

The Real Tent City
3-Year Bible Reading Plan
By Dr. Jeff Meyers

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 5:1-9
Preached On: Sunday, February 2, 2020

Crossroads Ministries
301 S. 8th Street
Opelika, Alabama 36801

Website: www.fbcopelika.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 2 Corinthians 5. Now as you're turning to 2 Corinthians 5, I'm going to describe or allude to a phrase that has become somewhat popular in recent days, it is the term or the phrase "tent city." This may be something you have or have not heard of, so allow me to describe it in brief. We typically view it in one of two ways. On a very formal systematized account, we see those places throughout the world where people in mass number are trying to escape regime and civil war, and there are refugee camps that are placed all over the world where hundreds if not thousands of tents are placed side-by-side. It is there that those people who are oftentimes fleeing from their lives or fleeing from oppression of some kind, find themselves no matter where they came from, no matter their gift sets, no matter what their education, no matter what their monetary worth, they find themselves dwelling in a city of tents. On the other side of the equation, all across even our own nation typically in major, shall we say, metropolitan areas, oftentimes under the bridges of major interstates and highways, there are those who have fallen on difficult times financially. Oftentimes they don't have the relationships to sustain what you and I might call a normal existence. It may not be organized, it may not be systematized but there are tents nonetheless that pop up under those bridges for their sustenance. Whether it is organized by a major governmental entity or whether it's a group of people getting together just to try to survive, we refer to those places as tent cities.

Today from 2 Corinthians 5, I want to address the real tent city. Oh, don't get me wrong, those places I described do exist every day of our lives, but I think you may be surprised today to discover that the real tent city is actually much larger than even the largest camp of refugees. In 2 Corinthians 5 beginning in verse 1 it says,

1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. 5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of

the Spirit. 6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. 9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

Now this passage begins, the Apostle Paul, the Lord is utilizing him to communicate a very powerful truth. Why him? Why in this moment? Why in this place? Because he was, shall we say, educated and he was raised up in what you and I know as Judaism. He was steeped in the Old Testament and so he begins this passage that talks about living by faith and not by sight, this passage that talks about an eternity versus the temporal by drawing a very important parallel. Notice in verse 1 he parallels our bodies, he parallels our existence to the tabernacle of the Old Testament. Interesting because the tabernacle shows up in the book of Exodus 25. There the Lord gives the Israelites who have come out of the bondage of Egypt, he gives them very specific instructions: the colors that are to be used; the skins that are to be used; the dimensions that it is to be. And then in verse 8 of Exodus 25, listen to what the Lord says, "Let them build me a sanctuary that I might dwell among them."

We get the word "tabernacle" from the concept of "dwelling with." That's all it means. The word "tabernacle" means "to dwell with." Why was the tabernacle built? So that the presence of the Lord, the ark of the covenant of God could dwell with his people. That's why what we know as the Jewish feast of Tabernacles, that was the time where God said, "I will dwell with you in a very special and unique way."

By the time we get to 1 Chronicles 16, Moses and the Israelites have come and gone and we discover a man by the name of David, a man who yearned for the presence of the Lord, a man who desired for the ark of the covenant to have a more permanent dwelling place. It was his desire that there would be a building built so that it would no longer have to be nomadic, it would no longer have to wander, it would no longer have to be subject to the elements. What's interesting is in 1 Chronicles 16:1, describing the tabernacle, King David said, "How much longer, God, will you dwell in a tent?" It's a parallel for us. Why? Because the tabernacle did encompass the presence of the Lord but if you look at it from a physical perspective, it was a tent is what it was. It was made of fabric. It was mobile. It was subject to the elements. And as you study its history throughout the Old Testament, it was not built for an everlasting existence.

Do you see the parallel? One of the things he's trying to share with us very importantly today is this body that we possess, this life that we live is like a tent. It's temporary. It's meant to be a time of transition. We don't go and put up tents for permanent structures. We utilize a tent as a means to a further, shall we say, lifestyle and living, which reveals the purpose. Why in this passage does God refer to us as tents? Why does he refer to our bodies as tabernacles, as tents, as temporary dwelling places? Because that is what we are. It doesn't matter how much money you have access to, it doesn't matter how much medical care that you have access to, each and every one of us at some point, barring the Lord's return, we are going to breathe our last breath.

