

Walk by Faith

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Darren, and as Martin said, we are going to continue looking in this series in 2 Corinthians. And yet, this is, again, as a wee bit of a reminder, we're looking at this letter where Paul has established this new community of believers. He's had this boom of faith, and then things have fallen apart in the way that they have related to one another, to the point where they've not only rejected him, but publicly criticized him, and the hardships of which he is faced of having a whole community of people he's invested in suddenly reject him. And in this letter, we are seeing right into the heart of why Paul does what he does. It's quite an insight into why he continues to persevere, not to give up, to continue to persevere with the things that most people, when they would experience, would step away. I know for myself, if I had somebody like Paul appear in my therapy room, so I work as a therapist part-time, and he told me about these relationships he was involved with, and all these different people he was engaged with, and the way they were treating him, I think I would say something like, you need some better boundaries, Paul. Maybe you need to step away from some of these toxic relationships. In fact, does your Jesus not even tell you to dust off your sandals from people who reject you? You know what Paul will powerfully do is point to an unseen reality that not only allows him to bear what is happening, but actually motivates him to continually give himself to something and to people for a God who's not just in his life, but at work in the world.

And when we talk about unseen realities, I know it's difficult. It's a difficult thing to get our head around. This week, over the past couple of weeks, I have maybe a bit foolishly agreed to homeschool one of my nieces to help my sister and her husband out, because they're all working at home, which I assure you is a task I hugely underestimated. And one of the things we were doing is at the end of the day, when I make dinner, I was trying to explain why I say grace, why I pray over food. And this six-year-old said to me, well, why do you pray? You cook the food. And I said, well, yeah, but it's where the food comes from. She was like, where did you get it? And I was like, well, the supermarket. She said, well, yeah, so you got it from there. I was like, yeah, but that came from somewhere as well. She's like, yeah, the farmers. And I was theologically stumped by a six-year-old. And eventually, we were starting to talk about if there's an unseen thing happening here, where the physical things that we rely on actually have something behind them that doesn't just provide for us, but gives a life and source to each one of us. So I'm just going to quickly pray myself again, and then we'll launch into what Paul writes here to the Corinthians when he talks about these unseen realities. Father, we thank you for your word, and we thank you that you speak to us. You speak to us from the heart of who you are and tell us what reality is actually like. And so I pray that as we look at your word this morning, you would put us in touch with reality. Amen. So last week, at the end of chapter four, Paul is touching on this idea that whilst his experience of life is something that he experiences things are fading away and decaying, but there's something internally being renewed, there's something new at work inside. And he picks up this idea, and he takes it further in chapter five, and he starts to use this analogy of a tent. And in verse one, he says that, for while 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. And he picks up this analogy of this idea of his temporary self, the life he leads to just now being like a tent. And it's a pretty powerful image when you think about it, because obviously tents are temporary structures, aren't they? They serve a function and a purpose, but they're obviously not designed or intended to be something which we call home. You would never really think, apart from maybe the extreme outdoor people, which I am definitely not one of, where you'd think, I'll build my entire house and life around a tent. And we instinctively know that. We especially know when we see extreme examples of that. So think in the news when we see any of the many,

unfortunately, huge amounts of refugee camps around the world. We see seas of people who are living together in temporary accommodation. Now, the tragedy of those events in and of itself is bad enough, but there's something about seeing those huge fields of people that invokes a feeling of unsettledness, doesn't it? We instinctively look at that and think, that is not a place to build your life. This is a picture of Zatari in Jordan. It's the largest Syrian refugee camp, which opened in 2012, and is still open today, and houses 78,000 people. And it's classified as a permanent settlement. Now, we look at that and we instinctively think, that is not built to last. That is not going to be something that provides security or meaning or purpose for the people there. And added to that, Paul himself is actually a tent maker. That was one of the things Paul did while he was in Corinth. You know that from the book of Acts. So when he was in Acts, when he was in Corinth, as he tells us in Acts, he used his skill and time and energy to make tents. So he's actually taking a real-life example in his place of work, something that he's applied his time and his energy to. And he's making the very simple point, see this thing, we all know this is not built to last. And this is what the temporary life that we live in now is like. And we see that principle everywhere, don't we? We know instinctively in ourselves that when we think of our body or our health or our politics or the planet itself, we see the decay. We see that as it goes older, it starts to fail and not do the very thing that we all hoped it might do eventually. Now, at the same time, Paul is not affirming here some sort of devaluing of the present. That's not what he's doing. If you look at verses 2, 3, and the first part of 4, meanwhile will we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 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.

