

7. This very thing

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[0 : 00] Well, now we come to hear the word of the Lord, written for us by the Apostle Paul, but it's the Lord himself who speaks. So let's turn to this second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4.

You'll find this on page 966 in our big pew Bibles. The passage I want to preach on, study today, is chapter 4, verse 16, to chapter 5, verse 10.

But I'll read from chapter 4, verse 13, so that we can pick up the thread from where we were last week. So 2 Corinthians, chapter 4, beginning at verse 13.

Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed, and so I spoke, we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart.

[1 : 20] Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 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. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

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.

[2 : 45] Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him.

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. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord to us, and may he make it a blessing to us this evening. Well sung. Amen.

Let's bow our heads for a brief moment of prayer. Dear God, our Father, we tell you again with thankful hearts that your word is a lantern to our feet and a light to our path.

We pray, therefore, that you will bring light and joy and understanding into our hearts tonight, helping us to continue to walk with Christ, with perseverance, as we look ahead.

[3 : 57] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Well, let's turn up our two Corinthians again. And as I said a little bit earlier, chapter 4, verse 16, to chapter 5, verse 10, is our passage for this evening.

Now, we know, we believe, that God has made each one of us. He is the creator.

But what has God made us for? And we know, because we're creative ourselves, we know that we make things for specific purposes. We make a kitchen table, for example, so that we should sit in comfort and eat our meals.

We make beds to give us a comfortable night's sleep. You might make a rabbit hutch so as to contain your rabbit. So we make things for definite, clear purposes.

[5 : 08] What is the reason, then, why God has made us? Well, let's look together in our passage to chapter 5, verse 5. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God.

Now, the us here refers not to everybody, but to all Christians. He's writing here about Christian people. So Paul is saying in verse 5 that God has prepared Christian people for a specific purpose, something that he calls this very thing.

So what is this very thing? Well, he tells us in the verse before, verse 4, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

That is what God has prepared Christian people for, so that what is mortal, our mortal flesh, should be swallowed up by eternal life. You and I are mortal.

That means that we shall decay and die. But God has made us, he has prepared us in such a way that our mortality will not have the last word.

[6 : 15] It will be gloriously overcome by life. Paul puts it like this in 1 Corinthians 15. This mortal body must put on immortality.

Now, if you're a Christian, that is the great purpose. That is the ultimate purpose for which God has designed you. Now, of course, he's made us for other lesser purposes to be fulfilled in this world.

For example, he's made us to look after the earth. He's made us to spread the gospel and to serve and love other people and to work at our jobs and earn our living and even to pay our taxes.

But his greatest purpose for us is this very thing, that our mortality should be swallowed up by life.

Now, why might the Apostle Paul have wanted to teach this to the Corinthians at this stage in their life? We know that Paul never simply introduces topics into his letters without good reason.

[7 : 15] His letters are never random outpourings of interesting theology, just written to bless the waiting world. These letters are real letters, written to real people in a very real and concrete situation.

So every topic that Paul covers in a letter like this is directed to the needs of the folk that he's writing to. So if he introduces this theme of mortality and immortality, as he does here, we can assume that the Corinthian Christians needed to hear about it.

Now, the reason could be this, that the false apostles, the false teachers who have come into Corinth and seem to have been influencing the Corinthian church in Paul's absence, they may well have been saying that godliness is all to do with the way in which people live in this world.

If these teachers were trying to bring the Corinthians back to some kind of Judaism, it's likely that they were majoring on the trappings of this worldly Judaism, things like kosher foods and circumcision and forms of worship and perhaps the receiving of mystical revelations and that kind of thing.

And therefore, it may be that Paul is having to bring their thinking back to the central importance of the great future of the world to come.

[8 : 33] And he was certainly having to do this a year or two previously when he wrote 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 15, his great chapter on the resurrection, he asks them, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

It seems that some at Corinth were denying the future resurrection. So he was having to say to them, you are in danger of losing your grip on the real gospel if you're ditching your convictions about the great future resurrection.

And then a few verses later in 1 Corinthians 15, he says this, if for this life only we have put our hope in Christ, we are of all people the most to be pitied.

