

## **Letting Go of Self-Preservation 2 Corinthians 5:1-10**

We have a very interesting subject this morning – I’ve thought about it before, but I don’t think I’ve ever preached about it. Our passage for today dives into it and I think it will be challenging and thought-provoking, and hopefully life-changing.

The subject has to do with self-preservation, protecting yourself, protecting your physical wellbeing, preserving your life here on earth. How important is that to you? How important should it be? For the vast majority of us – Christian and non-Christian, I think it’s extremely important. I think we go to great lengths to protect ourselves and preserve our lives here on earth, especially in America where life can be quite good and pleasant.

We value life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This is the American Dream. We want to be happy, healthy, prosperous, and free, and we want it to last as long as possible. So we try to preserve our lives as long as possible. Think about how much money is spent in the medical field to try to keep people alive for a few more months, or weeks, or even days. Radiation, chemo, dialysis, pacemakers, bypass surgeries, prescription drugs, life support systems... Billions are spent every year so that people can try to add a few more days to their lives.

Then there’s the diet and exercise industry. I don’t know how many ads pop up on my screen when I’m on the internet for vitality drinks or supplements or chair workouts, and they usually feature people who are retirement age and older trying to look or feel younger. “Drink this and you’ll feel like you’re 30 again.” “Take this supplement and you’ll have the brain of a 20-year-old.” “Do this chair workout and you’ll have the body of a professional athlete.” I imagine a lot of people pay a lot of money for these with the hopes that they will keep them young and healthy and alive to a ripe old age.

Self-preservation... It seems obvious to me that our Creator has given us the will to live as long as possible. We don’t want to die. We want to prolong this life. And that’s a good thing. But how important should that be for us? Especially for us who are Christians?

I've noticed some things that come along with this desire for self-preservation. One of them is an underlying fear or avoidance of death. When we think about dying, it's usually a negative thing. It brings deep sadness. We think about our loved ones and all the good things we'll leave behind and we really don't want that to happen. So there's this fear and avoidance of death.

I've also noticed we end up avoiding things that could be dangerous or life-threatening. You might avoid smoking, or eating fatty foods, or high-sugar drinks. You might avoid speeding, or careless driving, or sky-diving, or mountain climbing. Those are all fine and probably good things to avoid.

But what happens if God calls us to do something dangerous or life-threatening for the sake of the gospel? What if God calls us to do mission work in dangerous places? Gary Sandmann is going to be here next week and he's doing ministry in an area that regularly faces danger and the threat of the drug cartel. What if God wants you to go on a mission trip down there to help him? What if Christianity becomes illegal here in the States or hostility escalates like it has in many other parts of the world? Will the fear of harm or the possibility of death make you hide your light under a bushel? How far should self-preservation push us?

Paul faced dangerous and life-threatening situations all the time in gospel ministry, yet he seemed to overcome his fear of death and desire for self-preservation and continued to press onward with courage, knowing he could die, and he eventually did. Why was he willing to give up his life for the sake of Christ and the gospel? What did he think of that gave him the courage to press onward into dangerous and life-threatening situations?

We saw some things last week in 2 Cor. 4 about why he was willing to suffer – he fully believed in the resurrection and that his sufferings for the gospel were achieving for him an eternal weight of glory that would far outweigh them all. Now today, as we get into chapter 5, he continues that train of thought even further to help us see why he was ready to die. My general thought as we look into these things is that it would be good for us, especially as American Christians, to arm ourselves with his mentality so that we too will not fear

death and we will have the courage to do dangerous or life-threatening things God may call us to do.

### 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. <sup>5</sup> He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.*

This way of thinking is a lot different than how many people think. It's not just that Paul wasn't afraid to die, he was actually looking forward to it. He longed for it. Not in a self-loathing or self-destructive way, but because he was longing for what would happen after he died.

