

MORE BEYOND**2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10**

Hundreds of years ago, the country of Spain, was a major European power. It controlled most of the lands on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea. At that time, Spain produced coins picturing the Straits of Gibraltar located on the western edge of the Mediterranean inscribed with the Latin words “Non Plus Ultra” which meant “No More Beyond.” The Spaniards thought they had discovered all there was to discover! But then in 1492 a man by the name of Columbus came along and convinced the Spaniards to finance his explorations. His discovery of the New World changed everything and kicked off a revolution in world culture, the global economy, and geopolitics. The proud nation of Spain eventually had to admit its ignorance, so it took off the negative “Non” from its coinage and left the words “Plus Ultra” on them. “More Beyond.” No longer “No More Beyond” but “More Beyond.”

“More Beyond” is an appropriate way to summarize what Paul was getting at in the passage of 2 Corinthians we reflect on today. We’re making a study of his second letter to a group of Christians living in the large city of Corinth in the 1st century. In a multitude of ways, Paul revealed he was living a cruciform life – a life that was cross-shaped. In other words, Paul’s life and ministry resembled and reminded people of the life and ministry of Jesus in significant ways. Our lives can be cruciform today as well. We can live a cross-shaped life – a life that resembles and reminds others of Jesus.

The passage we think about together today is all about your future and mine. It’s about what will happen after we die. Paul believed what happened to him and other Christians after we die was a vital part of being able to overcome very serious obstacles and setbacks in his own life and ministry. The Holy Spirit revealed there’s a whole lot more beyond. Paul was powerfully motivated by his future resurrection. It was a big reason Paul put up with all the suffering, humiliation, and difficulties he endured day after day sharing Jesus with others and helping new Christians like the Corinthians get their spiritual act together. If he wasn’t certain about his future resurrection, Paul would have found his own life intolerable and meaningless.

Here is something profoundly important for you and me. How you conceive of the future – and particularly what you think will happen to you after you die - is a decisive issue. Why? Because the way in which I view my future determines the way I live today. Some people believe when you die, it’s “No More Beyond.” (Non Plus Ultra) You just cease to exist. Period. That powerfully affects how they live their lives every day. Most people hope there is “More Beyond” (Plus Ultra), but they only have vague fantasies of what it will be like. That also powerfully affects how they live their lives every day. Followers of Jesus believe God has revealed very important information about their future. It’s most definitely “More Beyond!” (Plus Ultra) And it’s highly motivating. If we believe it, it will change the way we live each and every day. As I reflected on these verses, I found four key facts about my future that profoundly affect my present as a child of God. My future molds and shapes my present. If you’ve been born again by the Holy Spirit and you’re a child of God today, these facts are just as true about your future and they have the power to affect your present significantly.

FACT #1: I WILL HAVE A NEW BODY AFTER I DIE.

When it comes to my future, I will have a resurrected, physical, perfect, and eternal body made by God himself. What does verse 1 tell us? “For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.” (2 Cor. 5:1 NLT) Paul compared your human body here to a tent – something physical, yes, but also something temporary. A tent isn’t something you live in permanently. But Paul said we will have a resurrected body in Heaven which he referred to here as a “house.” A house is permanent; a tent is temporary. Because it will be made by God Himself, this new, resurrected, body will be permanent, eternal, and indestructible.

Even Christians get their future wrong. You will not become an angel after you die and be sent back to Earth to help people like Clarence, the angel, did in the movie “It’s A Wonderful Life.” You will not be a ghost with wings floating on clouds and sporting a golden harp either. Instead, God is going to give us a new, resurrected, physical, perfect body that we will occupy for all eternity. That’s very clearly taught in verse 3, “For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies.” (2 Cor. 5:3 NLT) Heaven is often depicted as a kind of dreamy, non-physical place where we will float around as spirit beings. Wrong! Heaven is and will be a physical place and you will have a physical body. What will that new body be like? We can conclude from other Scriptures there will be some kind of fundamental continuity with our present bodies and that they will resemble Jesus’ resurrected body. The Bible says, “He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same power with which he will bring everything under his control.” (Ph. 3:21 NLT)

How does this fact about my future body affect how I live today? I thank God for my earthly body, but I look forward to a better body. So, how do you feel about your body today, Christian? “Pastor Rick, did you have to go there!” Paul alluded to this issue in verse 2, “We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.” (2 Cor. 5:2 NLT) God made our earthly bodies, too. They’re wonderfully miraculous in many ways and clearly point to God’s amazing creative power. So, we’re thankful for them. We appreciate them. We take good care of them. But, we also know our physical bodies have been negatively affected by living in a sinful world. They’re subject to all kinds of diseases and to age. Worst of all, they eventually die, decay, and return to dust. So, we learn to live with this tension every day. Paul actually used the word “groan” here which is reflected in other translations, “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling.” (2 Cor. 5:2 NIV) This isn’t groaning in pain or groaning in weariness. This is like a kid groaning for Christmas Day to come! Anticipation! Can’t wait! We live our lives today longing for something wonderful to happen that hasn’t quite gotten around to happening yet. We’re thankful for our present body, yes, but we eagerly look forward to a better body. Plus Ultra. More Beyond! Here’s a second great fact from our passage today.

