

In search of...



Truth & Right

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Our Earthly Tabernacle

While the apostle Paul was preaching at Corinth he met Aquila and Priscilla. "Because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers" (Acts 18:3). Like every Jewish boy, Paul had learned a manual trade aside from his chosen profession in life.

When writing to the saints at Philippi he spoke of his conflicting desires. On one hand he desired "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). On the other hand, he wanted to continue in his evangelistic work which would bring fruit from his labor

(Phil. 1:22).

The phrase "to depart" is from a Greek military term which means "to break camp" or "strike ones tent" (Marvin Vincent, Word Studies In The New Testament, Vol. III, p. 425). Paul wrote these words while a prisoner in the barracks of the Praetorian Guard. No doubt Paul had watched Roman soldiers set up their tents and take them down a few days later. Paul was eagerly awaiting the day when his fleshly tent would be taken down for the last time.

In John 1:14 we read, "And

the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." According to A.T. Robertson, the verb dwelt means "to pitch one's tent or tabernacle" (Word Pictures In The New Testament, Vol. V, p. 13). What a thought the Lord of glory left heaven to take up residence in a tent!

The apostle Peter also compared his body to a tent. "Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me" (2 Peter 1:13-14).

Why would Bible writers compare our physical bodies to a tent?

When God spoke with Abraham, He told him to leave his homeland and journey to a foreign land (Genesis 12:13). "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and

pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13).

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived in tents, though they could have lived in mansions. During their journey "they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." They lived in tents because they were waiting for "the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

As Paul comforted the brethren at Corinth about the resurrection, he said, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:1-6).

Paul makes two main points in this passage. First, when we put off our tent, we will have a permanent home in heaven (vs. 1). Second, while we are in this tent we are separated from God (vs. 6). Our earthly journey keeps us at a distance from Christ.

I enjoy camping. I love to set up our tent and gather firewood. My kids like sitting around the Coleman lantern telling jokes. I don't even mind sleeping on the

ground. A night or two in a tent brings the family closer together. But, as much as I enjoy camping, I would hate to think of having to live in a tent permanently. We should feel the same way about our physical body (our present tent).

James rebuked those who put too much trust in the future. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit,' whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15).

All our future plans depend on the continuance of this life, what a frail and uncertain thing that is. Who knows the duration of a vapor? What hopes can be built on a mist?

One thing that should spur us on in the preaching of the gospel is the brevity of life. Several years ago I put a little sign on the pulpit which says, "The Apostle Paul. He preached as though he would never preach again, a dying man to dying men." I don't recall where I first read that quote, but I have tried to fashion my preaching around it.

In the Prayer of Moses we read that "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away" (Psa. 90:10). Though our lives might span seventy or eighty years, we are "soon cut off, and we fly away." Since our life is so brief, we need to get busy.

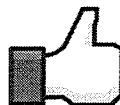
Parents must bring up their children "in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Young people must "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Eccl. 12:1). Elders must "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Gospel preachers must "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Timothy 4:2).

All of us must use our time wisely. Paul said, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:15-16). We cannot spend our time thinking about "what might have been." Jesus warns us that "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Each day we live moves us one day closer to our final camp. One day we will strike this camp for the last time and exchange our earthly tent for a home in glory.

David Padfield

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- A man who was lame from birth sat (Acts 14:8)
- And heard Paul speaking the gospel (vs. 9)
- Paul said, "Stand up straight on your feet!" (vs. 10)
- When the crowds saw what Paul had done, (vs. 11)
- They shouted in the Lycaonian language (vs. 11)
- They called Barnabas Zeus (vs. 12)
- And they called Paul Hermes (vs. 12)
- Then they intended to offer sacrifice (vs. 13)
- They tore their robes when they heard this (vs. 14)
- "We are men also, with the same nature as you" (vs. 15)
- They were saying to turn from worthless things (vs. 15)
- to the living God, who made everything (vs. 15)