In this passage we see that he was longing for a new and different kind of body to experience life that would be far greater than his earthly one. He compares the difference between the two by comparing a temporary tent with an eternal building. These earthly tents that we are currently living in will be destroyed, but when they are, we will receive a permanent house in heaven that God has prepared for us. And Paul longed for that to happen. He says he groaned inwardly for his new heavenly body because of the Spirit that God had given him.

He writes about this inward groaning in Rom. 8:19-23: *“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”*

This is a remarkable thing. This isn't just a mindset that Paul figured out how to have. This is a Holy Spirit induced groaning deep inside for the redemption of our bodies. Do you feel that groaning? Some of you probably do. Chances are, you're older, and your body is starting to break down or you might have some kind of disease that's speeding up the process. You're feeling that groaning. But many of us don't. I don't think that's because it's not there. If the Spirit is there, the groaning will be there. But the reason we might not feel it is probably because we're hanging on too tightly to the good things God has given us in this life and the desire for self-preservation.

Self-preservation is a good thing, but could it be that Satan has corrupted something good and turned it into something different than God wants it to be? He doesn't want Christians risking their lives for the sake of the gospel, and if he helps us elevate our desire for self-preservation too high, we won't. Long life could become an idol.

Has that been happening in your life? Could it be that your desire for self-preservation is drowning out the inner groanings and longing of the Holy Spirit for your redemption body?

Now, there's one more thing that Paul mentions a couple times in this passage having to do with our heavenly bodies and I think it relates specifically to the prevailing views of the afterlife in that culture. In verse 3 he says: *"if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked."* And in verse 4 he says, *"not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed."*

In that culture, people grew up believing that souls were immortal, and bodies were not. So when you died, your body was buried and gone forever, but your soul lived on. You shed your body and your soul descended into the underworld, a mysterious and murky place of eternal reward or punishment. There was some kind of existence, but that existence was without a body.

If you grew up that way, the idea of laying down your life for the sake of the gospel wouldn't be all that appealing. So I think Paul included those statements to reassure them that in the resurrection their soul won't be "naked" or "unclothed." He wasn't longing for existence as a disembodied

soul. He was longing for the opposite: *“that he would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”*

As great as this longing was for Paul, there was another longing even greater that helped him let go of his inner desire for self-preservation...

2 Corinthians 5:6-10

*<sup>6</sup>So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.*

Not only did Paul eagerly await the redemption of his body, but he eagerly longed to be with Jesus. This was his greatest desire. You see here again Paul was looking forward to the end of this life because he longed to be at home with the Lord even more, much more. He walked by faith, not by sight, so rather than keeping his eyes on the good things in this world, he kept them on Jesus.

Paul says in Philippians 1:21-23: *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup>If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup>I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.”*

Paul longed to be with Christ more than any other longing. He greatly looked forward to that day, and because of that, he made it his aim to please him. He mentions the judgment seat of Christ here and indicates that this judgment is much different than the Great White Throne of judgement in Revelation 20. This is not the judgment of whether a person will spend eternity in heaven or hell, this is a judgment for Christians, and the purpose is to receive rewards based on our obedience in this life. I should probably preach a whole sermon on this, but for now, I just want us to see that Paul's longing to see Christ and live a life pleasing to him is what gave him the courage to press onward and

joyfully face life-threatening situations for the sake of the gospel. He let go of his desire for self-preservation and set his heart on being with Jesus.

I think that Paul would have had to pray and meditate on these things often in order to feel that longing and be willing to put himself in harms way for the sake of the gospel. I think he would have had to practice surrendering his life on earth and setting his mind on Jesus and his life in heaven. And I think we need to do the same thing.

I enjoy this life. God has given me many wonderful blessings. But he gives them so that by enjoying them my enjoyment in him will grow all the more, leaving my enjoyment for earthly blessings in the dust. May the Holy Spirit empower us to think and feel this way and live this way and be willing to suffer the loss of all things, even life itself, that we may gain Christ and take hold of life that is truly life.