

# At Home With the Lord

by John Piper

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*We do not lose heart in the face of suffering because our inner man is being renewed day by day, and we are trusting in the eternal weight of glory that is being produced in us.*

**Duration:** 34:51

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 4:16

**Topics:** "Eternal Life", "Worship"

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## Description

In this sermon series, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living out the word of God in our daily lives. He highlights four reasons why this series is significant to him. Firstly, it provides daily courage to face the challenges of life. Secondly, it reminds us that the worship and experiences in church are not just a temporary escape from reality, but a true reflection of God's reality. Thirdly, it encourages us to prioritize our love for God over worldly desires. Lastly, the series explores what happens after death, including the immediate aftermath, the coming of the Lord, the judgment of believers, and the final state. The preacher aims to bridge the gap between this life and the next through the essential act of worship.

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## Transcript

2 Corinthians chapter 4, and if you don't have a Bible, there's one in the pew rack in front of you, and it's on page 1,375 of that Bible. This morning, Pastor John will be preaching from 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 16, through chapter 5, verse 10. Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.

For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory, far beyond all comparison. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed, in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked. For indeed, while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed, but to be clothed, in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now he who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the

Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight, we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord. Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to him.

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Today I want to begin a series of five messages on the topic, what happens when you die? Today's message will try to answer the question, what happens immediately when you die? What's the next second after death? Next week will be the question, what happens at the coming of the Lord? The next week will be, what happens to believers at the judgment? The next week will be, what happens in the final state? Is it an ethereal heaven, or is it a new earth where lions and lambs lie down together? And the last message in the series will be, what is the most essential bridge that connects this life with the next one, namely worship? Now there are a lot of reasons for this series, and I'll mention four. They're not all, but they are four.

Number one, the possibilities of joy or misery are trillions of times greater after death than before. The Bible describes this life as a vapor's breath, James 4.15. It is like walking outside on a winter morning, speaking a word, and seeing your breath appear, and it's gone. It's just gone.

That's the way the Bible views this life. Most people don't view it that way. They don't feel that way about their life.

We feel like this is substantial and lasting, and this is it. The Bible says it's just like a vapor, like two seconds maybe. And then the Bible describes what's on the other side of the grave with this phrase, ages of ages.

Not just two or three ages of thousands of years, but ages of ages, thousands of thousands of thousands of years. That's the way of expressing eternity. So my first reason is simply this message is about reality.

Reality is if you're more interested in what lasts a trillion years than what lasts two seconds. If you're only interested today in what lasts two seconds and not what lasts a trillion years, shut it down, because I'm not talking your language. Reason number two, this theme forces the question about the authenticity of faith.

Is your faith real, substantial, biblical faith in objective, external reality, God? Or is your faith simply a subjective, internal thing of emotions and thoughts that is conjured up to soften the bumps of life and to accumulate a network of friends and continue a tradition from your parents? I'll tell you, thinking about death and moving right up to the brink of it and facing eternity has a marvelous way of blowing sham out of your life. So it's a test, and I hope that for five weeks you will stand before the test and feel whether you're real or not and get real. Number three, this theme keeps God as the center of our lives by asking us, do we love Him more than we love the world and everything in it? Does the thought of dying give us more pain at losing friends than it gives us joy at gaining Christ? I'll say that again.

Does the thought of dying give you more pain at losing, you fill in the blank, than it gives you joy at gaining Christ? And if it does, you need some adjustments in your spiritual priority, a pretty profound one. Maybe you need to become a Christian. And the fourth reason is that to know as a Christian what is happening to you when you die frees you to be radical, frees you to be real, frees you to lead a life of self-sacrifice rather than accumulating.

If you can say with the Apostle Paul authentically from your heart, to die is gain, then you will be able to say with the Apostle Paul, to live is Christ. But if you can't say that, if you can't say, to die is gain, you will probably say in one degree or another, let us eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. That's the way a lot of people live because they don't think death is gain and therefore this is it, therefore live it up because it's just nothingness at the end.

Four reasons for why this is an important series in my, it gives daily courage, it helps you not lose heart to know what's going to happen to you. When I say you, I'm talking believers now for these five weeks. If you're not a believer in Jesus, and there are a lot of you in this room right now who aren't believers, who do not authentically trust Christ as your Lord and your Savior and cast yourself on Him and submit yourself to Him, there's a lot in this room like that.

I want you here, okay? I don't know who you are, but I want you here and I want you here because I believe that in setting out what will happen to believers will always have the other side kind of trailing along. What happens if you're not a believer and my prayer is that these messages will waken you out of the slumber of indifference to infinitely important things. I walked through the block party in Henfin, Friday night I just walked from one end to the other with my son Barnet, looking at this carpet of people and all I could think about was, they're all going to die.

