

# Living Heaven Minded

*2 Corinthians 4:13–5:10*

May 17, 2026 · New Baptist Church · Huntington, West Virginia  
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On June 8, 1941, C. S. Lewis stepped into the pulpit of a church in Oxford, England, and preached a sermon called “The Weight of Glory.” Britain was at its lowest point in the war. London had just been gutted in the heaviest Blitz of the conflict, leaving fourteen hundred people dead. Crete had fallen the week before. Rommel was driving the British back in North Africa. Everywhere they looked, defeat. In that dark hour, Lewis chose the text we are reading today.

He did not choose it by accident. He chose it because Paul preached it first — in his own darkness, to a church that doubted him, with a body bearing the marks of three beatings, five lashings, one stoning, and three shipwrecks. Paul says in 4:1, “we do not lose heart.” He says it again in 4:16, “so we do not lose heart.” Between those two sentences, and after them, he tells us why. That is our text this morning.

*“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. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light 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 that 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. 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.”*

*— 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:10*

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I want to start by naming a struggle that most Christians have. Most of us in this room believe in the resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come. We confess it, we sing about it, and we talk about it. Yet most Christians live throughout the week as if the resurrection were not true. What most people do is treat the visible as the real and the unseen as the imagined. We treat the temporal — the now, the present — as the weighty, and the eternal as the abstract.

That is the condition Paul is addressing. And please know, Paul is not writing to skeptics. He is writing to Christians who have lost their grip on what is real, on what is eternal, on what matters. So this is where Paul directs our gaze: to what is real and eternal. And in doing so, he tells us six things about what it means to live heaven minded.

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## I. The Resurrection to Eternal Life Is Already at Work in You (4:13–16)

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.”*

Paul is quoting Psalm 116. In that psalm, a man is in the grip of death. The cords of Sheol are around him. He cries out, “O LORD, deliver my soul” (116:4). And the LORD delivers him. Paul is saying: that is me. The man in Psalm 116 who cried out from the snares of death and was delivered — that is every believer.

And the deliverance has a name. Verse 14: *“He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.”* Hear the Trinitarian structure of that sentence. The Father raises. The Son was raised. The Spirit — named in a moment — is the guarantee. The whole economy of God is bent toward your resurrection. The Father purposed it. The Son secured it. The Spirit is applying it to you now.

And why? Verse 15: *“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.”* Your salvation is not the end of the sentence. The glory of the Father is. He saves you for his own praise.

Therefore. Verse 16: *“So we do not lose heart.”*

Now Paul moves to the part most Christians miss. *“Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”* Two selves. The verb for wasting away means corrupted, destroyed, decaying — every cell, every breath, every gray hair, every joint that no longer cooperates. The outer self is going.

But the inner self is being renewed. *νακαινοται*. Day by day. Made new. Made new. Made new.

Please hear what Paul is saying. He is not describing two compartments of yourself, as if you had a spiritual self stored inside your physical self like a soul in a jar. He is describing what is true of you because you are in Christ. The inner self that is being renewed is the self joined to the risen Jesus by the Spirit. The renewal is not your project. It is the resurrection of Jesus working outward in you. The same power that lifted him from the tomb is at work in you right now.

On the outside, your body is dying. But there is a part of you — the inner you — that is rising. And this dying of the outer self and the making-new of the inner, it is doing something to all your sufferings in this world. That is Paul’s second point.

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## II. In Christ, the Resurrection Redeems Every Suffering and Hardship (4:17–18)

Verse 17: “*For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.*”

The word translated *preparing* means actively at work — it is doing something to us. Paul is not saying that your afflictions are the dues you pay for glory. He is not saying that your suffering happens to be the bus you ride to heaven. He is saying that your affliction is the very thing God is using to produce in you a glory beyond all comparison. By the power of the resurrection, God is redeeming your afflictions.

This is remarkable. Your heartaches, your sufferings, your ailments, your griefs, your sorrows — all of it. *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.* And the reason the momentary affliction is light is that it is compared to what is eternal. Paul puts the scales in front of us. On one side, light affliction. Momentary affliction. Paul — beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, hunted, hungry, cold, betrayed by his own people — calls all of that light. And momentary. On the other side, the *kabod*. The weight of glory. He stacks the preposition on itself: according to excess, into excess. Excess upon excess. A weight upon a weight. The scales are not even close.

And here is how the affliction becomes light. Verse 18: “*As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.*” The participle is *σκοπούντων* — continuous, fixed, attentive looking. Not a glance. A gaze. It is the root from which we get the word *telescope*. In the power of God, fixing one’s gaze upon the eternal redeems the affliction of the moment.

Paul is not pretending the affliction is not real. He is not telling you to ignore the diagnosis or pretend the funeral did not happen. He is telling you that there is something more, something greater, something more firm, something more lasting — and when you fix your sights there, the eternal resurrection power of Jesus Christ begins to work its way into your everyday life today.

And here is a glimpse of that which is more, that which is lasting, that which is yours in Christ Jesus.

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## III. You Already Have the Building (5:1–5)

Chapter 5, verse 1: “*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*”

Present tense. We *have* a building from God. Paul does not say we will have it. He says we have it. The resurrection body is already secured, already prepared, already in your name. The deed is already signed.

A tent is temporary. A tent has stakes that pull up. A tent flaps in the wind. A tent does not last. Your body is a tent that someday will be rolled up and tucked away. We all know this. But there is a building made by God, eternal in the heavens. This is the resurrection body. You do not earn that body. You do not build it. You have it. In Christ.

