

Those who have served in our nation’s military know all about paradox. They love America, so they spend long years in foreign lands. They revere freedom, yet they sacrifice their own so that others may be free. They defend the right to live as individuals yet yield their individuality in that cause. Perhaps, most paradoxically of all, they value life, yet courageously ready themselves to die in the service of their country.

I have had the privilege of knowing many veterans who have served their country and managed to survive the horrors of war. One man named Wallace Wilder sticks out in my mind. He had incredible stories to tell about his service in the Pacific theater, including Iwo Jima. His distinguished service was recognized when he received the Silver Star for “gallantry in action.” For brave men like Wallace, we give God our humble thanks, even as this past Monday, we gave thanks for those who never made it home.

Those who spend time in military service have an uncomfortable life—and as a civilian I know I don’t know the half of it. But some veterans have told me field duty is usually an ordeal: Eating C-Rations/MREs, cleaning weapons, guard duty, braving the harsh elements, long hours, and living in a tent. The Apostle Paul never served in the military, either, but as a tentmaker he knew what it was like to live under harsh conditions. In II Corinthians 5 he writes:

“For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.”

For troops on deployment, a tent is frequently “home sweet home.” It’s all part of military duty, but no one lives permanently in a tent. It may seem like it at times, but the truth of the matter is, that at the end of every field exercise soldiers return to their barracks or quarters.

That is exactly the word-picture Paul is presenting. Paul is saying that our bodies are a lot like tents. They provide a place to live, but only for a brief portion of our existence. Like the canvas of a tent, our flesh is just a temporary structure. Paul’s idea of death is breaking down a tent and folding it up, in preparation for moving into a permanent facility. At the end of life, we can add these words to our obituary: “TO BE CONTINUED.” There’s more to come.

Our Lord Jesus assured His disciples that they could live in that expectation if they put their trust in Him. In John’s Gospel, chapter 14, He offers these comforting words: “In My Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you.”

When soldiers are on maneuvers, what do they talk about? I’m told they talk about how they can’t wait to get back home. The misery and hardships troops endure make homecoming all the more sweet. Our problem is that we often think the tent we’re living in is all there is. The words of our Lord remind us that life does not end when the tent is folded up—we’re moving on to the place he prepared for us by dying on a cross to cancel our sins. By rising again from the

dead, He paved the way to His Father's house. That's why so often you will hear those who are prepared to die in Christ say that they are ready to "go home."

The Bible offers the assurance that when our earthly existence is over, we will leave our tents and dwell forever in our permanent home. This life is the only life we've known, but there's another life coming.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: What you believe about your future changes your present. That's the whole thrust of what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians. He begins with the end in mind. He writes that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us...into his presence." If you believe that, Paul writes, you will not lose heart. If you believe that resurrection with Jesus is your future, then your inner self will be renewed day by day, even if your outer self, your tent, is wasting away. Paul continues: "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to 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."

Do you realize the practical power of this resurrection faith? If you are afflicted with physical illness or disease, if your body is breaking down, if you are weighed down with stress or grief, this is a reminder and a promise of two things: number one—your suffering has meaning, and it's not punishment. Instead, Paul writes, it is preparing you for glory beyond comparison; it is whetting your appetite for life with Jesus in a resurrected body, guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection. That's number one. Number two is this: your suffering is temporary. Pain, disease, depression, is transient, it will pass. We're living in a tent, but one day the tent will be folded up and put away, and we'll move into something permanent, something more glorious and wonderful than you can possibly imagine. That's what the resurrection of Jesus means for you. If you are certain that the day is coming when you will stand in a perfect body with a perfect soul by your perfect Savior, how could that not change the way you look at today?

But how can someone be certain of that? This is the majesty of the Gospel. You can be certain because a resurrected life in the permanent home of God's presence is not your doing. It's not about your good performance; it's not even about being a moral person. You can be certain because this is Jesus' doing. He earned it. He makes it happen. What the Son of God did is sure and unshakable. He gives resurrected life to us. It is pure gift. We just receive it. Faith takes the gift and unwraps it and puts it on. You can be certain about the gift because you can be certain about the Giver.

Live in the practical power of this resurrection faith. The outcome is certain because it all depends on Jesus' perfect faithfulness. Because of Him, your story is always "to be continued."