What’s the goal of life for your friends and family?

**Read** – 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

How does verse 1 support Paul’s argument (see 4:16 and 4:18)?

What’s the contrast Paul makes in verse 1?

Do you think of life in the age to come as more real than life in this age?

How does this give you strength to to ‘lose heart’ (4:16)?

In what ways do you ‘groan’ (5:2) in this age?

Why does Paul say believers groan?

What image is Paul conjuring up with Life swallowing mortality (5:4)?

What’s the very purpose Paul says we’re made for (5:5)?

**Read** – 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

What’s Paul’s conclusion in 5:6? How does that follow from what he’s said?

What does ‘being at home in the body mean’?

(You might like to read 1 Corinthians 15:35ff., which shows us that Paul doesn’t mean we long to be a soul *without* a body. Rather, he means *this* body, i.e., this tent, *before* we’ve put on over the building from God.)

What does it mean to ‘live by faith, not by sight’?

In verse 9 Paul says, ‘we make it our goal to please the him’?

How does that follow from what he’s just said?

*Do* you make it your goal to please him?

What extra argument does Paul make in 5:10 in support of making it our goal to please God?

If someone were to make a documentary of your life, what would they think you lived for?

Alexander was a merchant in a thriving city. He’d grown up in the country but been drawn to the city by opportunity. As a merchant he bought and sold goods all over the world. Exotic imports could command a high price, if a little risky sometimes. There was risk involved, there was always risk involved.

But what choice did he have? He’d come to the city so that he could make something of himself. He wanted to be something. No guts no glory! He wanted to walk down the street and command respect. To have people know his name. He would dream of what the children he’d grown up with would think when they saw how well he’d done for himself.

And he was doing well for himself. He had a nice place near the docks where he could oversee his business. One day he’d met a guy named Paul. This Paul was like Alexander in many ways. He was a well-educated member of the middle class. But there was something different about Paul. He found out that Paul was a traveller. Moving throughout the known world on what were sometimes, quite dangerous trips. And he’d starting these trips later in life: Paul wasn’t a young man!

What was really compelling to Alexander was that Paul had done all this only so that he could tell people about a Palestinian peasent called Jesus. Alexander had become a follower of Jesus, accepting forgiveness for his sins and seeking to grow like him.

But Alexander still had his old life. A life that called to him. The life of making a name for himself. Of being known in the street. Of commanding respect.

Alexander isn’t, of course, real. He’s a character set in Corinth. Corinth was a place that attracted the upwardly modile middle class in Roman society. It was somewhere you could make something of yourself.

This is the background throughout 2 Corinthians and is important for understanding the theme of strength in weakness. How is weak strong when we know strength lies in savings, property, business, and respect!

In today’s passage Paul is dealing with bodily weakness. His hearers don’t want to be bodily weak. They want to dominate. But, says Paul, our strength has come from God and our home is in the heavens.

**Because We Will Receive Our Heavenly Bodies, Nothing Can Harm Us**

Chapter 5 opens with the word ‘for’. So, we ask ‘for what!?’ Verse 1 tells us that ‘if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God.’ That little word ‘for’ is telling us that this fact is supporting something else just said. I might say, “I’m going to the stone room, for I’m hungry.” Why am I going? Because I’m hungry.

It’s the same here. Look back to the end of chapter 4 and verse 18, “we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” We can fix our eyes on what’s eternal *because* we know that God has an eternal body prepared for us. We gaze at what’s eternal knowing we’ll never make it. We fix our eyes on what’s eternal knowing it’s prepared for us+. Ultimately, this train of thought leads back to chapter 4 verse 16 where Paul says, “we do not lose heart.”

And so, the argument is this: even though we may struggle. Even though we’re not up to the task in ourselves. We look to what’s eternal and so we persevere.

What does it mean to fix our eyes on what’s eternal? To be confident because God has something sure for us? How do we go about doing that?

Notice first the image that Paul uses. The earthly is a tent, the heavenly a building. The one is temporary, the other is permanent. The one is easily torn and destroyed, the other stands firm.

When you were a child, did you ever build forts? I’m thinking of the type of bedroom fort that kids make. Where you take a blanket and some pillows, and you put up a house. You daydream of being the king of your own castle. Of running your own show. Kids do this because they see adults running their own house. And so, they copy. They play at being adults. The child’s game is fun, but it isn’t the real thing. The real thing is the building, not the play fort.

Paul tells us here that this earthly life is like the play fort. It’s temporary. It will pass away. It’s not the real thing. The real thing is hid with Christ in God. It’s in the heavens and can’t be touched. It’s where moth and rust cannot destroy.

Is this how we view our life with Christ? That it’s the real thing and that our life in this age is the temporary fort? It certainly isn’t how our culture views things. When someone dies, we say things like, “they live on in our hearts,” or, “they’re alive as long as we remember them.” Paul says, “no, no no!” Putting off the *tent* of this passing earthly life we receive a *building* hid safe with God. Who’s really living in the real thing? It’s not us in this transitory age.

When we shift our perspective to be in line with God’s: that this life is the temporary, the model, and the age to come is the real thing, then we are able to live as if nothing can touch us. To go back to our analogy of the child’s fort. When the fort comes down. When the blankets collapse. The game might be over, but what’s left is real life. So, it is for you. So, it is for me. “We know that if the earthly tent we live is in destroyed,” whether by cancer, by age, by any cause at all, “we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,” *then* “we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven.”

