

What's Done in the Body – By Me; By Christ

4th Sun. after Pent. – 06/16/24 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-17 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10, **“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.”**

v.11, **“...But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience.”**

Introduction

✘ When Paul says “we” in our Epistle Reading this morning, he’s talking about himself and the Christians he addresses in his letter. So, as I just read in verse 10, Paul says that “we” Christians “must all appear before” Jesus the Judge when He returns where we will “receive what is due for what [we] have done in the body, whether good or evil.

→ But what does this mean; to be judged on what we do in the body? That doesn’t sound at all like what we Lutherans know and teach from God’s Word, does it?

I. We Can’t ever do enough!

✘ Well, before any of us start boiling up a bunch of heartburn, let’s do another important thing that we Lutherans say we must – let’s look at the entire context of what Paul is teaching us so that Scripture will interpret Scripture for itself.

→ In verse one, we have the verse that ended our text for last Sunday. Paul says, “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.” He’s talking about our earthly bodies. And there’s no denying the facts. At some point these bodies we have here on earth – our earthly homes, will be destroyed. Paul, the tentmaker is telling us that like any tent, our bodies are temporary. They will wear out.

✘ How many of you have ever camped in a tent? In the hundreds of times I have done so, no matter how hard I try to keep it from happening, there’s always something, a rock or big bump in the ground in the wrong spot.

→ The wind whistles and gusts around and through the flaps and zippers, and the shadows and sounds of the forest seem like they are right on top of you. Then by morning, even if there is no rain, the sides of the tent are moist with condensation so that a simple touch brings water running down the tent, putting your sleeping bag and other belongings at risk of getting wet.

→ And if it does rain, even if you’ve tested and waterproofed all the seams, there’s always the question about whether or not the tent will leak somewhere, sometime during the night. You’re just never quite comfortable in a temporary dwelling like you are at home. This tent; this body is always frail and flawed.

✘ So God has promised to give us an eternal home, an upgrade to the stately heavenly mansion – an immortal body that He Himself has re-created and glorified. Think what’s it like to live in a mansion. From the outside, it is majestic and elegant; grand and permanent. On the inside, you’re protected from all those elements that bring you stress and concern in a tent. You don’t hear the wind howling or feel any drafts. Condensation or leaks are not even on your mind and you live and sleep in perfect comfort: no aches, no pains.

→ My dear Christians, this will be your restored and resurrected body; your heavenly, immortal home – beautiful on the outside and perfect on the inside.

✘ So, how many of you wish you could have that eternal dwelling right now? That’s what Paul means in verse two, “For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.”

- Any normal person would want it; to put on that heavenly dwelling. But there's a catch. Not everyone gets a glorious, eternal, permanent dwelling! Paul says in verse three: "If indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked." You see, God is very clear about eternity, we will all receive what the Judge knows is right: either a permanent, heavenly dwelling where our bodies are glorified, or these earthly bodies stripped bare of any heavenly glory at all. These people are the ones who have turned away from or rejected Jesus, that Paul says will be "found naked."
- ✘ Let's see how Paul explains this: verse four, "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." So, while we live here on earth, in the temporary dwelling of this mortal body, we groan. We're weighed down and burdened by the sin that is within us. It takes its toll; it ages our bodies; it slows our step. It puts creaks in our bones, wrinkles in our skin, decreases our eyesight, and muffles our hearing.
 - Then, when we move into our permanent heavenly dwelling, this current temporary tent in which we groan is not entirely stripped away. After all, it is still a part of the identity that God gave to us; a part of His image. Instead, Paul says it is "further clothed." God gives us a serious upgrade; this body is perfected; swallowed up by life – eternal life; immortal life!
 - ✘ So why, in eternity, will some be found naked while others will be further clothed? Why will some be found without a glorious dwelling and some will live in God's heavenly mansion?
 - This brings us back to our original question, where Paul says: "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" (v. 10).
 - ✘ First of all, we can't overlook this fact; everyone must appear before the judgment seat. No one is exempt. It is when we appear before Jesus, the Judge that each person receives either the key to that glorious heavenly mansion or he/she is left naked. And Paul says it's all based on what is done in the body, whether good or evil.
 - So, does this mean that for us to inherit the heavenly mansion we must do good in the body? Are we really judged and rewarded based on what we do? And if that's the case, how can we ever be certain that we've done enough? How can we ever know that, on our personal scale of justice, the good things we've done outweigh the sinful things?
 - What about those unintentional sins? Like when you blurt out something without thinking. It hurts or offends someone – as well as God and you may not even know you did it. Those don't count against you, do they; if they weren't intentional?
 - On top of that we all commit sins of neglect; like when we know somebody needs help but we don't. Or there's something we know we should do but we ignore it or get lazy because, to be honest, we just don't want to do it. Does that count as something bad done in the body? I mean, we didn't actually do something bad, did we?
 - ✘ How does God's math work with this? What if we've done a number of good things in the body and then we do just one really bad thing? Does that wipe out all of the good? Are there different weights to the good and the bad things? Can I do some really good things in order to wipe out a number of bad things?
 - Look folks, just asking these questions is to play right into the devil's hand and show ourselves to be fools. God has given us the answer to all of these already in His perfect Word. Not one of us; no one with an earthly body can ever do enough good in the body to receive the glorious heavenly dwelling! Count 'em however you will; Romans 3:23 tells us that we all fall short of the glory of God. So then how can we receive it?