FACT #2: I WILL BE ALIVE AFTER I DIE.

When it comes to my future, I will live forever in God's presence. As a child of God, you had a beginning – the day you were conceived in your mother's womb - but you will never have an end. You are an eternal being who will live forever. "Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life." (2 Cor. 5:4 NLT) I can't get my brain around the fact I will live forever in God's presence; I just can't truly comprehend it. Nevertheless, I receive it by faith because God's Word proclaims it here and elsewhere explicitly. Paul reminded us of that fact right here in our passage, "For we live by believing and not by seeing." (2 Cor. 5:7 NLT)

How does this fact about my future affect how I live today? I am grateful for this life, but I look forward to a better life. Just as with my physical body, I am profoundly grateful to God for bringing me into existence and giving me life. After all, by giving me physical life in this world, God has made it possible for me to know Him and live with Him for eternity. Now, Paul never ever said death was a good thing. After all, it's directly related to human sin which is responsible for destroying all life. Death is the last enemy God will destroy. But Paul definitely saw death as preferable to endless life in this sinful, fallen world. There is most definitely a better life ahead in the future for you and me just like there is a better body ahead. Death cannot and will not end our relationship with Jesus. Instead, it will allow our relationship with our Lord and Savior to get to a new, deeper, and better level. Death allows us to enter into a relationship with God we just can't experience in this world or in this life.

The deposit or the down payment for that perfect, future relationship is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives right now. Paul wrote here, "God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit." (2 Cor. 5:5 NLT) When the Holy Spirit enables you to sense God's presence, or prompts you to love and obey your Heavenly Father, or provides you with His compassion for lost or hurting people, or gives you His peace in the midst of life's trials, it's THE sign and THE promise you will receive everything God has for you in Heaven. Nine year old Ellen sent a letter to her pastor that said, "Dear Pastor, I hope to go to Heaven someday, but later rather than sooner. Love, Ellen." Ellen speaks for almost everyone. We all want to go to Heaven, but later as opposed to sooner. Paul saw it differently. He hoped to get there sooner rather than later. In another letter to another church, he wrote, "I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me." (Ph. 1:23 NLT)

Author and professor, Lewis Smedes, used to ask his students if they wanted to go to heaven when they died. Everyone would raise a hand. Then he'd ask, "Be honest now - who would like to go today?" A few would raise their hands slowly, giving what they thought was the correct answer, looking around to see if they were the only ones. They were. Most people wanted a rain check. They were ready to die. Just not today. Then Smedes would ask who would like to see this world set straight once and for all tomorrow. No more common colds. No more cancers. Hungry people would have plenty. No one would lift a finger to harm another. We would be at peace with everyone, even with ourselves. Smedes would ask, "Anybody interested in that?"

There would be a frenzy of hand-lifting. Then Smedes would point out that if that new world is what you really want, then Heaven's where you'd like to be.

In the book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit gave the great Christian leader, John, a snapshot of the better life that's coming for every child of God. "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." (Rev. 21:3-4 NLT) Does that kind of life sound better to you? Plus Ultra. More Beyond. That leads right into a third great fact.

FACT #3: I WILL BE IN HEAVEN AFTER I DIE.

When it comes to my future, Heaven will be my eternal home. Twice Paul wrote, "So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord.... Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:6, 8 NLT) "Home" is a powerful word. A house is just a building, but home is an environment. It's where we belong, where we're accepted, where we feel comfortable, and where we're loved. We've all heard the old saying, "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." All of us would prefer a shack where we belong to a mansion where we feel unwelcome, a shack where we're accepted to a mansion where we're rejected, a shack where we're comfortable to a mansion where we're anxious, and a shack where we're loved to a mansion where we're unwanted.

How does this fact about my future affect how I live today? I appreciate this world, but a new and better home is coming. If you've ever had that rather odd feeling you just don't quite fit in this world, there's a very simple explanation. You don't! And sometimes the older you get, the less at home you feel in this world. The old Gospel song put it memorably, "This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door. And I can't feel at home in this world anymore. O Lord, you know I have no friend like you. If Heaven's not my home, then, Lord, what will I do? The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door. And I can't feel at home in this world anymore." This isn't your real and final home, child of God, and sometimes the Holy Spirit will remind you of that fact. "You're not home. Not here. Not yet."

Author Paul David Tripp is persuaded that the whole purpose of wilderness camping is to make a person long for home! On that first day in the woods, putting up the tent is exciting, but three days later your tent has unpleasant odors you can't explain. You love the taste of food cooked over an open flame, but three days later you are tired of foraging for wood and irritated by how fast it burns. You were excited at the prospect of catching your dinner from the stream running past your campsite, which is reported to be teeming with trout, but all you've snagged are the roots on the bottom. After four days your back hurts, there seems to be no more wood to gather for your fire, and you're tired of keeping the fire going anyway. You look into what was once an ice-and-

food-filled cooler to see the steaks you have kept until now looking kind of gray and floating in a pool of blood-stained water. Suddenly you begin to think fondly of home. You stand there hoping and praying someone will say, "Why don't we go home?" Your four days in the wilderness have accomplished their mission. They have prepared you to appreciate home! This world makes us long for Heaven. This world isn't like a really fun or good amusement park. No, it's a broken place groaning for redemption. Living here is meant to prepare us for and make us long for eternity there.