[6 : 20] And so Paul has drawn up this tension that is, although this heavenly tent is his home, and while it's not built to last, there's this groaning that goes on in between, which is the thing that all humans, I think, can relate to. I know I can. COVID has definitely exposed that in us, as we miss things. It's not just that we're missing things, but there's an added fear that some of these things might not come back. For some people, there's actually health, people who've got long COVID or people who have died, that we know the experience of the moment is not just that it's something we're missing, but it touches on a bigger idea that things are decaying, that we are not actually in control of that much after all. Yet, at the same time, it has value. Like, the present does have value. So Paul is not affirming some sort of, like, well, we just need to get out of this, because it's worthless. I've even heard once or twice these kind of ideas used to affirm things like, well, life has got no real meaning. We just need to get out of here. Paul is touching into the brutality and the honesty that in the moment, while he's in this place, there's an experience of life that makes him want to long for something more. I think all humans have that, and he is not shying away from that. He doesn't look at the suffering he's experiencing from promoting the gospel and sharing the good news and saying, well, I just need to have a stiff upper lip here. This doesn't matter. He holds the groaning and actually says there's something about that groaning that's accessing something that is bigger in what we want from life. He actually says those pains are actually pointing towards something. For him, it's the longing to be in this home that God has made for him.

And this is where he kind of takes us in his journey and in his thought, because he doesn't end with some sort of nihilistic conclusion of, well, just you've got to make do with what you can make do with this life, or what I believe became the phrase of 2020, it is what it is. This is just what life is like. No, instead, he will point to something far bigger and greater, which is where we pick up halfway through verse 4. With our heavenly dwelling, which is what he's talking about, the thing he yearns for, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now, the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us a spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. So, interestingly, Paul's conclusion on tent life, if you want to call it that, is that when it ends, actually the end is something far better. And actually, it's not just like a better thing or something nicer. He says it's swallowed up by life. When we think of the end, when we talk about the end, we use words like the end or death. And quite naturally, we use those words because they communicate what something has happened. But Paul says what will happen next is I'm going to be swallowed up by life.

And this word life is supercharged. It's the word *zoe*, and the definition will pop up here in a second. But that word means life, real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed in the portion, even in this world, of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be

consummated by new accessions, among them a more perfect body and to last forever. When I think of what comes next, even in my most best days, do I think that what the Christian promise is, is not just a slightly better shadow of what we have now, but it's actually life, that life will swallow us up. It will be the thing that charges all things in this world now, but will be made even more fuller in the life to come. Paul sees what comes next, again, what many of us would call the end, and he sees it as something more real than what we're experiencing in the moment.

[10:15] This is obviously in huge contrast to the way most people think of the end, of death, of the afterlife, whatever you might call it. We have a world that affirms this is all that there is, and therefore, if you're living in the moment, it's really hard to reconcile things like pain, let alone pain, that comes from the idea of trying to serve those round about you with the message of the good news.

Our world will tell you, well, don't do that. You've got a short time look after yourself. That is the main thing to do. The artist David Vorashnovich, I don't know if I just said his name there correctly, I've never known how you say his name. He was a famous artist and activist in the 70s and the 80s, and he was homeless for a lot of his life and then had HIV and died in his late 30s, and his memoirs, which I don't know, they're not the cheeriest book in the world, but he was talking about this life now, and he said, I realize how much I hate arriving at a destination. Transition is always a relief.

