

For 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.² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling,³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight.⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it.¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

To be honest with you, when I read the passage, I had the same feeling as I did when at age 11 in my English lit class I was first presented with a passage of Shakespeare. I recognised the words which individually made sense but collectively they were leaving me a little befuddled, many trees, no wood. And that is how it can be when we read a passage in the bible. At those times it can be useful to grab a different translation of the bible, in this instance I found The Message helpful.

Corinthians 5¹⁻⁵ For instance, we know that when these bodies of ours are taken down like tents and folded away, they will be replaced by resurrection bodies in heaven—God-made, not handmade—and we'll never have to relocate our "tents" again. Sometimes we can hardly wait to move—and so we cry out in frustration. Compared to what's coming, living conditions around here seem like a stopover in an unfurnished shack, and we're tired of it! We've been given a glimpse of the real thing, our true home, our resurrection bodies! The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less.⁶⁻⁸ That's why we live with such good cheer. You won't see us drooping our heads or dragging our feet! Cramped conditions here don't get us down. They only remind us of the spacious living conditions ahead. It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going. Do you suppose a few ruts in the road or rocks in the path are going to stop us? When the time comes, we'll be plenty ready to exchange exile for homecoming.

⁹⁻¹⁰ But neither exile nor homecoming is the main thing. Cheerfully pleasing God is the main thing, and that's what we aim to do, regardless of our conditions. Sooner or later we'll all have to face God, regardless of our conditions. We will appear before Christ and take what's coming to us as a result of our actions, either good or bad.

I think we have the flow of the passage now, so perhaps I'll sit down and its tea and coffee at the hatch? Or perhaps not! Two major themes crop up in this passage; Faith & Hope, the heading to this passage could be said to be Paul's ultimate hope and his current walk. His ultimate hope was to be absent from this body & present with the Lord. (which does not mean we are presently absent from God but that our seeing of God is by faith, not by sight.) In another of the books that Paul wrote, Romans, Paul offers Abraham as an example of hope; which I find interesting, Abraham had no external or historical grounds for that hope. He couldn't go to his life application bible and do a word study on Hope or gather his home group around him to pray when he felt down. His hope is solely grounded in a personal relationship with the God who he trusts. Rom 4:¹⁸ 'Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed', he believed the God of Hope even though all human hope was gone. Why was all hope gone? Abraham was 99 when God promised him a son, in reproductive terms, he was a fossil.

So Abraham hoped, but our hope is grounded in more than Abraham had. We have the external evidence, the historical fact of Christ's victory over evil through his death & resurrection and we have the internal evidence, the gift of the HS. Something that became clear to me as I studied is that hope & the HS are closely linked and there are it seems to me, two components of Hope, the Divine Gift & Human Activation. Firstly the Divine Gift. Rom 8.¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to son-ship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. It is the HS that tells us & assures us that we His children, with an inheritance, the HS is a guarantee, verse 5, a seal, or like a postage stamp, if you will, a stamp once you stick it on the envelope & post it, you can't get it back, its going somewhere. So we having been given the HS by God are en route, we have the hope of a certain future, of glory that is to be revealed.

The Holy Spirit gives us hope of a certain future & a taste of the things to come. In a book subtitled 'The compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship' - and with a title like that who could challenge it - it tells us that, 'the pouring out of spiritual gifts is part of life in the Spirit, providing Christians with an overwhelming assurance of their inclusion in a new age that has already dawned.' An overwhelming assurance that God hasn't been derailed by that which causes us to groan, as Simon taught last week, the troubles that threaten to

overwhelm are sown with a seed of purpose. But, I hear ringing in my ears but how, practically, how does the HS cause hope to arise?