It's a pitiful travesty of the Christian faith to think that it's only about life in this world. So to return here to 2 Corinthians 5, it may well be that Paul is insisting that the Corinthians return to a proper understanding of the great eternal future because these false teachers have forgotten this very thing, that what is mortal is destined to be swallowed up by life.

Let me tell you about something which proved to be quite a formative moment for me. I guess we all have formative moments we can look back to. But I was in London 20 years or more ago and I was at a conference and I was listening to our friend Dick Lucas preaching and he was expounding one of Paul's letters.

[9 : 57] I think it was 1 Timothy. And he just dropped in a little aside. Preachers sometimes do this. They haven't got it in their notes but they suddenly think it'd be good to say that and I'll just drop it in.

And that I think is what happened here off the cuff. And Dick Lucas said this, of course, the focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological. I was sitting there like a sponge trying to soak in every detail and I thought to myself, yes, that is so right.

The focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological. Now I know that word eschatological sounds rather difficult but it's not. The word eschatology is a word used by Bible commentators and theological writers quite often and it simply means this.

It's a good word for any of us to use. It means the Bible's teaching about what happens at the end. So the Bible's doctrine about the return of Christ and the day of judgment and everything that follows on afterwards.

Eternity, the new creation, heaven and hell, all of that. So when Dick Lucas said that the focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological, he meant that Paul's telling of the good news about Jesus always takes us to a point beyond our life in this world and into eternity.

[11 : 21] Now Paul is doing nothing more than following Jesus in this respect. The focus of Jesus' gospel is primarily eschatological. Think of John 3.16.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. Or as Jesus puts it very characteristically in John's gospel, everyone who looks on the son and believes in him will have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.

Now that's always where the New Testament gospel takes us, to the last day and beyond, to the defeat of death. It's not a gospel simply for this world. It's not a gospel about lying on a Caribbean beach eating prawn kebabs and fresh coconut.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not suggesting for a moment that the gospel does not transform our lives in this world. It transforms them deeply. It redirects them.

It reshapes our values and our desires. And it brings us wonderful joys. But the joys that the gospel brings us in this world come wrapped up in envelopes marked suffering and endurance and persecution.

[12 : 35] Those things are all mixed up together. Now it's quite common and some of you will know this, it's quite common for churches these days to focus their interest and their teaching only on the concerns of this world.

As though the Christian life is only about finding happiness and fulfillment and experiences of emotional uplift and celebration in this world. But if we will allow Paul and the Lord Jesus to teach us, we find that the focus of the New Testament gospel is, say it with me, primarily eschatological.

Good. As Paul says, if for this life only we've put our hope in Christ, we are pitiful creatures. Over the next week or two, spring is coming, isn't it?

We've just felt it in the air. Over the next week or two, when you're in Gap or Primark or even Marks and Spencers and you're buying your pretty spring outfits to celebrate the return of the warmth and the sunshine, think of the passing nature, the transient nature of not only the fashionable clothes that you're buying but also of the form that they're designed to cover.

And then say to yourself, the focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological. Now the false teachers at Corinth must have been losing sight of this and that's why Paul says to his friends, God has prepared us for this very thing that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

[14 : 15] Now let's turn to our passage and we'll see how Paul begins to unpack his eschatology. Now we've noticed in the last couple of weeks that Paul keeps on telling the Corinthians that he and they have every reason for not losing heart.

Let's just look at this again. Chapter 4 verse 1, he begins the chapter having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. He says it again in verse 16, so we do not lose heart.

Or look at chapter 5 verse 6, so we are always of good courage. And verse 8, yes, we are of good courage. And in our passage for today, chapter 4 verse 16 to chapter 5 verse 10, it's precisely the eschatological teaching which is the source of Paul's great encouragement.

It's because of the great eternal future that Paul is able to keep on living the Christian life without getting disheartened and without keeling over. Now that's the pattern for us too.

Once we have grasped the Bible's teaching about eternity, it will give us great strength to persevere as Christians even through times of real suffering and persecution.

[15 : 28] To use a very simple illustration, in a rugby game, you can keep going for 80 minutes through all that pain and weariness and all those knocks because you know that there's a hot bath and a lovely meal waiting for you at the far end.

