

WEEKLY SERMON STUDY

We Go Home

Based on 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 | Sermon 2 of 5: The Nature of the Present Heaven

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." — 2 Corinthians 5:8

SERMON SUMMARY

This sermon — the second in a five-part series on heaven — asked the most personal and universal question any human being faces: What happens when we die? The mortality rate is 100%. This is not an abstract theological exercise. It is the question every person in every generation has had to answer.

The sermon began by naming two common Christian answers — and then showing that Scripture says it's neither one.

The Two Wrong Answers

1. Nothing. Some Christians teach that when we die, we simply cease to exist — passing out of consciousness and memory until God raises us at the last trumpet. We just sleep until the resurrection.
2. Everything. Others teach that death ushers us immediately into the full experience of heavenly glory — new body, new creation, grandpa dancing on healed legs the moment he closes his eyes.

Scripture's answer is neither. It is something in between — what theologians call the intermediate state. Not nothing. Not everything. Something genuinely blessed, genuinely real, and genuinely incomplete.

The Context: Paul Writing Under Pressure

2 Corinthians is Paul's most autobiographical letter, written around 55 AD while defending his ministry against charges that its hardships prove it invalid. The chapter before our text frames everything: "We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away... our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen."

Chapter 5 is that glimpse of the unseen. It contains a complex vision that blends two timelines — what happens after our last breath, and what happens after the last trumpet. Paul develops the distinction through three pairs of contrasts.

2 Corinthians 5:1-8 "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven... We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."

Three Contrasts — Two Timelines

Contrast 1: Tent vs. House (v. 1)

Our current earthly body is like a tent — portable, temporary, vulnerable to wear and decay. The resurrection body is like an eternal building, permanent and perfect. Paul's audience in Corinth would have understood this vividly: they saw tents during the Isthmian Games and the ruins of massive stone structures in their city. This contrast looks forward to the resurrection — the transformation that comes at the last trumpet, not at the moment of death.

1 Corinthians 15:52-53 "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."

Contrast 2: Clothed vs. Naked (vv. 2-3)

Between the earthly tent and the resurrection building, Paul introduces a third state: nakedness. When our earthly body dies, the new body is not yet ready. We exist without the clothing of a physical body. This is not desirable — Paul says he would rather be clothed than naked — but it is real, and it is temporary. We are not destroyed. We are undressed.

Contrast 3: Away from the Body vs. At Home with the Lord (vv. 6-8)

This is the clearest statement of the intermediate state. At the moment of death, when we are away from the body, we do not wait for the trumpet. We are immediately at home with the Lord. Not in final glory. Not with a resurrection body. But with Christ — conscious, present, blessed.

What We Know About the Where

Three things can be said about the place we go at death.

- The present heaven is different from the eternal heaven. Genesis 1:1 says God created the heavens and the earth — meaning heaven itself is a created realm, not an eternal one. Revelation 21 describes a new heaven and a new earth, meaning the present heaven will itself be renewed. Where we go at death is not where we will spend eternity.
- The present heaven is a place of blessedness. Though incomplete and temporary, Jesus called it paradise — the same word he used from the cross ("Today you will be with me in paradise") and that Paul used to describe his own glimpse of the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12. The parable of Lazarus describes it as a place of comfort at Abraham's side.
- The present heaven is the pattern for earth. Hebrews 9 describes the tabernacle and its entire sacrificial system as a copy or shadow of what is really true in heaven. Heaven is not a better version of earth — earth is a reflection of heaven. C.S. Lewis: "The hills and valleys of heaven will be those you now experience, not as a copy to an original, but as the flower to the root or the diamond to the coal."

What We Know About the Who

Four things can be said about what happens to us at death.

- We will be divided, but not destroyed. Body and soul belong together — but death divides them temporarily. Jesus said "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul." When Stephen was stoned, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" — his body died, but he

entrusted his spirit to God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are buried in Hebron, but Jesus declared them living: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

- We will have an identifiable form. The transfiguration shows Moses and Elijah present in recognizable forms — Peter even offers to build shelters for them. In Revelation 7, John sees a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, wearing robes and holding palm branches, crying out with voices. The present heaven contains forms identifiable enough to show diversity, clothing, hands, and speech.
- We will have continuity of personality. Revelation 6 shows martyrs under the altar — conscious, rational, aware of their earthly deaths, aware of passing time, and crying out with a hope for justice. They are oriented in person, time, and place. They are themselves.
- We will experience blessedness. Paul writes in Philippians 1: "To die is gain... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far." Not better because of clouds and donuts, but better because we will be with Christ. Every cancer, every arthritis flare, every depression, every addiction — gone. But above all, home.