They dress like they're not going to die. They walk like they're not going to die. They sing and dance like they're not going to die, but they're going to die.

Every one of them is going to die. That's one thing I know, and I think they know, but don't want to think about. Therefore, what we're going to talk about is incredibly relevant to every human being you know, whether they're church people or not.

The text, 2 Corinthians 4, 16, 10, I believe is designed by the Apostle Paul to explain to the Corinthians and to us why he does not lose heart in spite of all the troubles and afflictions of his life, including the wearing out of his body and the leading to death. Let's read verse 16 of chapter 4. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Now that's the key point.

We don't lose heart. We don't lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. Now this is utterly crucial.

What this message is about this morning biblically is not losing heart. Some of you have been so beat up and oppressed physically, financially, and relationally that this week and in many weeks gone by, you have been tempted to lose heart. It isn't worth it.

It always goes wrong. Nothing works out. One thing starts to get right and another thing goes wrong.

What difference does it make whether I believe or not? Do you think Paul never had those temptations? You read verses 8 and 12, what he went through, and you'll know that he had to fight not to lose heart. So what we're reading here is the apostolic prescription for how you don't lose heart when life is really, really, really hard. It was for Paul most of the time.

Let me show you down in verses 6 and 8 that this is really his concern. Verse 6 of chapter 5, therefore being always of good courage. There he is again.

Verse 8, same thing. We are of good courage and say. So right through the train of thought in this passage, from 4.16 to 5.10, Paul's burden is to explain to the Corinthians why in the face of his own decay he does not lose heart but rather has good courage.

And that's my aim for you this morning. I would like you to be able to walk out this morning feeling good courage, not losing heart, and have some real, solid, objective, biblical truth underneath that good feeling so that it doesn't get knocked over tomorrow morning when another bad thing happens to you, which it probably will. That's life, especially if you're obedient.

Now what's the threat to his heart here? What's causing him to maybe lose heart? Verse 16 gives the answer to that. It says, therefore we do not lose heart but though our outer man is decaying. Now here's the threat.

It applies in relative degree in this room. Some of you really feel the decay and some of you are so young and robust you hardly even know what this is talking about yet. Just store it up.

It's coming. See these bifocals? Paul can't see as well as he once could see. His eyes are going.

He can't hear as well as he once could hear. He can't recover from beatings as fast as he used to recover from beatings. He doesn't have as much strength to walk from Troas onto the boat over the water to Philippi and Thessaloniki and Berea and Athens, Corinth.

He doesn't have as much strength as he used to have to walk. He looks in the, what kind of mirrors did they have, and he sees these wrinkles around his eyes and he does like some of us and goes, hmm, what if I just got a little slit here and they tacked this down and I could have been ten years back there. He doesn't have memory.

He can't remember Luke's name. What was his name? Oh, Luke, yes, my beloved physician. Have mercy on pastors.

His joints get stiff. I sit cross-legged like a guru sometimes to pray when I get tired of kneeling and I can't stand up like I used to stand up. It's harder to get up at 47 than it used to be.

The outer man is your body, your body, and it's decaying. Everybody in this room, it's going downhill, some faster, some slower, and it tempts you to lose heart. Therefore, we do not lose heart, though our outer nature is decaying yet.

Now, here comes why. Why doesn't he lose heart? Verse 16 at the end. Our inner man, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

So there are some things, namely the wearing away of his body, that makes him want to lose heart, and then something else gives him heart, restores his heart day by day. Notice, it's a battle. It doesn't just happen once, either when you're saved or when you have some stunning experience.

It's a daily battle to get new in your heart. Every day there's a new reason to lose heart, and every day there are reasons to have heart and to be renewed. Now, what are they? How does Paul renew heart in the face of this attack of a wasting body? Verse 18 gives a very strange strategy for being of good courage.

It says, we look, mark that word because it seems to contradict the word that's coming, we look not at things which are seen, but at things which are not seen. Now, how do you do that? You look. That's not right, Paul.

You've got your words wrong. You look at what you can see. You don't look at what you can't see, because if you can't see it, you can't look at it.

Well, if I wrote the Bible, I would write it all wrong, I'm sure. We submit ourselves under the Bible. You don't straighten out the words.

You just learn. You say, this is strange. This is an experience that maybe I need to learn how to do.

Look at what is unseen. You do that? You've got to do that. You can't keep heart if you don't look.

I'm pointing in the wrong place here. Look, Ephesians 1.18, enlighten the eyes of the, tell me, heart. You've got to look on what's unseen, because if you only look with this, you will see something, but you won't see the essential thing.

