**Walk by faith not by sight** 5/12/21 dkm

Read: Luke 19:11-27, 2Corinthians 5

Text: 2Corinthians 5:6-10

Psalms: 145:13b-21, 119:145-152, 34:14-22, 117

People are rushing to book flights out of our city after the grounding of most passenger jets during the pandemic. We had become used to getting on a plane and flying to any part of the world, even during stormy weather. It is amazing how aeroplanes can fly, and even land, in thick cloud. The pilot cannot see beyond the nose of his plane but by watching his instruments he can fly with confidence. Not by sight but by faith in his instruments, he flies with confidence.

The apostle Paul did not fly an aeroplane but he navigated life in this world with confidence. In this world he faced opposition on all sides. He faced natural disasters, like everyone, but it was the storms of human opposition that threatened to end his life and ministry. Paul never considered life apart from the ministry, to which the risen Jesus called him. By the word of God, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, Paul navigated life in this world. He walked by faith not by sight, and he urges us to do the same.

The navigator must know where he is going- he must know the destination. We rightly tell people that ‘Jesus is the way’, but some clever fellows answer, ‘the way to where?’ The Bible tells us of the destination for which Jesus is the way, but how often do you hear about this destination? The apostle Paul made certain the people heard this truth, the truth about heaven and hell. Comments like, ‘pie in the sky when you die’ and, ‘too heavenly minded to be of any earthly use’ have put many off preaching this truth, but Paul was not put off. He constantly thought about heaven, and about being present with Christ, so had to speak about it.

Jesus spoke of the difficult way and the narrow gate that leads to life, eternal life (Mat 7:14). He also spoke of coming again that, ‘where I am, there you may be also’ (John 14:3). Jesus is the way and he is life, eternal life (John 17:3). Heaven is where Jesus is; to be present with the Lord is heaven. This is what Paul longed for- nothing more and nothing less than to be with his Lord and Saviour. He desired to depart this life to be with Christ, ‘which is far better’ (Phil 1:23).

Paul did not look upon his physical body as evil, but he knew that while ever he was in this body he could not be present with the Lord. He knew the weakness of the body and the temptations of the flesh, but God had given him this body for life in this world. He was confident that when he died, and his body was buried in the earth, that he would pass into the presence of the Lord with a new body. The verses before us give no indication of any delay in this transition and this transformation.

Let us briefly look at what Paul writes here in these verses under three subheadings: ‘Absent from the body and present with the Lord’, ‘Aim to please the Lord’ and, ‘Appear before the judgment seat of Christ’.

**1. Absent from the body and present with the Lord**

There are many Christians who are uncertain as to where they will end up when they die. Many think the first place they go to will be purgatory, while others think death will be the end of their existence, as in annihilation. Some even think it is presumptuous of anyone to say they are going to heaven, which means the apostle Paul was presumptuous! It is presumptuous if we believe it depends on our works of course, but in the gospel that Paul preached we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone (Eph 2:8). It is when we depart from this gospel of grace that we lose assurance of going to heaven. Works have a place of course, but it is not in deciding between heaven and hell. The place of works is indicated in verse 10 that we will come to shortly.

Paul did not consider it presumption to declare that for him, and for all believers, to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord, and that for eternity. He was most confident of this because, as we just said, salvation is by grace, the grace of God revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ (5:21). Twice in these verses Paul writes, ‘we are confident’ (5:6, 8). This word carries the sense of cheerful assurance. In verse 8 he expresses a desire to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. He had this cheerful confidence and desire when writing this letter, and later still when writing to the Philippians: ‘Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better’ (Phil 1:23).

Certainty about the future enabled Paul, and enables us as believers, to be courageous in the present in the face of conflict and pain. Paul did not dwell upon death in a morbid way but spoke of death in a hopeful and cheerful way. Worldly people are uncomfortable talking about death. They use lots of euphemisms, and they joke about death, in an effort to avoid thinking about their own death. Many Christians also tend to avoid talking about death, preferring instead to focus on the benefits they receive from Jesus in this life, or on the social implications of Jesus’ teaching.

But the ultimate benefit or blessing we receive from the Lord is eternal life, which comes from knowing Jesus Christ (John 17:3). Eternal life is ours now, as many popular preachers stress, but it is in fact life for eternity. The apostle Paul sees a smooth transition in his life with Christ, from life in this body to life apart from this body. He has just referred to the gift of the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of this transition; the Spirit is God’s gift for eternity.

Paul knew without a doubt that, ‘While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord’ (5:6). I guess most of us know this; although some think they are in heaven now in their earthly body! At the same time, Paul was confident that to be absent from the body meant being present with the Lord (5:8). Is this a confidence you share with the apostle? He is talking in the plural to include all believers.

