

Speaker 1:

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. So if any of you have figured out what 2 Corinthians is talking about, please come forward and explain it. I mean, wow, what Paul is saying here in 2 Corinthians, it is incredibly dense and incredibly filled with Greek logic. Paul was a philosopher. He studied Greek philosophy under the greats. And when he speaks in particular, his rhetoric is very, very precise and very complex. And to my modern ear, it took me forever to try and figure out what in the world he was talking about here. So hopefully I'll be able to express it to you and unpack the passages. But first let's get to Ezekiel. Ezekiel talks about this great tree that is chopped off and then a small part of it, a new twig is planted on a high hill in Israel.

What it's really talking about is from the great depth of prophecy in the Old Testament comes a new teaching, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the gospel of our Lord. And that is broken off from all of the Old Testament, all of the history that is leading up to it and growing it and getting ready for it. It is broken off and planted in a new hill where all people, all of us birds of the air will be able to nest in its branches. In other words, Christ is the new creation, a new teaching that builds on the old and provides salvation for all people. That's really what it's talking about. And he can bring life out of death, the dry branches he can make alive again and the live he can make dead. In other words, he can bring the gospel to all people. It's for everybody, based upon our faith in his word.

All right, so that is what Ezekiel's kind of talking about. So here in 2 Corinthians, Paul is talking about our faith as well, our life in Christ. What does that life that has been newly planted on the hill in Israel, what does it look like? So this is the third week in a row that we've talked about the fragility and the temporary nature of life. For two weeks now we've described, Paul has described life, our earthly life, our earthly home as that of dwelling in a tent. And then the week before that we talked about the life, the treasure that we have, the gift of faith that God has given to us is contained in a clay pot. And both of those images are to communicate the temporary nature of life. A clay pot is easily broken. It doesn't last for very long, but eventually it wears out.

Same thing with the tent. It's a thin piece of canvas between you and the outside elements, and it's not something that is meant to be long term. So we are to consider our own lives here on earth as temporary, that this is really not the hope that we are looking forward to. Paul says that he looks with... He doesn't see with his eyes, but he walks by faith, not by sight, and he looks to the spirit rather than the flesh. So what he's talking about there is that when he looks at life around us and when he looks at the people around us, he does not judge or think about us and

our life as the world does. The world judges us and compares us based upon our bank accounts, the car that we drive, the house that we live in, the clothes that we wear, the jewelry that we have, any number of... The fitness that we have, the health that we are.

There's all sorts of measuring sticks that the world uses to determine whether you are good or not, whether you measure up or you don't, whether you're better than the rest or not. But the way the things that the world uses to measure success and good is not how we as Christians measure success and measure the importance of life. You see we understand that this world is filled with trials and tribulations, that this world is sometimes a really hard place to be in. I mean, many of us have gone through a few decades of our lives and in a few of those there have been times when life has been challenging and hard and we stress and we get upset. And pretty much through every stage of life, there's something to get stressed about. There's something to be anxious about, there's something to worry about. But Paul says, we do not think in those terms because we know that God has provided a place for us, a temporary dwelling here, which he will provide for and take care of. God promises to give us all that we need to support this body in life. So when we understand that God has promised to give us all these things, we then don't need to be anxious and worried about the cares that this world expects us to be anxious about. Whether we are rich or poor we can like Paul know the secret of being content. That is knowing Christ and his salvation. Any blessings that we have in this world pale in comparison to what is to come. And so we don't hold onto this life grasping with all the strength that we have. We are free even if we face our last day. Now, it does say that when Jesus Christ will come again and we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that everyone may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Now, when I hear that phrase initially, I'm like, "Whoa, okay."

I'm going to be judged for the good or evil. Now here's the question. How much good do you need to do in order to be judged rightly and positively by God versus the evil that you do? Have you done enough? Are you on the right side of that scale? And I will tell you right now, you're on the wrong side. You, me and the entire world, we're all on the wrong side. We have never done enough good to face the judgment seat and be confident that we're going to go to heaven, not by our own works, not by our own measuring stick, not by our own efforts that we do to determine whether we think we're a good person or not. None of that is sufficient to face the judgment seat. What is sufficient is this, that Christ has come to die for us and that the righteousness of God is given to us as a gift. And so the good that I do is to believe that God has done it all for me.

That's the good that I can come before the judgment seat of God in and be confident that I will leave this earthly body, this temporary temple that I dwell in, and it will be transformed into this heavenly, eternal body where I will dwell with God forever without all the pain and sorrows and heartache and anxieties and fears that this world provides. I'll be free of it all because I look at life not through the lens of the human experience alone, but through the experience of Christ coming to be human with me so that he has raised me up from just thinking about the flesh and the things of this world and the cares of this world. He has raised me to new life, to think about eternal things because if one person has died, then all have died through him. Christ died and in our baptism we are connected with his death and our old Adam, our sinful nature is drowned and dead.

So we have already died. We already have eternal life, the life with God. And so therefore, when this flesh breathes its last, we know that that's not the last thing. Because we see, we spiritualize. We are confident of the eternity that we will be with Christ. And so we're not caught up in the cares of this world. We live in this world, but we're not of this world. We're passing through from this life into the next. And so we can then use the gifts that God has given to us for his glory and for the benefit of our neighbor. In other words, we don't need to grasp onto our money. We don't need to grasp on to every possible health and wellness thing that we can find. We don't need to grasp all the things that hopefully the world says will make us feel secure because they won't and they don't. Everything that the world says is going to give you security and peace fails at some point. The only thing that does not fail is the gift given to us by God.

And so we long to be with him. We look forward to the day when we get to meet our maker. I know that's not usually the way we speak of it, but that is the way we as Christians see it. I look forward to the day when I face the judgment seat of Christ, not because I'm all that good and holy and righteous, that I'm confident in my own actions. God forbid, no, but I am excited when I get to see my savior, because I know when I see him, he's going to look at me and see Christ in me and he's going to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And I'm going to say, "What did I do?" Nothing. But Christ did it for you. So our confidence is based in Christ. So we don't need to worry and fret, have we done enough? Are we good enough? Have we made the right effort? The fact of the matter is we're always going to say, no, we haven't.

But for the sake of Christ, we can still be at peace and we can still then strive to love one another, strive to care for one another, strive to serve each other, to give of our tithes and offerings to help other people. We do that not because we hope that it's enough, but we do that because God has already given us more than we can

possibly imagine and we want to thank him and we want to express our joy that this earthly tent is not the end all and be all of existence because God has planted that seed of faith in our hearts. And as small as it might be when it starts, it grows to fill all of us, every pore of our being so that we know when the harvest comes, when the seed is ripe, when the harvest comes, God himself, who is the reaper, will bring us home, bring the harvest home to be with him.

And so our task in the meantime is not to look as the flesh looks, not to be concerned and focused only on the cares of this world, but to be focused on how we might serve our neighbor in the job that we live, in the neighborhood that we're, in every experience, and every activity, in every conversation that we have. How can I express the joy of my salvation? How can I let this person know how much they are loved by God? How can I demonstrate in my words and my actions and my thoughts that God is here for all of us and that we do not need to be afraid? So that's really what Paul is trying to help us understand, that this world is temporary and what is to come is so glorious that we cannot wait for the day it happens. So in the meantime, as you're waiting around in this tent for your eternal dwelling, may His grace and his mercy and His peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore, unto life everlasting. Amen. Let us then confess-