



11500 West 20th Avenue Lakewood,
Colorado 80215
303-238-2482 (Fax 303 238 2337)

www.soth.net

contact us at mail@soth.net

9:00 a.m. Christian Education

10:00 a.m. Worship

Children's Sunday School during Worship



"From the Heart: Swallowed Up By Life"

2 Corinthians 5:1-10

Rev. Ron Holmes

September 5, 2010



We are continuing in our series through 2 Corinthians—Paul's 2nd letter to the church he founded at Corinth, a church with which he has a complicated relationship. It is arguably his most personal letter and his words for them...and us come "from the heart."

Today's reading continues some of the themes from last week—our bodies outwardly wasting away, but inwardly being renewed; our "light and momentary" troubles far outweighed by the eternal glory that will be ours; things that are temporary versus those things that are eternal; and fixing our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Note Paul's continuation of these themes as we listen to the word of God from 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. (Read)

The mortal "swallowed up by life." Don't you love that line? Mortal things...swallowed up by life. For the worldly, mortal things are swallowed up by...death. Something to dread or fear. Certainly not something to look forward to. For the Christian, mortal things are swallowed up by life—leaving this earthly tent for a home built by God (5:1...also, John 14:2, "*In my Father's house are many rooms: if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.*"); a life guaranteed by the Spirit given to us (v. 5); life where the preference is for being "away from the body and at home with the Lord" (v. 8). Such is the future glory that is ours. For the Christian, everything gets swallowed up by life...the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus in John 10:10, "*I've come that they might have life—and have it to the full.*" For the follower of Jesus, everything gets swallowed up by life!

However, one question to ask is, Which "life" is Paul—and Jesus in John 10:10—talking about? The future life of glory in God's heavenly kingdom? Or, this life here and now? And the answer is...both! Without question, Paul is reminding his Corinthian readers, and us, about the future life of glory in God's heavenly kingdom—a life in the "eternal house built by God," a life "at home with the Lord." Yet, Paul is also speaking to this life here and now. While Paul is the champion of grace—God's "unmerited favor"

bestowed upon us through Jesus Christ and particularly the death and resurrection of Jesus, accomplishing what we could never do for ourselves—he is also the champion of good works, of living our lives here on earth as much as possible according to the standards set before us by God...despite what his critics claimed. His critics accused Paul of throwing out the Law in favor of grace. But Paul never does that. A quick read of Paul would immediately reveal that. It is Paul who writes, in three verses, the great summary of this truth: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which he has prepared in advance for us to do"* (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is Paul who writes his foundational letter on Christian theology, the letter to the Romans, where he champions grace over the law yet also calls followers of Christ to the high standards of Romans chapter 12. Read that chapter and then tell me what we do in this life doesn't matter to Paul! And, it is Paul who writes here, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 9, *"So we make it our goal to please [the Lord], whether we are at home in the body or away from it."* The good news of the gospel is that the darkness of mortal things are swallowed up by life—the darkness of death and the end of our life here on earth, but also, the darkness this mortal life brings us here and now—the outwardly wasting away, the troubles in life, the destruction of our "earthly tents." All of that is swallowed up by life in Jesus Christ.

That is the great promise of Christian faith. It can also be its greatest weakness if pushed to the extreme, the same area of weakness that Paul's opponents attacked—erroneously, but a place vulnerable to attack if we're not careful, vulnerable to our being complacent if we're not diligent. I've mentioned before that the uniqueness of Christian faith over all other faiths is that Christianity is spelled D-O-N-E, while all other faiths are spelled D-O. D-O as in, what must I do to be right with God. Lacking a theology of grace, other faiths necessarily must view the pathway to being right with God as being dependent upon what they do in life. Do more good than bad and you just might make it. As Christians, we understand that our pathway to righteousness before God is based upon, not what we do, but what Jesus Christ has done for us. That is justification, salvation by grace, trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior. However, what we do in life most definitely matters. A sincere follower of Christ will be passionate about doing good, about bringing the light of Christ to whatever area of darkness they encounter in life. That is sanctification—doing acts of justice, love and mercy, following Jesus Christ as Lord in our lives. Our motivation is to please God. Our salvation doesn't depend upon it, but what we do matters. Seeking to please God contributes to experiencing mortal things being swallowed up by life. We should be motivated, in this life, to please God.

In our Scripture reading for today, Paul mentions a motivation for our doing good that we don't often talk about. What can get lost in the wonderful message of God's grace and love, when pushed to the extreme, is the fact that what we do in this life matters, in part because we will some day stand before Christ and give an account of our lives. There is, apparently, some kind of reward system awaiting us in heaven, dependent upon what we do in this life. We don't know exactly what that looks like, but it is mentioned in various passages from Scripture, including our reading for today. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive what is due them for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"* (2 Corinthians 5:10). I don't know about you, but that gets my attention. Frankly, there are some actions from my life I don't want presented before the judgment seat of Christ. I fully expect heaven to be glorious, beyond even what I can imagine. But, I expect some uncomfortable moments in getting there, standing before the judgment seat of Christ and receiving what is due me for things done while in the body, both good and bad. And that motivates me to be about doing good rather than bad.

There are, in fact, several things that motivate me to do good in this life, to resist temptation and live as best I can according to the standards God sets for me. First, and foremost, I am motivated by the absolute belief that those standards are what is best for my life. The world may tempt me with the allure of its

standards. But, I know that God's standards are best for my life and, therefore, I am motivated to live by them. Then, I am motivated to resist the temptation to do bad and seek to do good by the practice of thinking through the consequences of my actions. I wish we had the technology to be able to play a video of what the consequences will be of some particular action we're considering. We fall to a temptation, in part, because we think we'll be able to get away with it. Wouldn't it be helpful to see a video of what really will happen down the road if we take a particular action? Thinking through the realities of the consequences that will occur if I take a particular action is a motivating deterrent for me. And then there is the motivation of realizing that some day I will stand before Christ and be held accountable for my actions. I'll not be able to hide from my actions. I'll not be able to talk my way through them. They will be present with me before the judgment seat of Christ. In fact, a related motivation for me in addressing how I live is to imagine Christ is present with me, right there with me as I act. Would I do this if Christ were here in the room? In essence, He is. He already knows the things I've "done in the body, whether good or bad." They'll be in the room when I stand before the judgment seat of Christ. I don't want to make that experience any more unpleasant, any more uncomfortable than it has to be. And that is a strong motivation for me in my life.

Paul wants us to enjoy life to its fullest, experiencing the truth in Jesus Christ that mortality is swallowed up by life. Swallowed up, first of all, by eternal life that is ours in Jesus. When the earthly tent is destroyed, we move into a heavenly dwelling that God has prepared. Mortality swallowed up by the abundant life of justification/salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. And, mortality is swallowed up by life through the standards God has set before us. The conquering of sin in our life through subjecting ourselves to live the kind of life Christ wants us to lead. Mortality swallowed up by the abundant life of sanctification/good works through following Jesus Christ as Lord.

Let's take a moment for silent reflection.