And because you have it right now, right now you are already experiencing a homesickness for it. That homesickness is part of the proof that it is real. *“For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling.”* The groaning, the longing, is not a malfunction. It is the Spirit-given ache for something this world cannot give you.

I long for a joy that lasts. I long for justice to be done and for evil to end. I long for beauty that does not fade. I long to fully know and be fully known. I long for a body that does not break down. I long for a rest that does not end. I long for reunion with those that death has taken from me. I long for a life of lasting meaning and purpose. I long for completeness and wholeness, for what is wrong in me to be fully healed. I long to see God — not merely to read about him, but to see him.

Those longings did not come from this world. This world did not put them in you. They are the homesickness of someone made for a country he has not yet seen. They are the deposit signaling a withdrawal not yet made.

Verse 5: *“He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.”*

The word translated *guarantee* is *ῥαβών* — a commercial term. Earnest money. A down payment that legally binds the rest of the transaction. The Spirit in you is the Father’s earnest money on your resurrection. The full payment is on the way. The deal cannot be broken, because the Father has already put down the deposit, and the deposit is the Holy Spirit himself.

You are not waiting for the resurrection like a man waiting for a letter that may or may not come. You are waiting for it like a man whose contract is signed, whose earnest money is already in escrow, and whose only remaining question is the closing date.

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#### **IV. Living Heaven Minded Means Walking by Faith (5:6–8)**

Verse 6: *“So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord.”* And verse 7: *“For we walk by faith, not by sight.”*

Paul has told us to fix our gaze on the unseen. He now tells us how: by faith. Faith is not the absence of vision. Faith is the better vision. Faith is the eye that sees what the body cannot see. Faith is how we fix our gaze on the eternal.

And this kind of faith requires the Word to feed it, the Spirit to give it life, and the people of God around you. You will not learn to fix your gaze on eternity by trying harder to fix your gaze on eternity. You will learn it by sitting under the Word daily, by coming to the Table, by joining the people of God in prayer and praise, by suffering in the company of saints who have suffered before you. That is how the eye is trained.

And because of what Paul sees through faith, he says it again. Verse 8: *“Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* This is the comfort we speak at every graveside. The believer does not wait in a holding cell between death and resurrection. The moment the tent comes down, the believer is at home with the Lord. Absent from the body. Present with the Lord.

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## **V. Living Heaven Minded Means Aiming to Please Jesus (5:9–10)**

Verse 9: *“So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.”*

Where does faith aim? To please God. To make pleasing God one’s ambition in life. Notice that this purpose is not limited to this life — whether at home in the body or at home with the Lord, the aim is the same: to please him.

But please hear this rightly. We do not aim to please him in order to be accepted. We aim to please him because we have already been accepted in his beloved Son. The order matters. The indicative comes first. You are in Christ; therefore, you aim to please. You do not aim to please in order to get into Christ. The aim is the fruit, not the root.

And then verse 10: *“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.”*

The judgment seat — *τ β μα το Χριστο* .

### **Archaeological Moment**

If you go to Corinth today and walk the ancient forum, you can still see it: a platform of carved stone, raised above the floor of the marketplace, where the proconsul of Achaia would sit to render verdicts. Acts 18 tells us Paul himself stood before that very stone. Gallio, the Roman proconsul, judged him there. Every Corinthian Christian reading this letter knew that stone.

They had walked past it. They had seen verdicts pronounced from it. They had seen men condemned and men released on that platform.

Paul takes that stone and lifts it into eternity.

There is a *β μα* coming, he says, before which we must all appear. Every Christian. Every word. Every deed. The body itself comes with us, because what we did was done in the body, and the body is being raised.

I do not believe this is what Revelation calls the Great White Throne — the judgment of condemnation. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Rather, this *bema* is a judgment upon believers. It is the moment when the works of the believer — works done in the body, by the power of the Spirit, in union with the risen Christ — are examined and assessed. Wood, hay, and stubble will burn. Gold, silver, and precious stones will stand. Some will receive a reward. Some will see their life's work go up in smoke and be saved, as Paul says elsewhere, as through fire.

There is much to think through here, but do not miss what Paul is saying. First: what you do matters. Not for justification — what Christ does matters for your salvation. But what you do does matter to God, and there will be a day when he will approve or disapprove of what you have done with your gift of salvation. You will not lose your salvation, but what you do with it matters to him. Paul has just told us his aim: to please him. Second: if our aim is to please the Lord, he will let us know how we did.

This *bema* is not a threat. It is a joyful promise. It is the joy of showing the Lord who you have become because of him. It is the joy of showing the Lord how those barriers and obstacles and heartaches, through his Spirit working in you, have produced in you a weight of glory beyond all comparison.

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## Closing

So. What are you looking at?

If you are looking at the wasting away, you will lose heart. If you are looking at the affliction, you will lose heart. If you are looking at the tent, you will lose heart.

The tent is coming down. We all know this. Some of you have buried parents this year. Some of you are sitting in this room with bodies that are betraying you. Some of you are watching someone you love waste away day by day. The tent is coming down.

But there is a building. Made by God. Not made by hands. Eternal in the heavens.

Look there.

You have the Spirit as a down payment. The deposit is in you. The deal is going to close.

Look there.

The resurrection is coming. The glory is heavy. The home is waiting. The judge is pleased to be pleased.

Look there.

And you will not lose heart.