You know, it's interesting and as one who has the privilege of walking families through memorial services and funeral services, it's interesting to me our perspective on this. It doesn't matter if it's an early 40s superstar, or someone in their late 90s, have you noticed that everybody dies too young? When's the last time you went to a service like that and said, "Yeah, it's about time"? Hopefully you don't say that. But an adaptation of one of my favorite stories in life I'll never forget, standing over the casket of a man who was 94 years of age. One of his best friends had his arm around me, crying tears of sadness that one of his dearest friends was gone, and he looked at me and he said, "Pastor Jeff, he was just so young." He's 94, mind you. I said, "Maurice, he's so young?" You see, Maurice was 97 and when you're 97, 94 is young.

What's the purpose of this passage? It doesn't matter how much resources, how much finances, how much medical care we have access to, even if we are capable of making it to 97 and beyond, we still find ourselves woefully short to our desires. And it's also telling us this is just a time of transition. The amount of time that you and I will spend in eternity is infinitely more exponentially greater than any amount of time we spend on earth, even if we're named Methuselah. You realize Methuselah in the book of Genesis died at 969 years of age, and if you do a strict chronology of the Bible, he has spent at least four to five times more time in the presence of the Lord than he ever did on earth and he lived 969 years.

You and I, according to the Bible, we're tents. We're gonna get worn out. We're gonna become subject to the elements, which brings up the problem here. It says that if this earthly tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. You say, "There's a problem." Yeah, there is a problem and the problem is that very few of us actually truly consider that moment, that minute, that hour, that day on the other side of the last breath we will breathe. The problem is we are so distracted by the temporal that we oftentimes do not think about the eternal. We're so desiring to get one more year, one more experience, one more this, that we often forget that all of those experiences on the "other side" will be infinitely eternally longer and grander.

You know, the problem of being a tent is really threefold. The first problem is this: the who. Who is subject to being a tent? You got it, all of us. It doesn't matter how much medical care, it doesn't matter how much financial resources, in fact, the Bible says that God is not a respecter of persons. And even today thanks to technology and thanks to medicine, our life expectancy is almost twice what it was during the days of what you and I know as the Civil War, and yet even then, down deep don't we all think we can escape it? Did you know that the average person, this is just statistics, the average person over the course of their lifetime will spend 85% of all the resources they spend on medical care the last six months of their life? Why? Because as we draw nearer, as we see it coming, we have this natural tendency to either delay or not deal with the inevitable.

In the last week, at least our culture, has been subject to the who. One of the greatest physical specimens to play a game in the last 20-30 years, if ever, having hundreds of

millions of dollars in financial resources, having a family for all intents that is not only beautiful to look at but beautiful to live with, who would have ever thought, who would have ever thought?

A couple of years ago, I was introduced to a man who at the time did not know the Lord, who at the time had contracted Stage IV cancer, and he was mad. He was mad at God. He was mad at everybody because according to the statistics, he should have at least 12 more years. We can snicker at that but aren't we the same, folks? In fact, oftentimes we get on the other side of the statistical, shall we say, [unintelligible] and we wonder if there's still 12 more.

You see, the problem is that we can't differentiate between the who because it happens to all of us. The more difficult problem than that is the when. You don't know and I don't know. There's not a one of us here who knows when that time is. You see, if you're a 41 year old superstar basketball legend, you had no idea that you were old at age 40. That man that was in the casket years ago, 94 years of age, had no idea he was actually young at age 40. You see, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the trump sounds, the Lord shall descend. When our physical tabernacle tent existence comes to an end, we don't have the privilege of knowing the when. Now don't get me wrong, some people call it a curse, I call it a blessing. There are some of you who through even the sufferings of disease have had time to have those last conversations, you've had time to have those last gatherings of the family. Sometimes we're not guaranteed that last conversation, that last call, that last statement.