Now, Heaven will be no shack! Certainly not! The word "mansion" can't begin to describe the glory and grandeur of Heaven. The more I study Scripture, the more I have come to see there's likely a difference between present Heaven and future Heaven. The Bible says little about current Heaven or Heaven right now, although verse 8 here assures us when a follower of Jesus dies, you immediately enter into the actual presence of Jesus. "Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8 NLT) How, future Heaven will actually be this world renewed, recreated, and transformed by God Himself sometime after the Second Coming of Jesus. The Bible says, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." (2 Pt. 3:13 NLT) You and I will spend eternity on planet Earth restored and renewed so it is perfect in every way. The best part of it is the fact that both present Heaven and future Heaven will feel like home in every sense of that word. And maybe the most important fact to remember is that our eternal home – Heaven – is a Person more than a place. Ultimately, home is wherever God is. "For then we will be at home with the Lord." (2 Cor. 5:8 NLT) Plus Ultra. More Beyond. Here's a final great fact we need to bear in mind today.

FACT #4: I WILL BE JUDGED AFTER I DIE.

When it comes to my future, God will hold me accountable. How does verse 10 make you feel? "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body." (2 Cor. 5:10 NLT) Do you get kind of an "Uh – oh. What's this about being judged" feeling? Here's what that verse cannot mean. It cannot mean we are going to be judged as to whether we should get into Heaven or not. It cannot mean Jesus will close or open the door of Heaven to us on the basis of whether we have done enough good works to get in. It cannot be a denial of justification by grace through faith. If that were true, it would be a contradiction of other Scriptures some of which Paul himself wrote! For example, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it." (Eph. 2:8-9 NLT) When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the debt – death - for anyone and everyone who puts faith in Him.

Here's what the verse does mean. There's going to be a future evaluation of my life and yours. Jesus will hold us accountable. How we lived will be evaluated. How we served King Jesus will be scrutinized. How we used the time, talents, and treasure God entrusted to us in this life will be considered from every angle. Rewards will be given

and withheld based on that examination. Paul wrote about this in his first letter to this same group of Christians, “But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.” (1 Cor. 3:13-15 NLT) Every authentic follower of Jesus will live eternally with God in Heaven, true enough, but not every believer will be equally rewarded. Does that mean I should fear this future judgment? I don’t think so. After all, the One who will judge me with the most fairness is also the One who loves me best.

How does this fact about my future affect how I live today? I always make it my goal to please Jesus. What I do in this life matters in eternity. My life now has eternal consequences. It shouldn’t matter to me what other Christians do or don’t do. I’m not accountable to them. I’m accountable to King Jesus. I’ll be evaluated by Him. I’ll be scrutinized by Him. I’ll be examined by Him. But I can’t afford to live indifferently and with little passion for the Kingdom of God. The goal of my life every day that I breathe should be to please Jesus. Paul saw the implication clearly enough. “So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.” (2 Cor. 5:9 NLT) Even though I long for that new, resurrected body, and anticipate longingly that eternal, perfect life with God, and look forward to being in my real home, my goal in this life is to please the Lord in every possible way. So, I can earn a place in Heaven? No, one thousand times, no! Instead, I live to please Him because I am so eternally grateful for what Jesus has done for me. I live to please Him because I love Him most of all.

The singer songwriter, James Taylor, thinks one of his hit songs, "Mean Old Man," was a big accomplishment. Why? He said one reason was because Paul McCartney called him up, complimented him on the song, and said when he'd first heard it, he assumed it was written by other famous, gifted songwriters. Taylor was, of course, absolutely thrilled. On another occasion, Bob Dylan told Taylor he'd been listening to one of his songs and really thought it was great. James Taylor made this observation, “That's enough for me. Ten critics can savage me, but I'll be fine as long as every once in a while, someone like Bob Dylan or Paul McCartney says, ‘Keep going, kid.’” Child of God, whose praise or rebuke should mean the most to you and me? Who do you want to please above all? Who do you not want to fail above all? A pastor by the name of Rico Tice says he'll never forget the funeral service at which a little, old lady said to him, “Rico, do you know what failure is?” Rico answered, “No. Tell me.” The little old lady said, “Failure is being successful at the things that don't matter.” Good observation. Then, what's success? Success is hearing, “Well done” from the only lips that matter. “So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.” (2 Cor. 5:9 NLT)

Are you cruciform? Do you have a cross-shaped life? If so, your view of your future – what will happen to you after you die and beyond – will powerfully impact and influence how you live your life every day. Plus Ultra. More Beyond. How you live your life and what you do with your life matters in eternity. Therefore, make it your daily goal to please Jesus in all and above all.