Now, you remember how Jesus dealt with this in the religious leaders of His day? He said to them, Matthew 13, seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear. So here was Jesus, the Son of God, and here was His teaching like nobody ever taught, and here were the religious leaders, and they saw and they didn't see, and they heard and they didn't hear. Now, that's got to be reversed.

In this text, it's reversed, and Paul says, unless you have this experience, you won't have heart, namely, not seeing, you must see, and not hearing, you must hear. You've got to see what you can't see, and you've got to hear what you can't hear. There is truth, massive, objective, real, external, eternal, glorious, that you can't see with these eyes now.

Drop down to verse 7 of chapter 5. He says it a little differently. He says, we walk by faith and not by sight. There it is again.

Now, that does not mean that faith is a leap into the dark with no evidence of what is there when you leap. That would not honor God at all if you leaped like that into Christianity or into obedience. Faith means that you embrace what you now cannot see on the basis of reliable testimony from those who have seen and have heard.

Without the Bible, we'd have no faith. Without eyewitnesses who faithfully recorded their testimony of what He was like and what they saw and what He communicated to them, there would be no faith at all. But faith, right now, is in the invisible.

I haven't seen Christ. Paul, even though he had seen something like an apparition of Christ on the Damascus road, now he says, I walk by faith and not by sight. The Apostle said that.

The Apostle said that. The Apostle said that. And if he said it, I've never seen Him, I don't expect to see Him until He breaks through those clouds with lightning that flashes from one side to the other.

It's normative not to see Jesus. Be suspicious of the contrary. What do we look at? The truth of what we look at is summed up in verse 17 and spelled out in chapter 5. Verse 17, momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

Now what that means is, let's get this now, this is real important. Momentary light. He said that even though His affliction was unremitting, yearlong, and excruciating many times.

He called it momentary and He called it light in comparison to what's coming. And He says, this experience of mine, this decay of my body and all of this affliction is not in vain. It's not slipping into a black hole of meaningless suffering.

It is producing. The word is making, producing something. And what it's producing is an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

On the other side. So when Paul wants to establish his heart in the face of a decaying body, he does not look at the scene, namely the body, the cancer, the arthritis, the eyes failing, the ears failing, the memory failing, the Alzheimer. He doesn't look at that.

He looks at the glory that He is producing. And this is producing. I'm sure I don't understand the full weight of this, but there is more than an after here.

There's more than, it's going to be okay because after the suffering comes the glory. It's more than that because He's saying the suffering produces the glory. There's a correlation between what you must pay here and what you will get there.

That's why I want to say there's no wasted suffering. And notice here, we're not just talking about persecution. This is a deteriorating body here in this text.

This is not suffering from outsiders. There's a correlation. The decaying of my body and all the affliction that goes with it is producing for me a weight of glory.

That's why He does not lose His heart. He looks at that. You can't see it now, but you know it's coming because of all the foundations laid by Jesus in His death and resurrection.

Now, in chapter 5, He begins to unpack some of the weight of glory. The next two messages are in these next verses, so I'm going to pass over two things. Number one, the resurrection of the body is here in verses 1 to 5. And the judgment of believers is here in verses 9 and 10.

My point this morning is in verses 6 to 8, but I'm going to pass quickly through verses 1 to 5 because you really need to see Paul's priorities of value as to what, if he had his choice, he would choose with regard to death and life and eternity. So let me read with you verses 1 to 5, and I'm going to pause and explain as we go. This is full of metaphors, full of images, and you have to be able to see what the image is referred to for this to make any sense at all.

And I'm going to try to just unpack it briefly as I read through it and then conclude with verses 6 to 8. Verse 1 of chapter 5, For we know that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down, now that's His body. He's back to the decaying body. It's like a tent.

It's very temporary. It's a house tent, and it is decaying, and it is going to be torn down. If it's torn down, we have a building, something more permanent than a tent, a building from God, namely the new resurrection body that He wants very much to have.

A house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Verse 2, For indeed in this house, this tent house, our present body, we groan, longing to be clothed. He's mixing metaphors now.

He's moving from living in a tent to putting on clothing. He does this a lot. We groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, that is our resurrection body.

Verse 3, Inasmuch as we, having put on the resurrection body, shall not be found naked, that means He does not want to lose His body and be a naked soul. He wants the resurrection body. Verse 4, For indeed while we are in this tent, this mortal body, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed.

He doesn't want to lose His body. I wish the NASB got this better. The NASB just says, but to be clothed, and it ought to say overclothed, super clothed.

What He wants is instead of His soul and body being torn apart, which is never a complete humanity in the Bible, He wants for the second coming to happen and while He's still alive to be overclothed and this mortality to put on immortality. The resurrection body, that's what He really wants to happen. Verse 4, In order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God who gave us His spirit as a pledge. Now I'm going to talk more about the resurrection body next week. The point this morning is this, if Paul had a preference and he could choose, he would not choose to die and to be separated soul from body.

