixed on***

unseen glory will store up treasures in heaven and be richly and eternally rewarded

- ***Our heart is renewed when we treasure Jesus Christ above all else***
- ***Our inner being is weakened when we chase after the things of this world that are temporal and passing away***
- **We become inwardly strong and mature by treasuring Jesus Christ above all else and by fixing on our eyes on what is unseen and eternal rather than on what is seen and temporal**

- **When we habitually walk by sight rather than by faith, we become vulnerable to losing heart when trouble and suffering and health problems– or just plain, ordinary aging – come our way**
- ***When a woman is fixated on her physical beauty or when a man is fixated on his physical strength – then aging becomes a very real threat to their well-being and self-worth***
- **And the thought of cancer or stroke or chronic illness or disability becomes absolutely terrifying**

- ***How can we be renewed inwardly so that we do not lose heart during the painful and perplexing crises of life?***
- **By habitually fixing our eyes on the unseen – on the eternal glory that far outweighs all the temporary afflictions of life in this mortal body**

III. Our earthly tents vs. our heavenly dwellings

2 Corinthians 5:1 - 4 (NIV) ¹Now 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. ²Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, ³because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

- **Our bodies matter to God and are fundamental to our humanity**
- With our bodies we express who we are
- ***The idea that we are essentially a soul temporarily encased in a body and that our bodies are not an essential part of our humanity and personality is not a biblical or Christian idea***
- Our body is as essential to our humanity as our souls are

- When a believer in Jesus Christ dies, the body returns to the dust – but the spirit / soul is immediately brought into the conscious presence of the Lord in heaven

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NIV) ⁸We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

- *But to be absent from the body – what Paul calls “being found naked” is just an intermediate state and is NOT our full salvation -- our salvation is not complete until we receive our resurrection bodies at the Second Coming of Christ*
- *The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers us the hope not merely of the immortality of the soul and immediate entry into the presence of the Lord in heaven when we die – but also – and of supreme importance – the Gospel offers us the certain hope of the resurrection of our bodies in the likeness of Christ’s own resurrection body*

Philippians 3:20 - 21 (NIV) ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

- *God will take a perishable, dishonorable, weak and sinful body – a natural body characterized by sin and mortality – and in the resurrection God will make an imperishable, glorious, powerful body – a spiritual body – not spiritual in the sense of nonmaterial – but spiritual in the sense of fit to live eternally with God*

As C.S. Lewis says somewhere, they give you unimpressive horses to learn to ride on, and only when you are ready for it are you allowed an animal that will gallop and jump --one day God will give us bodies that will gallop and jump and then some – bodies that are perfect // bodies that are immortal // bodies that are untiring // bodies that will never get sick or suffer pain // bodies that are perfectly equipped to live and travel and worship and serve God forever in the new heaven and new earth

IV. Death swallowed up by Life

- Joseph Bayly (*The Last Thing We Talk About*)
- *“We may postpone it, we may tame its violence, but death is still waiting there for us... Dairy farmer and sales executive live in death’s shadow, with Nobel Prize winner and prostitute, mother, infant, teen, old man. The hearse stands waiting for the surgeon who transplants a heart as well as the hopeful recipient, for the funeral director as well as the corpse he manipulates.*
--Death spares none.

--The certainty of death... is the focus of man's insecurity and fear, his inability to be completely sure of anything on earth because he cannot be sure of drawing his next breath, or the one after."

- Instinctively, we fight to preserve and prolong our life against the certainty of death
- *We watch our carbs or fat grams // we jog or walk or workout // we go to doctors and chiropractors and some spend big bucks on a variety of medications // we undergo surgery as needed // all in pursuit of a longer and healthier life*
- Yet death comes to us all
- *Coronary, cancer, stroke, infection, disease, accident, violence – death comes to every human, every age – young and old, rich and poor, healthy and unhealthy*
- **Death is the great interrupter – and the great terminator**
- *Death interrupts our plans and goals and ambitions and schedules*
- And death terminates human relationships – separating husband from wife, parent from child, brother from sister, friend from friend
- *How do you face the reality and certainty of death?*
- How are you dealing with the reality that one day your body will die and return to dust – and your spirit will go to the God who made you?
- *What hope does the Gospel of Jesus Christ offer us in the face of death?*
- **First of all – let's make it clear that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers any real hope in the face of death**
- *Other religions and philosophies talk about the immortality of the soul and paradise and nirvana and reincarnation – but only as speculation and wishful thinking*
- **You see, when you can't pull off the miracle of a bodily resurrection from the grave – the best you can do is speculate about the immortality of the soul**
- All we know for sure is that when our bodies die – they stay dead
- *We can't see the soul of a dead person – we can't have a relationship with the soul of a dead person –*
- **Any hope of future reunions as disembodied souls after death -- is merely speculation and wishful thinking**
- What is the truth that gives us hope in the face of death?

- **What gives us hope in the face of death is that 2000 years ago Jesus of Nazareth strode forward unafraid and entered into the very stronghold of the undefeated giant – Death**
- *Until that time – every man who ever stood toe-to-toe with Death was easily vanquished by the great conqueror Death*
- **But coming forth from that darksome battle in the grave – Jesus of Nazareth emerged victorious – in a resurrected body -- having conquered Death and the Grave – and Jesus Christ now holds in his right hand the keys of Death and Hades**
- *Only Christianity offers any real hope for the whole person after death – body and soul -- because only Christianity proclaims the bodily resurrection of the crucified Son of God as the cornerstone of its faith – and therefore, only Christianity can offer believers the hope of the resurrection of the body unto everlasting life through Jesus Christ the risen Lord*
- *Death does not have the final word – the risen Christ does*
- *The separation caused by death is painful – but it is temporary – all who believe in Jesus Christ will one day be reunited in heaven*
- *The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is our guarantee that one day there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain*
- *Those who believe in Jesus – though they die like everyone else – will live again*
- *Death does not have the final word – the risen Christ does*
- **And that makes all the difference in the world**
- *If this world is all there is // if death has the final word – then this Life is a giant rip-off for many people*
- *If death has the final word, then the good-byes said at funerals are final good-byes leading to permanent separation*
- *But the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything – Christ’s victory over the grave means that there is healing and hope for the broken-hearted and grief-stricken*

V. **Made for Eternity**

2 Corinthians 5:5 (NIV) ⁵Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

- *“God has made us for this very purpose”*

You and I were made BY God and FOR God – for eternity

--you were made to last forever!

--you were made to live forever with God!

- You see, *this life is not all there is*
--you will spend far more time on the other side of death – in eternity – than you will here
--this life is preparation for the next
- The Bible says: *God has planted eternity in the human heart*
--you have an inborn instinct that longs for immortality
--this is because God designed you, in His image, to live for eternity
- When you fully comprehend that there is more to life than just here and now, and you realize that life is just preparation for eternity, you will begin to live differently
--you will start living in light of eternity

The Bible says that this world and everything in it is passing away, and only what we do for God will last forever

--worldly achievements / material wealth / the applause of men / social recognition or prestige / keeping up with popular fashions / fun times and worldly pleasures – none of that will last – all of it is temporary and passing away

--you were made to last forever

--so why invest your life on earth in what is temporary and passing away?

- *The fool lives for today, tomorrow and retirement*
--the wise man or woman lives for eternity – for what will last forever
- Just as the 9 months you spent in your mother's womb were not an end in themselves, but only preparation for life on earth in this mortal body – *so also this life on earth in this mortal body is just preparation for the next world*
--you were made to last forever
--for the believer in Jesus Christ – death is the door to eternal life in heaven

VI. The coming Judgment

- Satan's greatest deception remains that this life is all there is – or that there is an afterlife but there is no divine judgment at the gateway to eternity
- *In contrast to that satanic deception we hold these biblical truths in a Christian worldview:*

Hebrews 9:27 (NIV) ²⁷Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,

Matthew 16:27 (NIV) ²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.

2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV) ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- **Question: *Is the purpose of this coming judgment to declare who is lost and who is saved – or to distribute heavenly rewards for good works done by believers on earth?***

John Piper: *“The answer of the NT, if you interpret carefully, is: both. Our deeds will reveal who enters the age to come, and our deeds will reveal the measure of our reward in the age to come...”*

“Our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth in Christ's courtroom to demonstrate that our faith is real. And our deeds will be the public evidence brought forth to demonstrate the varying measures of our obedience of faith.

“In other words, salvation is by grace through faith, and rewards are by grace through faith, but the evidence of invisible faith in the judgment hall of Christ will be a transformed life. Our deeds are not the basis of our salvation, they are the evidence of our salvation.

“Salvation is received by faith. Salvation is shown by deeds.”

- **The NT does not give assurance of salvation to people who profess faith in Christ with their lips but are not living lives of obedience, good works and love**
- ***If you treasure Jesus Christ as Lord in your heart // if you are experiencing his transforming power in your life to change you more and more into his likeness // if you are trusting in Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross for forgiveness and are experiencing an increasing measure of freedom from sin's bondage // if you are inwardly motivated to obey Christ's teachings and to serve others in love – then you have nothing to fear on the Day of Judgment***
- **For the one who belongs to Jesus Christ – the Day of Judgment will be a further revelation of the Grace of God that will fill us with wonder and gratitude and joy – followed by full enjoyment of the fulfillment of all God's promises in Jesus Christ**

- If you are not sure how you will fare on the Day of Judgment, you can make today a Day of Salvation for you:

John 5:24 (NIV) ²⁴“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

- In a moment, you will be invited to receive the gift of eternal life by receiving Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord

(Conclusion):

- Joni Eareckson Tada illustrates well the inward strength of someone who is fixing her eyes on the unseen future glory and thus is being renewed inwardly though her paralyzed body is wasting away:
- *“Somewhere in my broken, paralyzed body is the seed of what I shall become. The paralysis makes what I am to become all the more grand when you contrast atrophied, useless legs against splendorous resurrected legs.*
- *I’m ready to have this lowly body transformed... I will bear the likeness of Jesus, the man from heaven.*
- *Like his, mine will be an actual, literal body perfectly suited for earth and heaven. Whether flinging a Frisbee or flying past Ursa Major. Scaling walls or walking through them. Speaking with friends or conversing with angels. Whether trout fishing in the Crystal Sea or going for seconds at the Wedding Supper, at all times and all places we shall be perfectly fitted for our environment, whether it be the new heavens or the new earth.”*
- *“In heaven I will be free to jump up, dance, kick and do aerobics. And although I’m sure Jesus will be delighted to watch me rise on tiptoe, there’s something I plan to do that may please Him more... The first thing I plan to do on resurrected legs is to drop on grateful, glorified knees. I will quietly kneel at the feet of Jesus.*
- *To NOT move will be my chance to demonstrate heartfelt thanks to the Lord for the grace He dispensed year after year when my legs and hands were limp and motionless. To NOT move will be my last chance to present a sacrifice of praise – paralyzed praise.*
- *And after a while, I shall spring to my feet, stretch my arms, and shout out to anyone within earshot of the whole universe: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and might, honor and glory and blessing!”*

Salvation Prayer

"I Will Rise"