Verse 7 is sometimes put in parentheses because of Paul’s return to, ‘We are confident’ in verse 8. He does not want us to think that being ‘absent from the Lord’ means we have no contact with him. We are not walking in the dark as it were, but walking in the light that God had shone into our hearts (4:6). We are walking by faith, not by sight. People walking by sight, worldly people, will not understand the way in which we walk, although they will admire the way of faith if we are walking in it. The difference is most evident when we actually face death, but the fact of death and the judgment, as taught by the apostle, should effect everything we do.

**2. Aim to please the Lord**

Being in the body meant weakness for Paul, but in this weakness he did not surrender himself to the flesh, to sin, and to the devil. He did not go around saying, ‘I am only human’, and as so many do today. He knew that God, by his Spirit, dwelt in his body, and with the help of the Spirit he fought to bring the body under control (1Cor 6:19, 9:27). Despite the weakness of the body, he made it his aim to please the Lord; unlike his opponents in Corinth who were focussed on pleasing themselves. ‘Without faith it is impossible to please the Lord’ (Heb 11:6).

The natural man is focussed on pleasing self; the natural man’s chief end is to please himself. But the person who is a new creation in Christ Jesus seeks to please the Lord, who loved him so much that he died on the cross to save him. Paul urges us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, and to approve what is his good, pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:1,2). ‘The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal 2:20).

It is no accident that as people turn away from the church and the Bible, they focus on themselves, which means trouble for other people. We are fast becoming a nation of narcissists, as well as victims. And it is no accident that churches which fail to preach the gospel which Paul preached, focus on self and the things of this world- and end up in bitter division, just like the church at Corinth. Living to please the Lord is not a chore or a burden but is something we delight in doing if we love the Lord, and are truly thankful for his amazing grace (5:14).

**3. Appear before the judgment seat of Christ**

To be present with the Lord not only requires a new, heavenly body, it also requires being cleansed of our sin; it is cleansing from sin that comes first of course. God cannot look upon sin, so let no one think they will sneak into heaven or enter Christ’s presence still bearing their sin. We must avail ourselves of the cleansing blood of Christ and accept his righteousness before entering his presence. This is made clear by Jesus in the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22:11-14. If you have not done this, not confessed your sin and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you will face the great white throne judgment and be condemned on the basis of your works (Rev 20:11f). If you have believed, and your name is written in the Lamb’s book of life, you will not face that judgment.

So what is Paul saying about ‘appearing before the judgment seat of Christ’ here in this verse? He is writing to the church, and he is including himself in the ‘we’. This judgment seat of Christ is specific to believers. It is here that hearts, as well as books, are opened. When the Lord comes, he will bring to light hidden things and reveal the motives of our hearts, so that each one’s praise will come from God (1Cor 4:5). John heard Jesus speaking and saying, ‘Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work’ (Rev 22:12). ‘The judgment seat of Christ can be a time of great regret, or it can be an occasion of supreme joy’, as Paul indicates here.

Paul was not concerned with what men said about him, or their judgment of him. He was not even concerned about his own judgment of himself. He was concerned with the Lord’s judgment of his words, his actions, and even his thoughts (1Cor 4:1-5). Walking by faith, he kept his heart and mind focused on the words, ‘Each of us shall give account of himself to God’ (Rom 14:12). Along with love for the Lord, this ‘fear of the Lord’ (5:11) kept him focussed on pleasing the Lord while walking in this world as a child of God.

This appearing before the judgment seat of Christ is not for the purpose of condemnation or acquittal. We are acquitted or ‘justified’ freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24). The purpose of this appearing before Christ is for rewards, heavenly rewards. Jesus spoke of such rewards in the parable of the minas (Luke 19:11f). The owner gave his servants a mina, expecting them to use this gift profitably until he returned. The servant who failed to do so suffered loss, but not destruction like the enemies of owner.

Paul spoke of God’s servants, like himself and Apollos, building on the foundation ‘which is Jesus Christ’ (1Cor 3:11f). The one whose work does not pass the test of fire will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved. Here in verse 10, Paul speaks of each one receiving what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or bad. We are saved unto good works, so let us be obeying the Lord, and doing what he commands us, in the strength that he gives us (Eph 2:10). Let us be looking to the reward that Christ will give, and to hearing the words, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’. Some think that ‘crowns’ are among the rewards given in heaven, but Paul does not go into such details here.

The apostle’s focus was on obeying the Lord, on serving him in the strength that he gave while he was in his earthly body. Knowing that in the future he would stand before Jesus Christ, and face a review of his life, motivated him to live righteously and faithfully in the present. It is here in this world today that we are to be using the gifts and abilities God has given us, whatever they may be, and however great or small the task God has given us.