Do you know what the other problem is? Why. You see, we live in a world that says, "Well, we die because we need better medical care. We die because we don't have enough education." No, we die because the wages of sin is death and it doesn't matter if we're in our 40s, if we're in our 90s, or somewhere in between, because sin, because rebellion, because our desire like Adam and Eve's was to do it our way and not God's way, the result of that is death. Not just an eternal death, separation from God in a place the Bible calls hell, but physical death as well. Our bodies are tents, they are tabernacles, they will waste away at some point because at some point in our life, not just Adam and Eve's life but your life and my life, we looked up at God and said, "I know how to do this better than you do." We have sinned, we have rebelled, we have transgressed, we have committed iniquity, and use whatever Bible word you want, we flat out missed the mark.

You know what this ought to do is give us a perspective. I want you to notice what it says in verse 2, "For in this we groan earnestly." Isn't that intriguing. The Apostle Paul says he actually is groaning. He is desiring to be in the presence of the Lord more than he is desiring to be walking and shuffling in the dirt of the Middle East. Can I ask that question to you today, it's a difficult question, it's a rhetorical question? You don't have to answer out loud or even with facial expressions. Are you more desirous of the things of eternity or are you spending all of your energy trying to hang on to the temporal? It's a tough question to ask and I would daresay that each and every one of us at some point in our life has struggled with this question so let's struggle with it today. Where is your groaning? Where is your yearning? Is it to be with the Lord for all of eternity or is it to

hold on for just one more fill-in-the-blank? It's perspective, is it not? The Apostle Paul said, "Man, if I could be with the Lord right now, I wish that was the case." He goes on later to say, "But I need to be with you. I need to walk with you. We need to do some things together." His perspective was that it was better to be with the Lord than it was to have any existence on planet earth.

You know, we admire those who attain status, we admire those who attain fame, we admire those who attain wealth and all the other trappings of this life. There's the old preacher joke that there's never been a U-Haul behind a hearse and it's true, but you know, we really, truly can't take it with us. Even Solomon, the wisest in the world said a man works his entire life, puts all of his effort into things and he cannot control what happens to it after his death. Why? Because no matter how much you put into it, how much you try to preserve, whatever it is, you can't control it once you breathe your last breath.

So what we discover is that you and I, we are the real tent city. We are living in temporary housing. This is but just a glimpse of the existence that we will have for all of eternity which brings up the final most important point and that's the promise that God gives here. I want you to notice what it says in verse 7, "we walk by faith and not by sight." He even says later that there is the earnest, there is the promise of the Spirit much like when you go and you purchase a home, you put earnest money down. Why are you doing that? Because you're reserving that your permanent place of residence, it's yours even if you haven't moved in yet. And what the Lord is saying here, here's this promise that if we will be people of faith, he by the Spirit of God will give the earnest to our eternal permanent dwelling, as he said, in a house that is not made with hands in the heavenlies.

The problem is it's by faith. You say, "What do you mean it's by faith?" That means you can't buy it. You can't earn it. And I've got news for you, there's not a one of us who deserves it. I've had the privilege of standing in front of many of families and friends at what you and I know as a funeral service and I've never once preached a good person into heaven because you can't. There's no amount of good and can I also say there's no amount of bad that can keep you out. There's no amount of deeds, there's no amount of resources, there's no amount of any of those things. It is by faith, what does it say? Not by sight. It is the faith that even though we messed up, even though we sinned, that Jesus Christ loved us enough to be willing to be born on our behalf, it is the faith of knowing that his deep love for us is so great he lived a sinless life, rejected all temptations including the kingdoms of the world so that he might take the punishment and the price of our sin. The wages of sin is death, that's exactly what Jesus Christ did on the cross. He experienced death. He went through death. He sacrificed himself so that we by faith in his actions, by faith in his blood might be redeemed, saved and what the Bible calls born again.

You and I today are a tent city. Some of your tents look a little better than other tents. Some of your tents have lasted longer than other tents. Some of your tents have got some good scars on them. It doesn't matter how pretty your tent is or how young it is, we're all

living in tents and the question for all of us to ask today is simply this: have we focused too much on the tent rather than the house that the Lord wants to give us?