Three Closing Truths

3. Death is not the end — even temporarily. The answer of Scripture to those who believe we simply sleep until the resurrection is no. We are never separated from the love of God for even a moment. Those who have died in Christ even now stand before the face of God, knowing him fully, even as they have always been fully known.
4. Life after death is the beginning, not the end, of eternal blessedness. Heaven is not static. Calvin said the intermediate state is the commencement of our heavenly building, and the resurrection is the consummation. It is one continuous growth in blessedness — further up and further in, as C.S. Lewis wrote — glory unto glory without end.
5. Eternal life begins now. Because of what is coming, what we do in this body matters. Paul's response to his glimpse of glory is not passive waiting — it is making it his goal to please God whether in the body or away from it. The perfect blessedness of the future should begin shaping how we live today.

Romans 8:38-39 "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Key Takeaway

When we die, we do not cease. We do not immediately receive our final glorified bodies. We go home — to a real, conscious, blessed, intermediate state in the presence of Christ, awaiting the resurrection that is still to come. It is not nothing. It is not everything. It is paradise. And it gets better from there.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take your time. Listen well to each other. There are no wrong answers — only honest ones.

1

Before this sermon, which of the two common answers about death felt most familiar to you — "nothing happens until the resurrection" or "everything happens immediately"? Where did that picture come from — family, church, culture, something else?

2

The sermon described the intermediate state as being "naked" — without the clothing of a body, yet still conscious and present with Christ. How does that image sit with you? Is it unsettling, comforting, strange, or something else?

3

The sermon said the present heaven is the pattern for earth — that earth is more like a reflection or shadow of the real thing, not the other way around. C.S. Lewis described it as diamond to coal. How does that reframe the way you think about the beauty and goodness you experience in this world?

4

The martyrs in Revelation 6 are conscious, aware of time passing, aware of events on earth, and crying out with hope. What does it mean to you that the dead in Christ are not simply "asleep" but are themselves — rational, aware, and present before God even now?

5

Paul writes that to die is "gain" and to depart is "better by far." If you are honest, does heaven feel like gain to you — or does it feel like loss, or obligation, or something vaguely unappealing? What shapes your honest gut feeling about it?

6

The sermon closed with the story of Thomas Dorsey — who wrote "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" days after burying his wife and newborn son in the same casket. How does the reality of the present heaven speak into that kind of grief? What comfort does it actually offer, and what questions does it still leave unanswered?

7

Paul's response to his glimpse of eternity was active: "We make it our goal to please him, whether at home in the body or away from it." If death is truly not the end and life runs into eternity, what difference should that make to how you spend your time and energy this week?

LIVING IT OUT

We are away from the body and at home with the Lord — not yet, but one day soon. Let that reality begin to shape how we live today.

In Your Inner Life

- Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10 slowly this week in one sitting. Notice how Paul moves from "we do not lose heart" through his hardships to the glimpse that sustains him. Let the arc of the passage — from wasting away to eternal glory — form your imagination for your own life.
- The Heidelberg Catechism asks: "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" The answer: "That I am not my own, but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior." Memorize that question and answer this week. Say it out loud in the morning or before bed.
- Spend time sitting with the question the sermon raised: Does heaven feel like gain to you? Be honest. If it doesn't — if it feels abstract, unappealing, or distant — bring that honestly to God in prayer and ask him to make it more real.

In Your Closest Relationships

- The sermon closed with the story of Greg and Lana — a husband who, 18 years after his wife's death, posted on CaringBridge about "the glimpse she got of what awaits us all." Is there someone in your life who has lost a loved one recently or is facing their own death? Let this week be the week you reach out. Don't wait for the right words. Show up.
- Talk with someone in your family this week about what they believe happens when we die. Not to correct or teach — just to listen and open the conversation. Many families never have this conversation until a crisis forces it. Don't wait for the crisis.
- The sermon said the dead in Christ are conscious, aware, and themselves — not gone, not sleeping, but home. If you have lost someone who died in Christ, let yourself sit with that truth this week. They are not lost. They are known fully, even as they have always been fully known.