He would choose that the Lord return, that immortality clothe mortality, that imperishable clothe the perishable and that the new resurrection body swallow up the old mortal body so that He's new, never having passed through the nakedness of death. He does not want to be a disembodied soul. Does that mean that the hope of dying and going to be with Christ is not a hope? No.

Paul makes very clear now what his second preference would be. In verses 6 to 8, let's read. Therefore, being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, that is the full intimacy we want with the Lord we can't have here.

I think that's a powerful statement of realism that you need to take into account in measuring the joy that you can have in this life. It will not be full. It will not be full.

Absent is an oppressive word to me. While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. Yes, we have the Holy Spirit.

Yes, we are united to Christ, but He is absent. I want Him. I want to see Him.

I want to touch Him. I want to talk to Him face to face, and I'm denied that in this life. But, verse 7, we walk by faith and not by sight.

We are of good courage, and here it comes now, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. Now, get this. Verse 4, He said He does not want to be unclothed.

He says, I don't want to be absent from the body. I don't want to be naked. I don't want to leave my body in the grave and have my soul cut free.

That's not my number one choice. My number one choice is to be overclothed at the resurrection, but my number two choice is to go to be with Jesus, because it is absent from the body at home with the Lord, and He loves the Lord more than He loves everything in this life. So, let me try to summarize it now.

Paul has three stages in his longing. Isn't this good to see that Paul had stairs of longing? His number one longing was for the second coming, the trumpet blast, the Lord descent, and a new body without having passed through death, and the rending of soul and body. He did not want to have to go through that, and if he had his first choice, he would say, clothe me over, God.

Clothe me over. I don't look forward to dying. I don't look forward to being rent apart as my first choice.

And then, having said that, he says, I prefer to be absent from the body and at home with the Lord. So, choice number two is not to stay here and keep decaying. Choice number two, if he could choose, which he can't, is to go and be with Jesus, because that, Paul says in Philippians 1.23, is far and away better than anything he could experience here.

So, we're talking levels of intimacy with Jesus. And there's an intimacy we're going to enjoy with Him when we have our resurrection bodies that is greater than the intimacy we will enjoy when our souls are split from our bodies. All the dead, my mother, your relatives who are in heaven now, are not perfect, except spiritually.

There is something wonderful yet coming. They are under the altar crying out, how long, O Lord, until you return and work vindication for your cause and show that we were right. You don't cry out, how long, O Lord, when everything's over and perfect.

And his third choice is, if you will, Father, I will walk by faith and not by sight, and I will be sustained, and I will be strong and not lose heart. So, I just want you to test yourself now as we close. Test yourself.

Do you this morning have these three biblical priorities? Now, I know this really hits hard because if you're just coming off of 30 hours of television, you don't. You know, sometimes we wonder, is this service real? Is this experience real? Is this hour and hour and hour real? Isn't this just kind of an unrealistic interlude in real life? I mean, real life is at work and with the kids at home and watching television and doing your stuff. That's real life.

And the things that I feel here, the things that go on here, the singing and the worship and listening to a sermon, is that just kind of a little bubble of unreality? You know what it is? It's a bubble of reality. It's a bubble of reality in a sea of unreality in large measure. And if you're feeling right now that maybe you could love the second coming more than you love anything else, that's real.

That's real. And what you might feel tonight when this is gone and you haven't cherished it and cultivated it and fanned the flame, that's unreal. And it will drive you to delusion and destruction.

So I just plead with you now as we close. Love the second coming of Jesus and all that it will mean for your resurrection as a believer. Secondly, long to be with Jesus even if it means you will have to be unclothed from your body.

And third, while He waits, walk by faith and not by sight and let your heart be renewed and be of good courage because you set your mind and your heart on things, these things that are unseen. As we close and move into the bridge now, let me just remind those of you who may not know what we're doing, how we do it. The bridge is about 15 minutes of worship.

It's a free time in which those of you who need to go may go and in which those who need to do something outside and then come back, you can do that. It's a time with prayer teams on either side of the sanctuary

here when you can come and just pray with somebody about a burden in your life. And it's a time for sitting in quietness and processing what you've heard.

And after about 15 minutes, we're into praying the vision until about 11.45 and then the reception. So that's the plan. Let me pray with you as we move on to the bridge.

Oh, Father in heaven, I bow now and acknowledge that it is a battle day by day to have my heart fixed and to be of good courage in things that are unseen because I am as vulnerable to the scene as anybody. And I pray for help for myself and I pray for help for these thousand people, Lord. Would you be pleased, oh God, to open the eyes of our hearts that we might see you and know you.

Oh, Redeemer, come. Make yourself known on the bridge. In Jesus' name.

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