

When I was a young man, I was a Lutheran Boy Pioneer. It was an organization similar to the Boy Scouts. Every year, we would do an overnight camping trip down the Ausable River, near Grayling Michigan. We would canoe for several hours, set up camp, sleep at the campsite, and finish our trip down the river the next day. I have to mention my experience with camping in those days. We had no air mattresses. It seemed that no matter where we set up the tent, the ground was rock hard, and a stone usually dug into our backs all night long. The cold air seeped through the tent flaps so that we were all freezing. By morning, condensation had built on the walls of the tent so that a simple touch caused water to plop onto the sleeping bags. Plus it seemed there was dirt everywhere in the tent. Still it was an experience. I enjoyed being out in nature, and spending time with the boy pioneers.

When I got married, I heard from several people, that there is nothing like camping to bond a family closer together. You just had to camp. Well, my wife made it clear to me when we got married, she was not a camper. She did not care for bears and other creatures, roaming outside a tent, along with getting a lousy nights sleep. If we were to go on vacations, she said, we are to stay in cheap hotels or at the homes of friends. No camping for the Schulz family.

If you have ever done some serious camping, you know how good it feels to come home, take a warm shower, sleep in a real bed, and prepare a meal with all the conveniences of our modern kitchens. Students will spend a whole summer traveling through Europe with only a backpack such as this to carry all their clothes and possessions for eight or ten weeks. It is exciting but it does get old after a while, especially if you try to see Europe on five dollars a day as we did in the early '70's.

Paul knew a lot about tents. In fact he could support himself by weaving tents for people most likely out of goat hair. These tents provided temporary shelters for people as they traveled from place to place or until they could get into a real home. This morning we want to think about this life as living in tent with heaven as our real home. Consider Living In A Tent!

Paul speaks about the place he had waiting for him after this life as a very real place. "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal home in heaven, not built by human hands." He says, "We know." Even though Paul's eyes have not seen the blessings of heaven, or his body has not yet been raised from the dead, he knows it is there and it is real because the Lord promised it. Our lives on this earth are like living in a tent because tents don't last. Gradually with time, the tent begins to tear at the seams and fall apart. There was a time when your life was so strong and vibrant, even the strongest storms could howl and you could weather the storms. Now your life is so fragile, the least little problem comes and you find yourself running to the doctor for help. Ultimately each of our lives will fall apart with time, like an old tent. Listen to these words of Ecclesiastes 12: "...when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint." Growing old is not so bad if we know that we have a permanent house waiting for us in heaven.

The place Jesus prepares for us has not been made by human hands. "We have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not made with human hands." Everything made by human hands has some flaws and imperfections in it. The place Jesus has for us will be without any flaws or imperfections. Hebrews 11 says of Abraham, "He was looking forward to the city with

foundations, whose architect and builder was God.” One of the joys of camping is to look up into the sky and see the beauty of the stars that God has made, but they cannot compare to the permanent sky waiting for us. As one little girl told her dad as she looked up at the stars, “Just think Daddy, if its this beautiful on this side, how much more beautiful, it must be on the other side.

Because we know this place really exists and the present life is so uncertain we eagerly long to experience what is waiting for us. The Apostle writes, “Meanwhile, we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.” The word for “naked” has the thought of not having enough clothes to wear. If you have ever camped when it gets really cold at night, you are so happy to put on the extra clothes you brought along. You may even crawl into the sleeping bag to get warm. Without these extra clothes you will shiver through the night. Imagine living in a tent when it rains, and when the wind blows, and when it is cold at night. Under such circumstances you groan about being in a dry bed with a warm, down comforter.

If you are around Christians, you will hear them groaning and sighing. It is not because their stomach is hungry for food. In every heart, even among the heathen, there is an ache and longing for what life was once like in the original Garden of Eden. Ecclesiastes tells us that God has put eternity in our hearts. There is a God-given hunger for a better place in all of humanity. Steven Spielberg captured this thought of longing to go home in a popular movie some years ago called, E.T. ET loved his new friends, especially his companion Elliot, but he still wanted to go home. You remember the tear producing words from the aching heart of the beloved ET: “ET go home.”