It's the knowledge of the great and glorious future that keeps Christians going in this life as we put in the hard miles and take the knocks which inevitably come our way.

So I'll take the section in three parts and we'll look first at chapter 4 verses 16 to 18 where Paul teaches the Corinthians about the incomparable glory.

There it is in verse 17. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. What he means in verse 17 is that the eternal weight of glory cannot be compared with the slight momentary affliction of this life.

Now somebody who's not a Christian might well try to make a comparison. He might say, imagine you've got a great set of scales in your hands and you're trying to balance one thing against another.

[16 : 44] Well on the one side you've got the pains and frustrations of your life in this world pretty heavy. Let's call it a ton a ton weight of this worldly pain.

But hey presto it's all going to be balanced out by a ton weight of glory in the world to come. A ton balancing a ton. Now Paul is saying nonsense piffle.

You cannot compare the two things for a moment. If our afflictions in this world he's saying weigh a ton then the glory of eternity weighs 10,000 tons.

What we have to endure in this world he says is slight and momentary. Now those two adjectives slight and momentary are very impressive when you think of who is writing them.

If the writer was somebody who had lived a protected and cushioned kind of life I think we wouldn't be very much impressed if we'd say to Paul it's alright for a softie like you to talk about your troubles as being slight and momentary because they are but you just come out from behind your cushions and you'll talk differently.

[17 : 49] But Paul was not a protected softie. In fact the more we get to know Paul by reading his letters and the Acts of the Apostles the more we realize that he suffered almost more than any other Christian has suffered in the last 20 centuries.

and yet he is able to consider his life of great toil and suffering as a slight momentary affliction which cannot begin to be compared to the glory that is to come.

So if anyone has the right to teach us how to get a proper perspective on our afflictions it's the Apostle Paul and he tells us here that set against the eternal weight of glory God's glory which we shall share our afflictions in this world weigh as much as a feather.

Now I know that sometimes we think well my afflictions don't seem featherweight to me. Well let's remember Paul and everything that he had to endure in terms of whippings and lashings and stonings shipwrecks mob violence terms in prison several years in prison in total and the focused hatred of Jews and Gentiles alike and then let's remember that he says it's all slight and momentary when you set it against the eternal weight of the glory to come.

Now there's also a great encouragement in verse 16 he says though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

[19 : 24] Now what does he mean by outer nature and inner nature? Well it would be misleading I think inaccurate to say that our outer nature is our body and our inner nature is our mind because while our bodies obviously waste away and decline as we get older our minds do as well.

We know that Christian people just like anybody else can become confused and can suffer from dementia and other types of mental disintegration. So I think it's better to say this that our outer nature is everything that we are both physical and mental in our creaturely mortal existence.

But our inner nature is the person who belongs to the age to come and it's that person that is being renewed day by day. And how do Christians actually experience this renewal of our inner nature?

Well surely in this way by God's grace we come more and more to know the Lord and to love him to value what he values and to hate what he hates and to look forward with a growing sense of excitement and anticipation to being with him so that we can actually look at him look him in the eye listen to him and enjoy him and his company and praise him with hearts and minds and tongues all made new.

In other words we are being prepared for the new creation. Our sinful nature as the Christian life goes on is being subdued and suppressed and we are being increasingly fashioned refashioned in the image of Christ himself so that when eventually we shall be with him we shall be like him and we shall truly be his brothers and sisters because we shall truly share his nature.

[21 : 12] Now this leads to a very practical consequence. Because we are being daily renewed and prepared for the world to come because we know that we have a glorious eternal future with the Lord the signs of our physical and mental decline become much more bearable.

Now the aging process is never going to be a lot of fun. Of course we're going to have frustrations and regrets when we find that we have to walk for example where once we used to be able to run where we have to dig the vegetable patch in ten minute bursts and then have a cup of tea where once we would have done the whole thing in one go without stopping.

Of course it's not much fun to see your body becoming increasingly lumpy and bumpy and wrinkly and crinkly and baggy and saggy.

and it's no fun to find your mind functioning rather less well. Why did I come into the kitchen? I was looking for something and I can't remember what it was.