Destination means death to me. If I could figure out a way to remain forever in transition, in the disconnected and unfamiliar, I could remain in a state of perpetual freedom.

He sees the end, literally the end, and the more he got towards it, the more terrified he became of it, and actually, the longer I can stay here, the more freedom I have. It's actually quite different to the way Paul sees reality. Paul sees what comes next as ultimate freedom. It is the ultimate life, because when we have fear of what's next, when we have fear or uncertainty about the future, it obviously creates an anxiety in the present, doesn't it? Where wherever we think what comes next is lesser, you will avoid it, you delay it. It's a basic human principle, and that manifests itself in most people's lives. Paul's motivation, he's pointing to here, is, oh, actually, I'm going to be swallowed up by life, so that doesn't just help me bear with this. It actually equips me to have a firmness to be present here today, because it's core to the Christian faith that what comes next is not some sort of shadow of this existence. It's not some sort of ethereal pie-in-the-sky, wishful thinking, we'll all be hanging around singing songs one day. What Paul has affirmed throughout this whole letter and goes on to affirm is what comes next is the new creation.

It's so important that in our faith that Jesus physically resurrected, he is the first to go through death and come back as the physical Jesus who ascends into heaven as the beginning of something new. And that's where God's people are headed, is the fusion of heaven and earth, is this beautiful new creation. In his book, C.S. Lewis writes in *The Great Divorce*, where he writes this fictional account of the afterlife, and he writes at the beginning of his book, it's a fictional thing, you shouldn't take it too literally, but he's trying to describe about a group of people who kind of arrive at the outskirts of the new creation, and he describes their experience like this.

[13:06] It was the light, the grass, and the trees that were different, made of a different substance, so much solidier than the things in our country, that men were like ghosts in comparison. The little flowers were hard, not like wood or iron, but more like diamonds. And I tried to pick up a leaf, but my heart almost cracked with the effort, and I believe I just did barely erase it.

So, what Lewis is trying to communicate is what comes next is not something lesser or something even a bit better of some of the stuff we have here on earth. It's a reality so charged because God, the creator of all things, is in the middle, and Jesus, the sustainer of all life, is there as its king, and this is the new creation that we are headed to. And Paul says in verse 5, this is a place prepared for him by God. It is fashioned, it has been made by God, and it is guaranteed by the Spirit.

It is not only somewhere he is headed in hopes, but he knows because of God's Word to us and God's faithfulness in His covenant that God has actually prepared this place and has given His Spirit as a guarantee that that will happen. It's a pretty beautiful picture of what comes next. Around in February last year, so just 11 months ago, my grandmother died, and I was very close to my grandmother. My grandmother was like a second parent to us while we were growing up, and she had a lot of dementia, but it was brought on by lots of these little strokes. And one day before what would turn out to be her kind of like ultimate stroke that put her into hospital and she never came home again, and the person we knew we didn't really ever see again, about four or five days before

that, the week before I was praying and felt compelled to go and visit her. She lives in Oban, and I can only really put that moment down to the Spirit. Anyway, I went home and I spent the weekend with her, and we were just chatting away, and we're kind of asking some of the questions that you often don't ask when there's an older person in the family is ill.