The longing we have is not based on some fantasy or dream which can never be fulfilled. This hope of our permanent home with Jesus beats inside by the power of the Holy Spirit similar to how our heart beats blood through out our bodies. Our text says, “Now it is God who has made us for this purpose and has given us the Holy Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”

God has given us his Holy Spirit. Before becoming a Christian, I might believe in the existence of God, but I certainly don’t know about the place the Lord has prepared for me, or even how to get there. Before the Holy Spirit’s work in my life, I will live under the delusion that the good I try to do in this life, will add up like money in a bank account, to give me a better place after I die. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, I come to realize how far I fall short of God’s glory, and how much I need what Christ Jesus did for me at the cross to cancel the debt and give me eternal life as a free gift. Before the work of the Holy Spirit, heaven appears as a very boring place, but after the work of the Holy Spirit, I realize that even the best moments of this life condensed into pure joy, will not even begin to approximate one second of eternity with the Lord. Paul compares this blessing of the Holy Spirit to a deposit or down payment guaranteeing what is to come. Just as a down payment says more money is on the way, the Holy Spirit says more is to come.

Camping can be tough when it rains and the tent leaks, or the air mattress losses its air in the middle of the night, or bears invade the campground and keep you awake at night. Always there are the joys in camping too. The majestic mountains, crystal clear lakes, waterfalls, gurgling streams, the campfires and the roasted marshmallows. Our lives in this old tent are

filled with joyful experiences as well. We have opportunities to serve the Lord that are so beautiful to the Lord and to us.

Paul tells us that he wants to go home and leave this body or this tent. At the same time he has confidence that the Lord has a definite plan and purpose for his life on this earth. He writes, “Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. “

While we camp on this earth, Jesus said we are “the salt of the earth and the light of the world.” We are to preserve this world from becoming more and more morally corrupt. We are to be examples to others in living our lives for Jesus. Our text says that our purpose and goal in life is to please him. It is our duty in life to bring honor to God, to love what God loves and hate what God hates. In Philippians Paul shared with us his joyful dilemma: “I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. “ Our lives here on this earth are caught up with the progress of the gospel. That is why we pray “Thy kingdom come.” We long for the joy of seeing other people come into the kingdom of heaven.

Some day we will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one will receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” We’ll have to explain to God why we used our voices to belittle instead of to encourage. We’ll have to explain why we balled up our fists in rage instead of using those hands to roll up our sleeves and simply find a solution to the problem we were facing. We’ll have to explain why we used our winning personality and charm to manipulate rather than to serve. Do you look forward to having to explain to God your sins?

That thought may terrify, but it doesn’t have to – not when you remember who the judge will be: Jesus. He is not only the judge of the world, he is also the world’s savior. And he’s already paid for all the sins we committed. When we were in college or high school, many of us sweated final exams. Wouldn’t it be so much easier if your teachers said that they’ve already taken the exam for you? It’s all done. You just have to show up on exam day and write your name on top of that completed exam to claim those test scores as your own. This is exactly what Jesus has done for each one of us. It’s the reason he came into the world. He took the exam God places before every human being and Jesus aced it. He didn’t make one mistake or miscalculation. And then before he handed the test into his heavenly Father, he wrote your name on top of it with the ink of his blood.

We are saved by the merits of Christ. We are not saved by our works, yet our works of love will be mentioned on the last day. They will be considered worthy and valuable for the sake of Christ. We will see the benefit of having lived for Christ and the beauty of having glorified his name, even when we had to suffer in this old tent of this life. You have heard the expression, “He is not a happy camper.” That’s not true of your life. You are living in a tent, yet you are a happy camper, because you know the home which is waiting for you, and you know the value of each moment lived in this life as a way to glorify the Lord. Amen.