Now what I'm saying is this that the process of decline which we'll all go through if we live long enough is much more bearable for the Christian than it is for the unbeliever who has nothing to look forward to.

[22 : 37] The Christian knows that the outer nature of body and mind is wasting away but he knows with great joy that the inner nature is being daily renewed and prepared for the eternal weight of glory which is beyond all comparison.

And this is why Paul is able to say in verse 16 so we do not lose heart. And he tells us more in verse 18 as our inner nature is being daily renewed we learn to look in different places.

We now look says Paul not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. So he's describing here a progressive shift in our vision. The things that are seen well that is literally what he means.

Buildings, roads, fields, cars, trees, people, poodles, everything that is visible to our physical eyes. That's what he means by the things that are seen. But the things that are unseen those are the things described in the book of Revelation.

The new Jerusalem, God's holy city, the new heavens and the new earth. The throne of God, God himself seated upon it. The Lord Jesus glorified in heaven and the countless multitude of all those whom he has rescued and the angels and every creature that inhabits the heavenly places.

[24 : 00] Now Paul is not saying that we shall see these wonderful realities with our physical eyes before we die. But he is saying that as our inner nature is being more and more renewed, we become more and more thirsty to see God and to be with him.

We come to realize how transient, how passing this world is and everything in it, even the things that seem so solid, like the Cairngorms and the Rocky Mountains.

Everything physical that belongs to the realm of this world is passing away. and our inner eye begins to turn more and more to the throne in heaven and to the one who is seated on it and we long to be with him.

Somebody once said to a very elderly Christian, and how are you today, my brother? And he replied, I'm very well, thank you, but I'm in the departure lounge and I'm waiting for takeoff.

Now it's good and right and godly, too long to be with the Lord. And it's good, right, and godly, therefore, for us to tread rather lightly upon this earth because we shall so soon be leaving it.

[25 : 15] Let's not drive in our tent pegs too deeply. So there's the first thing. Paul shows the Corinthians the incomparable glory and he teaches them to value it.

Now secondly, from chapter 5, verses 1 to 5, Paul teaches the Corinthians about the heavenly dwelling. You'll see that phrase comes at the end of verse 2, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.

And we have to understand Paul's metaphorical language here. In verse 1 he speaks, just in the one verse, he speaks of a tent, a home, a building, and a house.

In verse 2, of a heavenly dwelling. And in verses 3 and 4 he moves to the language of being clothed and unclothed. But all these metaphors are about the human body.

And from verses 1 to 4 he is contrasting his present aging, declining body with the new body that he's very much looking forward to having one day.

[26 : 16] So let's see what he says about the human body. Well in verse 1 he calls it a tent. The tent which is our earthly home. Now Paul knew a thing or two about tents.

He was a tent maker. He was a maker of leather goods. The modern tents which we buy in the shops here and take on our camping holidays are made of a strong canvas. But Paul would have used leather.

And in some parts of the world leather is still widely used for making tents. So Paul would have known a great deal about how a tent works and how it lasts. And he would have known that eventually even the very best leather made into a tent is going to fall to pieces after long years in the wind and the rain and the strong Middle Eastern sun.

And being a tent maker Paul easily thought of his own physical frame as being a tent in which he lived. Now look at the great assurance with which Paul expresses himself in verse one.

He says, For we know that if the tent which is our earthly home is destroyed, we know this. Paul is not hazarding a guess.

[27 : 25] He's not expressing some vague hope. He says there is something here that we know. And this is a verb that Paul has used several times in this part of the letter. Look back to chapter 4, verse 14.

Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus. Knowing this. Look at chapter 5, verse 6. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord.

Look on to verse 11. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. Now we're bound to ask, how could Paul speak like this? How could Paul know these things?

The answer is because the Lord revealed them to him. The Lord chose this man to be an apostle and to be, therefore, one of the chief channels by which the Lord was to communicate his message to the world.

The ultimate origin of Paul's letters is not Paul, it's the Lord. And that is why Paul is able to write with this great sense of knowledge and assurance. He's not proud.

[28 : 30] He's not claiming to be some kind of a cosmic genius. But he writes in the knowledge that he's an apostle of Christ and therefore what he says about things that human beings could never otherwise understand is the truth that the Lord has taught him and which he now knows.

