

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-10
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS!

Christians live between two worlds. That's a very simple statement, but is one that carries so many questions and challenges with it! We live between earth and heaven; the life that we see and feel and experience now is the life we know, but there is a hope of heaven for the Christian. Heaven broke into our world when Jesus came, as He came from heaven to earth to be our Saviour; He is raised and returned to glory and our hope is that He will raise us with Him. Citizenship is huge issue for the UK in terms of government and who belongs and how we persuade people to take that belonging seriously in terms of responsibility, even on the school curriculum; Paul says that our citizenship is in heaven, that ultimately our belonging is with God.

Paul uses 3 pictures in 2 Cor 5 to show us that we live between two worlds:

1. Tent – Paul was a tent-maker; curiously, it was when he visited Corinth that he worked as tent-maker for a time, making his living, supporting himself. The thing about the tent, it is temporary; if you've been camping, the beauty of the tent is that you can take it down and move somewhere else; it has no foundations; it is also easily blown down, if you want the worst of it. The Bible's history tells us of people who lived in tents, moving from one place to another, as a temporary dwelling. So, for us: "*Now we...*" (5:1) The "Earthly tent": our body is the earthly tent and earlier Paul reminded us how sometimes life in this world is hard; we suffer; our bodies are frail and weak; we get sick or hurt; frailty inevitably ends in death for us; this "earthly tent is being destroyed!" This is a realistic picture, if not an attractive one for us. In this world, life is a temporary thing.

2. Overcoat – the picture changes to clothes and overcoat: "*While we...*" (5:4) There is a counsel of despair that goes with the picture of the tent and the notion that life is frail and temporary and Paul pictures that as being naked; he wonders aloud about whether we will be homeless and lost and naked. The answer: no! we won't ever be lost, in despair, naked, because a new set of clothes is put on over the old set; we are clothed with a "heavenly dwelling"; the hope is that we will be new people, with a new kind of life, with new glorious bodies that are perfect and complete. Elsewhere we are told that we shall be with Christ and that we shall share His glory, raised with Him, and glorious forever. That glory we will put on like a new overcoat and we shall be changed.

3. Home – this picture is used in two senses: first of all, home is a house and in contrast to tent, this house is permanent, strong and real: "*We have...*" (5:1a) If death is like dismantling a tent, there is house to take its place, an eternal dwelling that is in heaven; we shall be new people, glorious people, sharing Jesus' glory. Secondly, home is a place to be; Robert Frost says that "home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in!" For Paul, our ultimate home is with God "*I would...*" (5:8) and it is entirely right for the Christian who dies to have this deep sense of going home. Home is being with God.

It seems to me that we need to recover something of this 'between two worlds' idea. We are, rightly, caught up with the life we live in this world and it takes up all of our energies at times simply to survive this life. Maybe we also remember the jibe that was launched at Christians in the past of being "so heavenly minded that of we are of no earthly use!" and so we have forgotten this other world in which we have hope. The problem is that when we only focus on this world, we lose that sense of hope; we become like everyone else and live thinking that the life we live now is all there is and it is such a terrible trial! We need to recover this sense of living between two worlds

and recover the Christian hope that comes from Jesus, that we shall be raised with Him and that we shall share His glory.

In case you think this is pie in sky that will make us dreamy and unpractical, and of 'no earthly use', see what it did for Paul. There was a groaning and longing at times, when he wanted to be at home with God and was frustrated by his own weakness and frailty, but it gave him two other qualities.

First of all, it gave him confidence. We look at the question of heaven and have so many questions that can't be answered that we have all sorts of reasons for doubt; we throw the idea away because we don't know all the answers. Paul knew that we live by faith, not by what we see and can prove, and he also knew God. "*Now it...*" (5:5) The Spirit lives in us and because we have the Spirit, we have the guarantee of all these promises of God. This hope is sure because it is a promise of God. God keeps His promises! There is a certainty about all of this that is life-giving, life-enhancing, confidence-giving and that confidence gave him the courage to face up to life in all its hardships. Far from leaving us to dream of what might be, this hope of heaven gives us confidence and courage to face up to life as it really is.

Secondly, this hope gave Paul a huge ambition to please God. "*We make...*" (5:9) This becomes his "consuming ambition" (Hughes) to please God. It becomes the driving force behind his whole life to please God. It's not a bad ambition, is it? It's one that fits us no matter where we are, what we do – to live life in a way that is pleasing to God. By instinct we live to please ourselves; we put 'self' at the centre and everything else revolves round that. Here's a new centre, to please God and that can touch everything: to be a parent in a way that pleases God, to be a husband or a wife, to go to work, to go to school, to enjoy our leisure, to deal with our neighbours, the way we use our Sunday – we can do all of these in a way that pleases God.

We are between two worlds! You might think that your life is like a dilapidated, broken-down hut because you feel frail and vulnerable, lost, confused, but one day you will be a beautiful palace. Even the communion service takes its place between two worlds – we celebrate communion "until He comes". One world we know very well; we need to take the other world seriously, this hope of heaven and glory; let it fill you with confidence and courage; let it inspire you to live life to please God.