

“Permanent Housing”

A few years ago my friend Dan and I hiked to the **summit of Mt. Whitney** in California which is the highest point in the continental US. **Here we are at the top**, which is 14,496 feet above sea level. It was one more great adventure that Dan and I have experienced over the years. But it wasn't easy. In fact, Dan almost didn't make it due to altitude sickness. **Here he is on our way up**. He doesn't look too good does he? He didn't feel good at all but there was hope because our plan was to spend the night around the 10,000 foot level. We definitely hoped that some water and a good night's rest would help. But that hope quickly faded when we hiked above 10,000 feet, where the trees stop growing by the way, and looked for a place to pitch our tent. Dan felt like he was hung over because of the altitude even though we weren't drinking. We were both tired and hungry and there was nothing around but rocks. So, **here's where we ended up**. An ideal camping spot, it was not!



While studying our reading from 2 Corinthians as our sermon series *Real Trouble Real Hope* continues, it was this picture of our tent wedged between two rocks that immediately came to my mind. Paul writes, **“While we are still in this tent, we groan.”** That's what Dan and I were doing that night. Because of our perceived burden we were groaning! No doubt, life was good! We were on our way to the top of our slice of the world! But how quickly our focus shifted. Sickness, aching muscles, and fatigue had set in and we found ourselves on a lonely mountain in a tent between two rocks groaning for something better.

We do that a lot don't we? Even when things seem pretty good, we still find a reason to groan about our perceived burdens.

Paul knew a thing or two about burdens and groaning. After his conversion he spent a majority of his life not knowing if he would make it to the next day or not. Death seemed

to be constantly on the horizon. He was beaten, stoned, persecuted, forsaken, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. It was a lot to deal with. But he faced it all with humility because of his Savior. If only we could do the same in all our trials.

Paul also knew a thing or two about tents. In the book of Acts, we read about Paul, while he was in Corinth befriending Aquila and Priscilla who like himself were tentmakers. Paul actually lived with them and worked with them in Corinth making tents. So it makes sense in our reading today from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth that he uses the analogy of a tent to ultimately express our great Christian hope.

I think in Paul's mind there was a great paradox with the simple tent. It shields us from the elements. It's portable. It can be set up almost anywhere and taken down when its time to move on. But it's not permanent. In fact, sometimes the tent can become a burden. If the tent was all you had to live in, for example, it might get old. It's small; there's no bathroom; it rips. And what about taking that tent around with you all of the time. If you had a big family that required a big tent, it could be quite a heavy load. That's what I think Paul had in mind when he talked about the burden of the tent. The tents like he made with Priscilla and Aquila were not like the ones we have today. They were not something that could be rolled up in a couple of minutes and attached to a backpack. These things were heavy and a burden to carry and to put up and down. Paul also points out that they were also flawed because they were made with human hands. Paul groans for the permanent eternal home in heaven, the building from God, a house not made with hands of man like a tent, but by the hand of God who will reunite our souls with our resurrected bodies where we will live forever as the perfect creatures he created us to be! He wants the real heaven. He's tired of the tent. And if you're like me, many days you want that too.

We want to get away from this life of burden and put on our heavenly dwelling don't we? We want to be relieved of living in this temporary tent because it gets old lugging this big thing around. It gets old taking this thing down and moving when the doctor tells us the cancer is back. It gets old taking this thing down and moving it when a spouse decides they longer want to be married. It gets old when our sinful habits get the best of us or when those terrible sins of the past creep back into our minds and overwhelm us to the point of doubting that we really are forgiven.

And if we're honest, I'll bet many of us pray for Jesus to return because we are done with the heavy load of the temporary tent. We want it to be folded up and put away in

exchange for permanent housing because life is just too hard. Well, if that sounds like you-I already admitted it sounds like me at times-I say slow down. I say “pump the brakes.” Because no matter what trouble we are experiencing in this world, there is certainly real hope even before Jesus returns. Yes, we have a heavenly dwelling. Paul tells us that God has prepared for us this very thing. But until Christ comes back and establishes the new creation, we have to wait but we don't wait in the darkness of the unknown. Paul reminds us we wait with a great gift from **God who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.**

You see, the Spirit is our guarantee that we are now a part of this whole thing. With God's Spirit given to us, we are now in the great drama of God dealing with his people. And that story as recorded in His Holy Word came together for us when a Jewish man from Nazareth was nailed to a cross and left to die by the Romans over two thousand years ago. But the crucified Jesus, who endured the pain and suffering of our sinfulness was rescued for us! That's how God decided to save mankind from sin. He saved us through the death and resurrection of Christ and it is this same Christ who will come back and make everything new again. That's how our lives, as good or bad as they may be at the moment, are part of his plan. And keeping us in that plan is the guaranteed Spirit of God. Think of it as our down payment!

That's why as Paul writes, “**we are always of good courage.**” We know that while we are still in this tent of life on earth waiting for Christ's return, we in a sense, are away from the Lord. But through the power of God's Spirit, we can courageously walk by faith in the death, resurrection, and ultimately the return of our Savior because we are connected to him! Through faith, we are able to recognize our sinfulness and then confess those sins and know we are forgiven! Through faith we understand that when bad things happen we don't try and explain God. We instead proclaim our trust in God's promise to help us through those things no matter what they are. That why these words of the Lord from Paul give us such hope. Yes, there is permanent housing promised for all with faith in Christ. But as Paul says **whether we are at home or away** in the temporary tents we all live in, **we make it our aim to please the Lord.**

Not please him in order to get something more in return but pleasing him by trusting him even in those most difficult experiences we all have. **When our lives look like we are living in that tent jammed between the rocks.** When what we are experiencing feels like there is just no hope, God see us between the rocks in our flimsy tents and he says, “I've got this.” He comes to us, forgives our sin and works his gift of salvation in Jesus

Christ even in the what seems like the most hopeless situation. Trusting that promise in all of life no matter the circumstance is what really pleases our Lord.

You know my friend Dan emerged from that tent the next morning not completely healed but well enough to keep going. **Here is the sunrise we saw.** Isn't it beautiful? I think there is a great lesson in faith here for all of us. The love of God shines in all us claimed as his children in Christ Jesus each and every day. Even though he is hidden among our sufferings to quote Lamentations Chapter 3, "**His steadfast love never ceases; his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning.**" Think of that love when you see a sunrise illuminating your little piece of his wonderful creation. Yes, many of us will see that sunrise in the midst of some pretty bad stuff and it won't be easy. And even though we may not be completely healed in our relationship with other people or healed of our pains or illnesses, because of our loving God who brought life out of death, we are healed with him and that should make us well enough to keep going.

The Lord is our source of life. He's with us now in our temporary housing on this earth complete with all its burdens, tragedy and troubles. And his promise is that when he returns we will inherit permanent housing in the new creation where disappointment, groaning and pain will be no more. That should give us all real hope! **Amen.**