**Because We Will Receive Our Heavenly Bodies, We Groan**

Just in this first verse, then, we have great encouragement that *because we will receive our heavenly bodies, nothing can harm us*. But there’s more. This thought leads on to the next thought in verse 2, “meanwhile we groan.” That is, until we receive the building from God in place of the tent of this age, we groan. We sigh. We long for the real. We yearn for the permanent. As the weakness of our jars of clay in this age frustrate us.

It’s not that this groaning means we long to be rid of our bodies. The Bible teaches us that our bodies our an integral part of us, we are body and soul. We’re not sighing to be rid of our bodies so our souls can be free. We’re longing, rather, to put on immortality.

In verse 2 our NIVs read, “longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.” Unfortunately, the NIV lets us down at this point. The ESV is better, “longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.” We could even say, “longing to put on, on top of it, our heavenly dwelling.” The idea being not that we reject this body and this life but that we long for eternity.

The NIV’s use of ‘instead’ could suggest that we want to take off our bodies in order to put on immortality. But that’s not what Paul means. This is clear from what Paul says next, “that what is mortal may be swallowed up in life.”

This is a beautiful image. Imagine Life as a whale with a huge mouth. And Life comes into view and scoops up death, swallowing it whole. The picture is usually the other way around. It’s usually death that swallows people. Sadness that engulfs us. Illness that takes over. Here Paul takes that usual imagery and flips it on its head. What we long for, says Paul, is for life to come and swallow mortality. To swallow our weakness. Our sadness. Our sorrow.

You might think of a nature program about the sea. And in this program, you see progressively bigger animals until finally out of the darkness of the sea comes one of those whales that goes along with its mouth open, scopping up everything in its path. We long for Life to be like that. It’s mouth wide open scooping up all sorrow and sadness and pain.

Brothers and sisters. We can all identify with this can’t we? Who of us hasn’t been touched by the frustration of mortality? Is it wishful thinking? Are we saying what we want to hear? No! This is no pipe dream because, verse 5, “God…has given us the Spirit as a deposit.” The Spirit of God who lives with every believer is a downpayment. A first installment of the eternity to come. The beginnings of death being swallowed up in life. The downpayment of the Spirit is the grip of Life’s teeth on Death before it’s swallowed forever.

If you’re groaning under the weight of mortality this morning. Know that we have the downpayment of Spirit. That Life will be victorious.

Does this groaning resonate with your Christian life? Do you long for the day of Christ’s return when death will be swallowed up and we can put on our eternal buildings from God? It’s often not the case. So often we Christians live like the rest of the world. Living as if we were at home here. As if this life was all that mattered. That’s a mistake.

What Paul’s saying to you. To Me. To people like our Corinthian merchant Alexander. We groan in this. We should expect to groan in this life. Because it’s not our final destination.

**Because We Will Receive Our Heavenly Bodies, We Make It Our Goal to Please God**

The fact of our permanent building safe in the heavens, then, gives us confidence that nothing can touch us. Yet the knowledge that we’re yet to receive the heavenly body makes us groan. Confidence and longing describe our way of being in this age. But how does it affect our actions? What difference does it make to our choices that we live in this age of confidence and longing? Well, says Paul, it makes all the difference in the world.

Verse 9, “we make it our goal to place him.” “We,” those who put our trust in the Lord Jesus, “make it our goal.” A goal is what we aim at. The purpose we’re aiming for. The goal directs the course of all things leading up to it.

When you’re playing a game of football there are different ways the game can go, the ball’s passed around. People get tackled. But the whole game is directed by the goal. The single aim of the game which draws all effort to itself. No player passes just for fun. Each touch of the ball. Each kick. Each movement is directed by the goal. The purpose for which the games is played.

In the same way, we, since we know that our real life is hidden with Christ in the heavens, make it our goal “to please him.” To please the Lord. To bring a smile to his face and a well done from his lips. Christians, says Paul, make *this* their goal.

Verse 10 tells us that it matters what we do in this age. This age isn’t a waiting room. It’s not killing time on a journey until we get to our destination. Yes, we long to put on top our imperishable building from God, but this age matters. We will, verse 19, “receive what is due us for the things done while in the body.”

In our football analogy, treating life as a waiting room would be the equivalent of a team being in the Premier League final. But instead of aiming for the goal, they teams decide to do a bit of passing. Perhaps see how many keepy uppies they can do. Just generally have a kick about as they wait for the final whistle.

That would be folly. There’s a goal. The game’s going somewhere. But here’s the challenge: are there times when our lives are a bit of a kick about rather than a wholehearted effort at the goal? Is our goal to please the Lord? Is it the controlling principle of all we do?

Imagine someone were to make a documentary of your life. They followed you around, filming where you went, how you spent your time, where you spent your money. When they came to make the film. To piece together the narrative of your life, what would they see as your goal? What would be the motivating factor which all the plays in your life aimed at?

If we’re honest, for many of us the main thing would be comfort. We’re driven at work by reputation, proving ourselves, money, whatever else. We spend our money on home improvements, holidays, and luxury. What do these things aim at? What’s their goal? What’s your goal?

**Conclusion**

We met Alexander in the beginning. A middle-class Corinthian looking to make something of himself. To gain the respect of his peers and a comfortable position. It’s striking how similar social life was in Corinth to many of us here in and around Angmering.

As he reads Paul’s letter to his Church, he realizes that this life isn’t the goal. That his position and comfort aren’t the ends to aim at. That, although many had criticised Paul for not being better, they’d missed the point. That this age is temporary. Life is coming to swallow up death and it’s affected everything in the present

Alexander realizes that the pleasing his Lord is life’s purpose. From now on, he resolves to live in light of Christ’s return. To make it his daily aim to gain his Lord’s well done on the great and terrible day of the Lord when he’d put on his eternal building from God.

Have we realised the same? Amen.