Now this is why we can trust Paul. We could never claim knowledge of these wonderful things by virtue of our own penetrating intelligence. I don't mean to be rude when I say this, but the fact is we are as thick as two short planks when it comes to understanding the things of God.

We couldn't begin to. We could never know the kind of things that Paul is revealing to us here. But he knows. And he's an apostle and mouthpiece of Christ. And that's why we are able to believe what Paul believes.

And that's why we are able to come to know humbly what Paul knows. So let's rejoice in that very strong verb in verse one. We know these things, says Paul.

So what does he know? Well, we're back to the tent, which is Paul's human physical body. If this tent, our earthly home, is destroyed, we have something far better.

[29 : 44] Not a tent, but a building. A building from God. A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So what he's saying is that this physical body that we have is temporary and will be destroyed.

Whether quickly in the crematorium or more slowly in the cemetery, really doesn't matter. But the flesh and blood and bone of which our human bodies are made is expendable material.

Why should we want to keep it when, as verse one puts it, we have, we possess even now, an eternal building or house in the heavens? Which is Paul's description of the new, permanent, heavenly body that he will soon inhabit.

So here is Paul aging. I wish I knew exactly when Paul was born. I don't think anybody knows that. But he might well have been still under 60 when he wrote these words.

But he would have felt old. He had been brutally abused and his body would have been covered with scars. So he probably often felt worn out and quite old. So it's not surprising that he says in verse two that in his old, worn-out tent, he groans because he longs to be shot of his aching old body so that he can put on his new heavenly dwelling.

[31 : 04] Now, friends, let's take note of this. We are being given apostolic permission to groan. Not to moan, but to groan, particularly when our bodies and minds are beginning to wear out.

But you'll perhaps remember how in Romans chapter eight, Paul says that the whole creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth. But both in Romans eight and here, it's not the groaning of despair.

It's the groaning of anticipation. You can feel Paul here reaching forward, almost like a runner as he prepares to breast the tape because he's so anxious to put on his heavenly dwelling, the permanent body, which is going to be his in the world to come.

He's in his dilapidated old tent and he's straining forward to his future home. And he almost fears that he's going to be left naked as he puts it in verse three or unclothed as he puts it in verse four.

But what he goes on to say in verse four is that his new body is going to be a glorious new clothing for him so that what is mortal, what is perishing and falling to pieces may be swallowed up by life.

[32 : 15] And verse five, it is God who has prepared us for this very thing. And if God has prepared Christians for this very thing, this glorious, eternal future, we mustn't worry too much about the disappearance of youth and beauty.

I've noticed just in the last few days, you know the new building, big shopping thing that's being built up there? There's a shop front which is called Forever 21, isn't there?

Does that mean what I think it means? I'm afraid it does, doesn't it? It means you go in there and you're 89 and a half and you buy something and you come out and your friends look at you and you say, oh, you look 21 again.

Aren't we amazing, we human beings, at self-deception? Extraordinary, isn't it? So let me put it like this. We mustn't worry too much about the disappearance of youth and beauty. If you're young, beautiful and female, I don't quite know what that feels like, but if you are, if you are, I guess, I've never seen this happen, but I guess you might sometimes look in the mirror and shake your head and say, aren't I pretty?

Or if you're the other gender, and I do understand this rather better, you might like to look in the mirror and flex your pectoral muscles and say, surely I'm irresistible. Which, brother, trust me, you're not.

[33 : 39] But if you do ever say that, then listen to yourself, just listen to yourself and take a pin and prick that little bubble of self-admiration and remember that in a few years' time, a very few years' time, you will look very different.

It's only a tent. And the very thing that God has prepared you for is that what is mortal should be swallowed up by life. And, says Paul in verse 5, God has given us a guarantee of all this.

And the word translated guarantee is the word often used for an engagement ring. It's a sure promise of a wonderful future. And this guarantee is the Holy Spirit planted in our hearts at our congregation filling us progressively and increasingly with the assurance that the Bible's teaching about the glorious world to come is true.

So we have the incomparable glory, the heavenly dwelling, and third, we have the constant aim of the Lord's people. You'll see that at the end of verse 9. We make it our aim to please Him.