This seems to me to be where we find that the Human Activation side to hope kicks in, where the realities of 1 Cor 12 & 13 kick in, the spiritual gifts, used by the Church in love. Hope arises when prompted by the Spirit you send a care package to a friend who is struggling, hope arises when you pray for the sick and they recover, hope arises when you responding to a prompting to send a text or pick up the phone to a friend and say I don't know quite why but I just felt I had to call you. Hope arises when God drops a word of knowledge or wisdom into your heart & you share it. (Testimonies from Anne Bishop & Claire Tinkler)

In all these incidents we see this cloak of sighing and the groaning being poked through and allowing eternal Hope to flood in, when through the body as Simon illustrated with the scales last week the weight, whatever it is that is threatening to crush is lifted, doesn't always disappear, but as hope is activated the weight is lifted.

I wonder if Paul was tempted to moderate his message, to talk less of burdens and groaning? Remember Tim told us about the 'super-apostles' who had come in from out of town in their Armani suits, Baby Bentleys and with silver tongues had preached a watered down, syncretistic faith that tickled the ears of the Corinthians, minimising suffering, the need for repentance, belittling Paul. Had Paul consulted the spin doctors they would have told him people want to associate with success, 'minimise the suffering - avoid mentioning the shipwrecks, beatings, floggings, hunger it just doesn't sell your ministry.'

Paul's perspective is defined not by his present circumstances; beaten, stoned, left for dead, shipwrecked, rejected by friends & of late, imprisoned. He is not defined by his circumstances but by his hope and his hope is expressed in Rom. 5:5 'Standing & rejoicing in hope' of what deliverance? No he had resolved himself to the fact that deliverance to a better set of circumstances might not come, he had resolved that he would not submit to something that he believed is wrong to make his life easier because his hope was in the glory of God. And that Glory in which you and I will share is more certain than the next beat of my heart.

We live as part of a community, the Church which stands between the resurrection of Christ 2000 years ago and the ultimate realization of the Kingdom of God at a point known to our Father. We are characterised by the reality of a future that has already begun but is still awaiting final consummation. It's a glorious future, and it's like a cake in the oven, we constantly get whiffs of it. We live in hope because God's promises often stand in stark contrast to the reality around us.

We live in hope and we walk in Faith.

Let's skip down to verse 9 which reads, 'Therefore we make it our aim to be well pleasing to Him', that is God. God, loves us, it is unconditional, unchanging. Solomon's Song says 'my beloved, (God), is mine and His desire is for me', his heart is for me. And the powerful, declaration of Paul's is ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' I am loved, you are loved, but am I pleasing Him? Paul says we make it our aim to be pleasing How do I please Him? By giving to the FoodBank, volunteering at the night shelter, church attendance, maybe, but from self-examination I can tell you that motives **fair & foul** can prompt these actions. How do we please God? Paul has already given us the answer in verse 7, walking by faith pleases God. And he further unpacks the point in Heb 11:6, 'without faith it is impossible to please God.'

Paul says, 'We walk by faith, not by sight.' The Corinthian motto was more naturally, 'we walk by sight, not by faith'. The Corinthians had done well for themselves, they had become rich. Paul speaking to them says, 1Cor 1:26 'Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth', but they were rich. They were self-made, it was a rags to riches city, no silver spoons, no family business, what they had they had earned themselves and they were very much attached to what they could see and touch. The message of success that the self proclaimed Super-Apostles brought resonated with them. To the Corinthian the gauge of success was measured in wealth. But this wasn't the way of the Kingdom.

Paul knew that if the Corinthian church were to continue with a fixation with what they could touch and see; bank balance, wages, wardrobe, house size, the model of phone, this obsession with externals which caused them to reject small, bald, scarred, stammering Paul, would lead to an inevitable rejecting of their Saviour Jesus.

Walking by sight. William Blake wrote, 'life's dim windows of the soul, distort the heavens from pole to pole and cause us to believe a lie when we see with and not through the eye.' What is the lie? The lie is What is seen is solid and secure. A believing friend of mine started a heating installation business. It grew and as it did, so did the size of his house and the value of his cars. Oh so secure. One night a call from the emergency services had him racing around to his warehouse, the flames of which were lighting up the night sky. Insured, certainly, but a technicality invalidated the claim. He acknowledges he was building his security he had started to walk by sight. The fire wasn't started by lightning bolt from God in punishment, it was an electrical fault or something.

So what does a walk of faith look like? That which pleases God. Heb 11:1 paints a picture for us saying, 'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.' If in a Word document you highlight 'faith' & right click, down to synonyms, click, 'confidence' and 'assurance' are suggested as useful synonyms, or word parallels for faith. The New King James goes further and says it is 'the substance of things hoped for', it is suggesting that faith is not theoretical or conceptual, faith is substance; there is a tangibility about it. The Greek word used for 'confidence' in Heb 11:1 is *hoopostasis* (5287) the same word is used in other first century documents for 'a body of documents forming the evidence of ownership' or what we would now call a 'title deed'. In other words if you possessed the documents you possess that which is referred to in it. If someone handed you the title deeds to 50 Wilmot St, what would your rights be? Possession of 50 Wilmot St! Now read Heb 11:1 with that understanding, 'Faith is the document forming the evidence of ownership, the title deed of that for which we hope, that which we do not see'. Faith is not a blind, stoical resignation to an unknown force. Faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith is more solid, more dependable than the chair you're sitting on.

Faith comes from hearing God's voice - through a sermon, through a scripture, through divine revelation, through a dream, through a prophetic word we hear God's voice. And those title deeds, that evidence of ownership is deposited in our being. I was 21, I had gone to bed reading a newsletter from a mission organisation, which I had been receiving since I was 14, one article had particularly challenged me. Despite my lack of natural numeracy I was training as a management accountant with Cussons. The article I was reading was challenging people with financial skill, I use the word skill very loosely regarding my numeracy, challenging them to give a year of their lives to overseas mission work. Sufficiently provoked I prayed and committed it to God believing that was the end. Having done so I went to sleep. The following morning before getting out of bed I opened my bible for a reading. The passage was headed, 'Jesus calls his first disciples' in Matt 4: ¹⁹ 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' ²⁰ At once they left their nets and followed him. There was a divine deposit of faith lodged somewhere in here. I knew then that I had to leave my work and offer myself to this Christian organisation for a year.

I told my parents and they were cautiously encouraging. I went to my then church leadership and they took the same line. I had to find my own funding for the year, it was a voluntary position, but that wasn't a problem I had a reasonably new car to sell and the church said they would give me some money and I had some share holdings. I was scheduled to depart in February 1988. The end of '87 saw the first financial crisis, my investments disappeared, then my church decided they didn't approve of the organisation I was going with and withdrew financial support, and on the way to a farewell party as a result of some sketchy motorway roadwork signage, I was rear ended by a speeding car and driven into the central reservation barrier. I was rattled and a bit bruised but my car was a perfect example of how a crumple zone operates, with the front and rear splendidly concertina'ed either side of the cabin. And because I had reduced my insurance to 3rd party to save, I got £50 from the scrap yard. The resources that were going to facilitate my voluntary work overseas had gone.

But faith is substance, faith is the title deeds, it is the documents assuring possession, doesn't need to see with physical eyes, it isn't fact based, it is truth based, it doesn't need to see cash in the bank and it doesn't need to know where it's coming from, faith is enough. God had spoken to my heart about giving a year to this organisation, faith had been deposited, not cash, and so I went, for more than a year, 17 actually before I received my next salary.

To conclude. Paul speaks of the Corinthian church as people who will be blameless. Blameless! This is a church where sexual practices were knowingly going on that were frowned on by the debauched society around them. The Corinthian church used the remembrance of Christ's death as an excuse for a drunken party. But Paul had hope that they would be blameless, hope of a certain future & a taste of the things to come. And God had deposited faith that meant he wasn't defined by what he could see and his circumstances. (Ask those praying to go to the back.)

If you feel despair & hopelessness colours your perspective....

If circumstances rather than faith in what God has said to you form the basis of decisions...