II. God is the One who does it!

✘ The answer is found right here in today's text. Paul says in verse five, "He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee." You see, left on our own, we cannot do any of the good things that bring us into God's heavenly dwelling. But God can and God does!

→ Where we fall short and fail miserably when Christ judges us for what we have done "in the body", there is a second part to Jesus' judgement of souls on that final Day; a judgment of what God has done and what God already knows about each and every soul ever to exist.

✘ Verse 11 says, "What we are (present tense) is known to God and I hope it is known also to your conscience." Remember, your status is already determined in verse one. For every true believer in Christ, as Christians, "we have (present tense again) a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

→ Paul reminds us in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is (present tense) in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." That's who we are and what we have – not by anything any of us have done or not done, but 100% by what God has done "in the body" for us! He is the one who has prepared us for this new heavenly dwelling.

III. So we are of Good Courage

✘ And how did He do that? In and through Jesus Christ! Only a few verses after this text in 2 Corinthians 5:21 we're told that Jesus, who knew no sin ever, took on and became the embodiment of every sin in the world for us! He took every sin, every evil deed, into His earthly body, which is why He was nailed to the cross.

→ And it's there that He conquered that sin within His body, so that all that is left for us is the good deeds Jesus has led and enabled us to do; the good deeds done through the Spirit as a guarantee.

→ So the Judge looks at you on Judgment Day, and all He sees are the good deeds the Spirit has done in you and through you and your body, because Jesus has taken away every evil deed in His body.

✘ That is why and how Paul says in verses 6-7, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight."

→ Yes, we Christians see all things now through the eyes of faith. In faith, we see that all of our bad deeds; all our sinful deeds are taken away in the body of Jesus on the cross. In faith, we see that the Spirit is the One still today who does good deeds through our body. And because of our faith in Jesus, we now "know" in our conscience "what we are" – a "new creation" in Christ and we see with eagerness that heavenly dwelling; that perfect body that is waiting for us at Jesus' final return.

→ "So", as Paul says in verse 8-9, "we are always of good courage," even as we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. What a change of attitude, right? Paul wasn't joking when he said we are "always of good courage." Always means always, because "whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him." This is now our entire life's purpose and perspective; happily understanding that life is not all about "me" now! Verse 15, "[Jesus] died for all, that those who live...no longer live for themselves but for Him." Why? because He died and He was raised for our sake!

✘ It's like living in a tent down in the valley of a campground. Up on the hill in the distance you can see the mansion. It's a glorious mansion. You know you have a reservation there; a room that's waiting for you. But you have to wait.

→ In the meantime, you persevere; you live here in this tent in the valley of the shadow. Yes, when the storms come through, the wind whips through the tent's flaps; the rain drips in through the seams; the bones creak; the eyesight fails; the step slows. Yet you remain of good courage, knowing that at some point it is guaranteed; you will move up; this temporary tent will be re-created and you will move into that grand, permanent heavenly dwelling.

Conclusion

⌘ But, before that happens; before you move up, the Day will come when you will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Yet in faith you do not fear that Day, when you will receive what is due, because you know that Christ has taken away the evil deeds in His body, so that a permanent heavenly dwelling is what you will receive. You have the Spirit already living inside of you since Your baptism as God's guarantee – keeping you in the faith, guiding and empowering you to live the faith as God desires; serving Him; worshiping Him; sharing Him and His love with all people.

→ So dear Christians, live in that assurance; live always in good courage, for Paul promises that this temporary dwelling in which we groan will be restored and glorified into God's eternal heavenly dwelling, because of what Jesus has done in His body for you in your body! Amen.