You're allowed to talk about the physical realities and stuff, but we were having a conversation about how she was feeling about what was happening, and what was happening to her, and she knew, she knew her health was failing. She knew she was coming to an end. Now, don't get me wrong, this is a, we west of Scotland Catholic women weren't having like great in-depth debates about the meaning of life, but we talked about what that reality was like for her, and she said about how she hoped where she was going next, and so we had a chat about how her hope can be confident because of Christ. We had this small chat about how that is not just wishful thinking, it's a confidence because of who Jesus is, and she agreed, and we sat and silently prayed for a minute, which is something I'd never done with her before, and then afterwards, she said, which is a memory that sticks in my mind quite clearly, she's like, I'm looking forward to getting rid of these old things and tapped her legs, because for a long time she functioned at quite a high physical capacity, despite the fact she literally never did anything a doctor had ever told her, and there was something about in that moment she was looking forward not just to something better, but the new physical resurrection, and I shared her story, I spoke at her funeral in February last year, and I was sharing that story, and as for me, and I was hoping for the people in the room that while we were there to mourn, we were also there to celebrate and join in the confidence that she had, that she was in the new creation, and her own safety was something far better than what she was experiencing in that moment, and Paul will go on to say that that belief, that takes faith, and that is what faith is about, as he goes on to talk about in verses 6 to 8.

[16:59] Therefore, we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and we prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So Paul goes on to further express that this reality, the groaning of what life in the present is like, the hope and the confidence of the new resurrection that is to come, that he experiences a bit of this tension, and he switches away from language of tents and buildings to this idea of being home and away. And again, this is not, and he describes this as like, allows him to have good courage or good confidence or good cheer, different translations would put it differently, but it's a sense of like, it's a proactiveness towards life. It's not, well, that will help me feel a bit better. It helps him engage fully with what's happening in front of him. And that's not some sort of brave face that wouldn't fit with the idea that he embraces the groaning, but it's something that gives him a readiness and a firmness to take on the things he's experiencing. And the reason, and the way he is of good courage is by, he says, it's by walking by faith and not by sight. Now, I'm not sure how you hear that verse.

Sometimes in the past I've heard that as, look, if you just believe something enough, it'll happen. You just need to believe and have a lot of faith. And although you can't see it, it's some sort of Christian equivalent of cross your fingers and hope all will work out. It'll be the kind of thing you see on mugs and magnets on fridges and things like that. So, it's a good idea, but actually in this chapter, in this verse, I think you will find that Paul is not affirming some sort of wishful thinking faith or some positive mental attitude. It is a faith that is rooted in something that is unseen, which he has confidence in, which I think is made a bit more clearer when we look at the structure of verses 6 to 8. There's a bit of a pattern there, and there's a bit of a mirroring of certain words that Paul will use, like home and awake. And just as a side note, whenever you see repetition in the Bible of certain words and phrases, it's not because the Bible writers have a limited vocabulary.

It's often they're trying to point towards something. So, this is called the chiasm, if you want the professional word for it. But it's just a pattern where, like, this idea of we walk by faith and not by sight is anchored in this tension that Paul is feeling where he says, look, I'm at home in the body, and while I'm there, I'm actually away from the Lord. But my desire is to be away from the body and at home in the Lord. Therefore, in that tension, I walk by faith, not by sight. His faith is not just, it just applies everywhere. It is rooted in the confidence of where he will go in the midst of the tension of his current reality, and therefore, he is confident. He is of good courage in the present.

And actually, he uses a different word there for home compared to the one in verse 1. The one in verse 1 is literally about buildings. He's comparing the buildings and tent. Here, this word has got

way more about belonging. I'm at home with my people. It's like being at home in your country. It's like a traveler who's gone away and finds himself home again. And Paul talks about this tension that he experiences in different places in the Scriptures. He says that in Philippians, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I'm going to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what will I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, but it's more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and I will continue with you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again, your boasting in Christ will abound on account of me.

[20 : 55] For Paul, the faith he is talking about is the belief that while he is away now, he will be home with the Lord one day in the resurrection, the new creation. This is a faith on what is to come based on the resurrection of Jesus. It's not blind faith. It is based on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Elsewhere in the Scriptures, Hebrews describes faith as confidence that what we hope for will actually happen. It gives us assurance about the things we cannot see. A few years ago, I was in Lindisfarne, which is in the northeast, wee island off the northeast of England, where there's an abbey. It was actually set up by St. Aidan, so St. Aidan was a disciple of St. Columba, who was sent from Iona, so it was Scottish people who were sent to help the English with the faith, if you want to look at it that way. Anyway, on the abbey, which is on the island, there's a causeway that helps you get to the abbey, which you can walk there at certain times of the day, but obviously causeways get flooded, so they had to go at the right times. But the weather conditions would make it a tricky journey.