Now in verses 6 to 9, Paul introduces yet another way of describing the contrast between this world and the world to come. It's the contrast between being at home and away.

[35 : 02] I know it sounds like a football fixture, doesn't it? But it's much more important than football. So verse 6, while we are at home in the body, meaning, while we're still living in our physical bodies, we are still away from the Lord.

But what Paul really wants in verse 8 is to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. He puts it even more strongly in Philippians chapter 1, My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is better by far.

You can understand Paul wanting to leave his mortal body and be with the Lord. He has had such a rough deal in this world. But he's also teaching the Corinthians and us to develop the same longing.

Now, Paul is not world denying. The last thing he's saying is that our life in this world doesn't matter. It does matter. And that's why he says in verse 9, So whether we are at home in this body, in this world, or away, we make it our aim to please him.

Isn't that a wonderful instruction from the apostle? The great goal of the Christian life in this world and in the world to come is to please the Lord Jesus. It will make us say to him, Lord Jesus, whoever I am, whatever my situation, I want to please you in the way that I live.

[36 : 25] So, am I a parent bringing up young children? Help me to please you by the example I set and by the teaching that I give them. Am I older and retired? Help me to please you by bending all my experience and energy into serving your people and honoring your name.

Am I a student studying for an important qualification like a degree? Help me to please you, Lord, by the quality of my work and by being unashamed of you and of the gospel in the face of my fellow students.

Am I struggling with unemployment or the great, great difficulty of being an asylum seeker? Help me, Lord, to please you by supporting your people and bringing the gospel to my fellow asylum seekers.

Or, am I tempted to desert you or to dishonor you or disown you or fall into some sin or shame? Help me, Lord, to please you by turning my heart and ears away from Satan's voice.

And verse 7 is such a help to us in all this. Paul says, we walk by faith, not by sight. We will see him when we are at home with him, but while we're still away from him, still in this body, we walk day by day by faith.

[37 : 43] We trust the one whom we don't yet see. But we know that his eye is upon us even if our eye is not yet upon him. And look at verse 10.

Our aim is to please him because 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.

Now, this is not the judgment seat of condemnation because for Christians, Christ has already taken our condemnation in full on the cross. This is a different judgment seat.

It's the judgment seat of loving assessment and appraisal. We aim to please him because we want him on that great day to be able to say to us, you have served me faithfully and I'm pleased with you.

Well, coffee and tea call us. Let me just sum up with a very brief final thought. The agnostic world, the world that we inhabit and know quite a bit about, has no knowledge of the world to come.

[38 : 50] And even some churches, as I said earlier, take the heart out of the gospel by teaching a Christianity for this world only. But Paul is teaching his readers, both then and today, to fix their eyes on the great future which is promised to all who belong to Christ.

A Christianity which is for this life only is in Paul's teaching a pitiful sham. It completely misunderstands why Christ came. Our service of Christ begins here and now in this life.

We're to work for him, to please him. We have a city, Glasgow, to be evangelized. And we have a world to be evangelized as well. And we have a church, our church and other churches, to love and serve and build up.

The Christian life in this world is a life of service and challenge, a life of great joys with a fair dash of sufferings thrown in. But, the goal of the gospel is in glory.

It's beyond this world. And let's never allow each other to forget this. Years from now, if you should come to visit me in the old people's home in West Kilbride, I want you to come close to me and speak very clearly into my hearing aid.

[40 : 06] And I want you to say this very distinctly in my ear. Edward, remember, the focus of Paul's gospel is primarily eschatological.

Well, of course it is. The Lord has rescued us so that we should be at home with him forever. As Paul puts it in verse 4, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

This is the thing we have been made for because it is God who has prepared us for this very thing. Let us pray together.

how we thank you, dear Heavenly Father, for Paul's sure knowledge of these things which you enabled him to have because you inspired him and taught him so that he should teach us.

And we pray that this knowledge of the great wonderful future that has been won for us by the Lord Jesus should be a knowledge that grows ever more strongly and more deeply in our hearts as we look forward to being away from this body, this dilapidated tent and to being at home with you in glory.

[41 : 26] Help us to live life in that assurance, dear Father, and help us to show others that they too can share it. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen.