

Matt Henry
2 Cor. 5:1-10
17 June 2018

“Tent City”

God’s grace and peace...

Well, it’s Father’s Day and I imagine a number of fathers and families have taken to camping this weekend in a tent like this one. Maybe sleeping in the dirt and getting rained on doesn’t appeal to you much anymore, but it sure does make for memories! My dad got Sally and me a big tent from Cabelas as a wedding gift with a note that said, “The family that camps together, stays together.” It sure brings people closer for a moment. No one thinks of a tent as a permanent thing but people will endure it for a few nights anyways.

Tents are temporary measures, unless you’re in Seattle. Homeless encampments are all over the place. It’s a true humanitarian crisis. Tents offer a false sense of security in themselves. You may have your own space, but tents have stakes that pull up, not a foundation that stays put. They were never meant to be permanent.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul talks about the tent which he equates to our earthly home. And that fits right in with the tent image, because this world is OK, but it’s temporary and we are promised a forever dwelling place in paradise. This is “the

building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (v. 1).

That’s the theological point Paul is making.

But it also fits in with Paul’s career because you might recall Paul was a tentmaker. He made a lot of them with his own hands, as he learned the trade from Priscilla and Aquila. So the tent is an object that’s familiar to Paul. And honestly, it’s familiar to Israel the nation who spent many years in tents—as a people on a journey. All they wanted was a place to call home. Well, God’s people still feel that way in this sense: this world is not our home. We are meant to long for the heavenly home because ultimately that’s where we belong—the promised heavenly Jerusalem with glory, bliss and perfect peace. But for now, it’s tent city. We pitch our tents each day knowing that one day we’ll ditch our tents for greater dwellings! That’s the theology of camping out. We’re all camping in this sense right now because we are in this world now—but not forever. That’s just how it is.

So I want you to think how you feel when you wake up from the night of camping. The one where instead of a sleep number bed, you have your choice between that rock in your back or the stinky socks in your face. And you come out of the tent, stumbling a bit and sore. Tents aren’t glamorous but we’ll put up with them for a short while knowing that we have a soft bed waiting for us.

That's the sense of v. 2, "For in this tent, we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling..." Or as Dave Barry, the humorist, put it, "Camping is nature's way of promoting the motel business." Living in this world is God's way of promoting the heaven business.

For as long as we are in this tent, we have reason to groan. That groaning can be from pain, disappointment, loneliness. Or it can be more positive—groaning in the sense of expectation and anticipation—you know the promise of a heavenly home is true and as God holds it before you, you just want to have it!

What we're looking forward to is the moment when "what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." Life swallows up death. As we say goodbye to people, if you go to enough funerals, it seems death has the greater appetite! But life wins. As promise of this occurring, and as a way of preparing us for it, God has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. He's the deposit guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5). The Spirit dwells within us. He's pitched His tent and makes our hearts His home only to point to a greater home yet to come. So that's reason to have courage. God is not only with us; He's *in* us. His presence enables us to endure through the tough times in this world.

Romans 8:26, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with

groanings too deep for words.” So, some of those groans—the one’s that yearn for God to act—might just be coming from the Spirit Himself. Those kind of groans are about the future.

Verse 7: We walk by faith, not by sight. What’s that mean? It means we’re meant to live with the future promise in mind, in order to make it through the present condition or hardship. Always thinking ahead. We’re away right now, but one day we’ll be home with the Lord. Until then, look at verse 9, “We make it our aim to please him.” Well, what is going to please the Lord? What do you get for the Almighty God who literally does have it all?

That’s why I like this quote from John Piper. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” That means relationship, right? That means He has our heart when we delight ourselves in Him. That pleases the Lord. So it comes down to love, trust and delighting in God. He satisfies the soul. Are you satisfied? Maybe you are, but then again maybe you’re not. Be honest! Psalm 107:9 says, “He satisfies the longing soul and the hungry soul he fills with good things.” So in that longing, in that hunger, when we seek to have those needs fulfilled in Him, that’s what glorifies Him and satisfies us best. It’s not about our ability or what we do for Him. It’s recognizing what He does for us.

And I'm telling you, if a child could just recognize all that a good father does in terms of provision and protection, that's gift enough. I mean, still throw in a gift card for good measure, but if they understand and appreciate what a father does, that's best of all. That must be how the Heavenly Father feels as well when we acknowledge and delight in what He has done for us. It's all about the relationship.

Last verse we'll take on is v. 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." If I wanted people to think good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell, I would use this verse because it sure sounds like God is rewarding people here for the good they did and punishing them for the bad they did. That's why most people think all their deeds go up on the scale and hopefully the good outweighs the bad. You know that's not how it goes, but what to make of this verse? What does it mean "that each one may receive he is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil"?

To be sure, Christ will judge all people. But I really think Paul is talking here just about believers because he says, "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ." We who? The believers who are already saved by grace through their faith. Believers will be judged for what they've done in that they

are rewarded for good and not rewarded for what is not good. The Greek word for good is “agathos”. It means good as in the sense of useful. It’s worthwhile. It serves a purpose. The Greek word for evil is “phaulos”. It doesn’t mean evil like sinful or demonic. It’s more of a moral determination meaning worthless. So the sense here is good or bad, or better yet, worthwhile or worthless. Good things would be worthwhile things that are in line to what God wants. Worthless deeds are something that God doesn’t want or have use of.

This is far more practical. This is down to earth stuff. Be about the things that are useful, worthwhile in the long run. I would submit to you the phaulos stuff is the kind of behavior that doesn’t factor in our future. Phaulos is living in the here and now and for yourself. And God doesn’t have any use for that. He doesn’t reward phaulos stuff. There’s more in the phaulos column than you may realize. That’s why He drills into us, “Think about the life to come. Store up treasure in heaven. Seek the kingdom and his righteousness.” He rewards the agathos deeds—that which is selfless and oriented in love toward our neighbor, that which takes in the life to come over the life that is; that which says I won’t be in this tent forever but while I am, you’re welcome to pull up a chair and sit and talk with me by the campfire. It’s that kind of relational living we’re called to.

Why should the promise of judgment before Christ draw us closer? It's meant to entice and encourage us as live life, certainly not to create fear. All He chooses to do is to bring his reward! So be of courage. We don't glory in the tent. No one does because it's fleeting. Instead, we delight in the eternal home that awaits us. We glory in the gospel of what God has done, is doing and has yet to do.

In Jesus' name, Amen.