So the monks came up with a system where they put these poles in place to guide them to the abbey. And on certain days, this became a picture of their faith. So they knew the abbey existed. It was the place of home and security and belonging. And on the journey there, they had a path to follow. Yet some days when the fog was so bad, or the weather was so bad, you would struggle to see all the poles. And so their picture of faith was, as they walked to the pole in front of them, they trusted that by the time they got there, the next pole would come into sight. And for them, that became a picture of what faith was like, certain of where they were headed, guided in front of them. Yet in the midst of what life is like, there would be storms, there would be fog, and they trusted as they walked. Because staying in the causeway was not an option. You couldn't just stay there, you would drown. They had to continue on their journey. But they were not just left blindly figuring it out by themselves. Walking by faith and not sight does not mean you're blindly just left to make up things by yourself. It's trusting in the one who says the things and guides his people.

So faith is confidence that what we hope for will actually happen. Faith is confidence, confidence or assurance that is a conclusion based on the available data. Faith puts its trust in God's character. We have faith in God because of who God is, because of who he has revealed himself to be. He is truth. He is love. He is mercy. We believe God's promises and then act in accordance with these promises. Even when there are certain things that we cannot see, we have assurance about these things. We have assurance and forgiveness and grace and the indwelling of the Spirit because of the one who tells us about them. Because we are confident in the character of God. Paul has ultimate confidence in what comes next because of who has told him about it. The difference between someone who's a Christian and someone that isn't is not whether you have faith or not, but what you've put your faith in, what you're building your life on, where you're building your life to head towards.

[24 : 11] Paul's made it quite clear, tents are not built to last. You're going to build your life on the hope of what is to come. Everybody lives by faith. The question is, what's your faith attached to?

Every one of us has faith in something, whether it's career, relationships, the government, it doesn't really matter, but we all have faith in something. Christians put their faith in Jesus, in his life, death, resurrection. The biblical witnesses and the historic reality of who Jesus was. Again, these are not some nice stories. It's about a real person who walked and lived among us as the coming King and gave his life for us. And faith isn't simply agreeing mentally with these statements. It's to walk by faith. That's what Paul tells us to do. It is something that pushes into the reality of our life. And that's what Paul's conclusion is here, that wherever he is and whatever he is experiencing, because of this confidence he has in something he cannot yet see, he continues to share this good news with others, which leads us into verses 9 and 10.

So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home or in the body or away from it. For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one of us may receive what is

due to us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. So Paul is saying that this confidence in what will come next, this faith that he has, causes him to walk by faith and not by sight. And part of walking by faith means his aim is to please God. Paul lives his entire life in light of the hope that his actions will bring delight to God one day, because it is possible for Christians to please or displease God in our daily actions. God is not passive on our lives. He mourns when we mourn. He rejoices when we rejoice. Therefore, obviously, God is pleased or displeased when we are continuing to pursue him or we are not. What pleases God? Well, when we live by faith, when we trust in what Jesus has said about who he is and what he has done, and live our lives in response to that. When we live the lives we were designed to live, with Jesus as our Savior King, lives in which we seek to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our mind, all our body, and our soul. When we seek to love our neighbors as ourselves. And Paul is saying in the coming age, Jesus will judge us based on how we have done that.