In Your Daily Life and Work

- Paul writes that because of this eternal reality, "we make it our goal to please him, whether at home in the body or away from it." Identify one area of your daily life this week where you want to live more intentionally as someone whose life runs into eternity — not as performance, but as a response to what is coming.
- C.S. Lewis described earth as the coal and heaven as the diamond. This week, look for the coal-to-diamond pattern in something ordinary — a relationship, a piece of beauty in creation, a moment of joy. Let it point you forward rather than anchoring you here.
- The sermon noted that heaven is not static — it is "further up and further in," growing in depth and brightness. Ask yourself: is my spiritual life growing? Is there movement? If not, what is one small step toward deeper rootedness in Christ this week?

In Your Faith Community

- This is the second sermon in a five-part series. Keep track of your growing questions as the series continues. Write down one thing from this sermon that you want to understand better before the series ends.

- If your congregation has members who are elderly, facing illness, or in grief, consider visiting or writing a note this week. The doctrine we studied is not only abstract theology — it is comfort for real people facing real deaths. Carry it to someone who needs it.
- The hymn "Precious Lord, Take My Hand" was born from Thomas Dorsey's grief over the death of his wife and newborn son. If you sing it soon in worship, let the weight of the story behind it give the words new gravity.

A Word to Carry

If you have buried someone you love — a parent, a child, a friend, a spouse — they have not passed out of existence. They are not sleeping in the dark. They stand even now before the face of God, knowing him fully, even as they have always been fully known. They are home. And one day, so will you be.

SERVICE CHALLENGE

Paul's response to the reality of heaven was not passive waiting — it was active, present faithfulness. This week, let the same vision drive one act of love toward someone who is facing what this sermon was about.

This Week's Challenge: Go to Someone Who Is Grieving

The comfort of this doctrine is not meant to stay in the pew. It is meant to be carried to the people around us who are losing someone, or who have already lost them.

Step 1 — Name Someone.

Think of one person in your life who is grieving a death, facing their own death, or caring for someone who is dying. Write their name down. They are the person this week's challenge is about.

Step 2 — Show Up.

Make contact — a visit, a phone call, a meal, a note. Don't wait until you have the right words. You don't need them. Presence is the ministry. The comfort you carry does not require a speech.

Step 3 — Listen First.

Ask one honest question — "How are you really doing?" or "What do you miss most?" — and listen fully. Don't rush to comfort. Don't fill the silence. Let them be heard before anything else.

Step 4 — Offer the Hope, If Welcome.

If the moment is right and the person is a believer, gently share what this sermon taught. Not as a lecture — as a word of comfort you received yourself. "They are not lost. They are home. They are known." Then offer to pray.

Step 5 — Come Back and Share.

If you're in a small group or Sunday school class, come ready to share briefly what you did and what you noticed. Doctrine that stays in a sermon and never reaches the grieving is doctrine that hasn't finished its work.

Optional Extended Challenge

- Read Randy Alcorn's chapter on the intermediate state in his book *Heaven*, or look up what the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 1 and 57-58) says about life after death. Come to the next sermon with one new insight or question from your reading.
- Write a letter — not to send, but for your own clarity — about what you believe happens when you die and why it matters. Sometimes writing forces us to be honest about whether our beliefs are genuinely our own or simply inherited without examination.
- If your congregation practices the Heidelberg Catechism in its preaching year, find Lord's Day 22 (Q&A 57-58) on the resurrection of the body and everlasting life and read it this week alongside 2 Corinthians 5. Let confession and Scripture interpret each other.

Closing Prayer Guide

Whether you're using this in a group or on your own, close by praying through these four things:

- Give thanks — that death is not the end, that we cannot be separated from the love of God for even a moment, and that to die in Christ is to go home.
- Confess honestly — the fears or resistances we carry about death, and the ways we avoid thinking about eternity because it feels too distant, too uncertain, or too uncomfortable.
- Ask for comfort — especially for those in your community who are grieving, who are dying, or who have buried someone they love. Pray that the reality of the present heaven would be more than doctrine to them — that it would be genuine comfort.
- Pray for the person you named in the service challenge — and ask for the courage and grace to show up for them this week.

"What happens when we die? The best answer of Scripture is: we go home."
— From This Week's Sermon