

No More Camping

2 Corinthians 5: 1-11

Forty-some years ago, two close friends celebrated their recent high school graduation by taking a camping and fishing trip in the woods of Tennessee. Detailed plans were made, a four-man canvas tent was purchased, and they practiced setting it up in one of their back yards. A few days later, the tent was returned to the cardboard box it came in, fishing tackle, food and supplies were rounded up, a Trip Ticket from AAA was obtained, and the pair crammed all those things and more into a Ford Pinto hatchback. Ten hours later, they arrived at a primitive campground on Tennessee Lake. No electric, no running water, just a great big beautiful lake, lots of woods, and too many mosquitos to count. Arriving shortly before dusk, the pair quickly unloaded the car and began to set up camp. As the light of day faded, a lantern was lit, and a somewhat level spot was chosen to pitch the tent. The box containing the tent was opened, and in the blink of an eye, their excitement and anticipation were quickly replaced by doom and gloom and a few choice words that can't be repeated here. Sure enough, the green canvas tent was in the box, but the poles that were needed to hold it up were not. They were ten hours away, laying in the grass in Berlin Center, Ohio. It was not long until plan B went into effect, and soon some sticks and clothesline replaced the poles, and the tent was mostly up. It was not a pretty sight, but it was functional.

Today, when I see or hear the word tent, I can't help but think of that experience. I am confident in saying that at the time, neither of us would have ever guessed that one of us would stand behind a pulpit someday and use it as a sermon illustration. But as a sign in my office often reminds me, only God can turn a mess into a message.

Tents were something the apostle Paul knew much about. He was a tentmaker by trade, a necessary business even today in the Middle East. With all of the traveling he did for the Lord in his later years, it is likely he repaired more tents than he made. Westerners tend to think of a tent as something to camp in for a few days, but for many in Biblical lands a tent is their home, their primary dwelling place. Typically, they are not made of nylon or green canvas, but coarse cloth covered with black goat's hair.

Writing to the early church at Corinth, Paul used the imagery of a tent as a symbol of the human body, much like he did jars of clay in chapter 4:7. It may sound strange to us, but a tent and the human body do share some things in common. One of the most obvious is that neither are eternal. Like so many other things on earth, they are subject to the elements and will eventually wear out or be damaged beyond repair. They do not last forever. Both are temporary dwelling places. A tent is a temporary dwelling place for our body, and our body is a temporary dwelling place for our soul. The good news is that Paul told the early church and indirectly the church here at Millcreek that if our earthly body is destroyed, if our temporary home suffers irreparable damage, God gives us something much better. To put it bluntly, when we die God doesn't give us a new tent, but a building, eternal in the heavens. We will come back to that concept in a few minutes.

He says in verse 2 that in this tent or in our earthly body we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. The first part is easy to understand as it tells us something many of us already know too well. Tents are not the best of dwelling places. They can be too hot or too cold, they can smell funny, and as they age, they require high maintenance. Like a makeshift tent held up with sticks and rope, they can be more functional than pretty. The picture is of us being stuck in a tent, all the while dreaming of moving to a penthouse suite at the Hyatt Regency.

The second part is a bit more difficult to grasp. How do we put on or wear a building? Even more confusing is verse 3. When we put on our heavenly dwelling, we will not be found naked. Some of us might say amen to that, but the question remains. What is Paul referring to when he says we will put on our heavenly dwelling, a house not made with hands but eternal in the heavens?

To answer the question, we must consider what Scripture tells us about death and resurrection. Perhaps the clearest is found in John 5: 28-29.

His voice refers to the voice of Jesus. A historical and fundamental teaching of Scripture is that Jesus was crucified and died to redeem sinners, He resurrected Himself from the dead after being in the tomb for three days, and a time is coming when everyone else who has died will also be resurrected from the dead at His command. Some will be resurrected to glory, and some will be resurrected to judgment.

Acts 24:15

And not only will we rise from the dead, we will also receive a new body. It will not be like our old temporary body that was destined to die, but it will be a brand- new resurrection body, an eternal body, a permanent body, a perfect body. In his first letter to Corinth, Paul goes into detail about it.

15:42-45.

Some will receive a body perfectly fit for glory and others a body fit for something else.

Mathew 10:28.

John, Mathew and Paul and the other co-authors of Scripture would be in agreement that on the day of resurrection, we will not as Paul puts it be found naked. We will not be an abstract spiritual being without a body to call our own. Until then, we are stuck in our tents, yearning for the glorious heavenly body that awaits. The body fit for glory will be so perfect, we cannot even imagine what it will look like. It will be like the body of Jesus, yet uniquely ours, completely absent from sin, evil, illness, deceit and every other earthly thing that takes such a toil on our earthly body.

We believe that to be true, even though we have never seen a resurrection body. We believe that to be true, because we walk by faith, not by sight. As we sang earlier, I remain confident in this I will see the goodness of the Lord.

So, or in the words of Paul, therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent from that new body, to be well pleasing to Him. The promise and goodness of eternity and resurrection should cause us to do all we can to live our life in such a way that God is pleased. God is pleased when His people are obedient.

Luke 11:28