Now, just to be clear, Paul is not suddenly saying doing good things is the aim here, and if you keep doing good things, you'll keep God on side. That is not what Paul is talking about here. But he's talking about when you come, which we all will, come and meet Jesus, our Savior King, who gave himself for us in love. He will ask each one of us, how did you respond to this message? How did you live as a result? In response to that, we're told each one of us will be asked what that experience is like, I don't know, but Paul is making it pretty clear this happens. Now, Paul is confident that genuine believers will pass Christ's judgment. You don't even need much of what Paul writes to get that conclusion. Because the good news is that God the Father has gone to extraordinary lengths to have a relationship with me and you through his Son and brought under the life-transforming reality of the Spirit, based on the forgiveness of our sins through Christ alone and through God's grace alone.

And faith in that, not ourselves, is faith that will result in changed lives. But when we come before Jesus, because when we come before Jesus, what could we possibly hold up in front of him and say, this was good enough for us and good enough for you, therefore let us enjoy this new creation? One of the paradoxes of what Paul is saying here is the judge is also the very person that stands in our defense. The judge is also the person who gives his life so that we may pass the judgment of Christ himself. Yet, at the very same time, there's this mystery that our present-day actions have consequences in the life to come. If there's a mystery in the New Testament, this idea that what we do with our lives aren't of no consequence, that they have meaning, they have impact, and that Jesus will judge each one of us based on how we have lived that life.

[28 : 38] Here, Jesus, in all his love and compassion, will also at the same time judge what we have done while we have been in the tent. What did we do in response to his love and grace and mercy?

Did we walk by faith and not by sight? Because of this hope of the resurrection and the reward of this glory beyond uncomparison that he talks about in chapter 4, how did you then live?

Who were you seeking to please? Who am I seeking to please? Seeking to please me, or does this new confidence allow you to act freely and humbly? Did we seek to love our neighbors by telling them of this God who has prepared this exact same place for them as well? In our weakness and our brokenness, we come before Jesus with the offer of the gift of the new life both now and in the world to come.

And that's actually one of the reasons Paul was kind of rejected, was he fully embraced and lived this. He was not seeking to please people, he was seeking to please God, and therefore his life was a bit embarrassing to some of the Corinthians. In fact, they would have wanted a shinier person who was doing lots of celebratory things that they could have easily got behind and say, yeah, we're for this really up-and-coming leader. But instead, you had a man who was so confident of where he was going that his whole life was about, well, I'm going to please the God who gives me this invitation to something new, and therefore that doesn't just help him to be present, it motivates him to go back.

The author Henri Nouwen says in his book, *Bread for the Journey*, the main question is not how can we hide our wounds so that we don't have to be embarrassed, but how can we put our woundedness into the service of others? We have become wounded healers.

[30 : 22] The new covenant that embraces all people in their weakness and in their brokenness and in their sin actually becomes the very thing that motivates Paul because of the promise of where they are headed, the promise of the new creation, the promise of this better place where he'd

rather be, but actually that gift transforms him to want to go back with that message into the world. To hold it out is the most beautiful thing that could possibly be offered, and therefore the Paul that comes back isn't somebody who's like cleaned himself up and made himself perfect, but actually in his imperfection comes before Jesus who sustains all these things.

So that's the good news of where we're headed. A God who has prepared a place for us guaranteed by the Spirit where Christ the Judge, who is also the Christ who gives himself to enable us to inherit this place, will stand. And that for Paul isn't just a nice idea, it is confidence that allows him to walk in the presence of all of the people in Corinth who, although they were slandering him and rejecting him, he would come back with a posture of love, with the good news of a hope for a better tomorrow, because it has been secured by a God who sees all things and embraces all things, and has sent his Son into that in order that while we experience groaning in the temporary, that does not have the final word, because the resurrection has the final word on all of our lives. I'm going to pray. And then Martin O'Connor. Father, we thank you for the good news, the good news that doesn't just help us feel better, but gives us confidence, a confidence in a reality that you have prepared for each one of us, a reality that's been secured by the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. And so I pray you'd help us to have faith in that, to help us to walk in that reality, to help us to dwell on the unseen that changes the way that we live today, and to hold out that message to a needy world. I ask that in Jesus' name. Amen.