

INTRODUCTION

This message is a matter of life and death—mostly death. Through the truth revealed in the Bible I can “fast forward” ahead and see my own death and even beyond. I love that phrase from Proverbs 31 describing a godly woman as someone who can “laugh at the days to come.” (Proverbs 31:25) Truly, for a follower of Jesus, death doesn’t have to be feared; we can even laugh in the face of death.

One pastor was doing a children’s sermon about believing in Jesus and going to heaven. As he concluded he asked, “So where do you all want to go?” And all the boys and girls said, “Heaven!” Then he asked, “And what do you have to be before you can go to heaven?” And one little boy yelled out, “Dead!”

Death can be a laughing matter, as some actual epitaphs demonstrate. Here are a few of my favorites:

1. In a cemetery in Ribbesford, England: Anna Wallace; The children of Israel wanted bread; and the Lord sent them manna; old clerk Wallace wanted a wife; and the Devil sent him Anna.
2. In Ruidoso, New Mexico: Here lies Johnny Yeast; Pardon me for not rising.
3. In Boot Hill Cemetery, in Tombstone, Arizona: Here lies Lester Moore; four slugs from a .44, no Les, no more.
4. Richmond, Virginia: She always said her feet were killing her; but nobody believed her
5. One of the funniest comes from an epitaph in Enosburg Falls, Vermont describing an accidental death: Here lies the body of our Anna; done to death by a banana. It wasn’t the fruit that laid her low; but the skin of the thing that made her go.
6. This last one is my favorite because it describes what really happens to a Christian when we die. It’s found in Nantucket, Massachusetts: Under the sod and under the trees; Lies the body of Jonathan Pease. He is not here, there’s only the pod: Pease shelled out and went to God.

If you’re a Christian, you and I are like two peas in a pod—and when we die, we’re shelling out of these pods and moving on to be with God. The analogy the Bible uses is not peas, but of our body being like a tent. Thus, while we’re here, we’re living in tents, hence the title of this message: “In-Tents Living.” If the Lord tarries, this old tent I’m living in will become obsolete some day—and I shall die. But that’s not a problem, because I’m leaving this tent and moving on to something much better. Peter writes about it in II Peter 1:12-15. In the previous verses, Peter wrote about the need to make sure of your election in Christ. He continues by writing: “So, I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made it clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.”

Have you ever slept in a tent on a campout? (I’m not talking about camping out in a motor home.) If you’ve ever slept in a tent overnight, you’ll have a better understanding of this message. Life is like living in a tent. There are three ways we can apply this analogy to our present and future.

1. OUR PRESENT "TENTS" (bodies) ARE IMPERFECT "TENTS"

In verse 13 Peter wrote, "It is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body." The lesson is that our earthly body is like a leaking pup tent! My reference to "present tents" and "imperfect tents" has nothing to do with grammar. I'm talking about our present bodies being flawed.

In order to understand this tent analogy, you must know each of us is comprised of three dependent parts: body, soul, and spirit. The Bible says in I Thessalonians 5:23: "May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Thessalonians 5:23) When God created mankind, He said, "Let us make man in our own image." (Genesis 1:26) That didn't mean our appearance resembles God, it means we are made like God. God is a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the same way, each of us is a tri-unity of body, soul, and spirit. All three elements can be clearly seen in Genesis 2:7 where the Bible says, "God formed man from the dust of the ground (that's the body) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (that's spirit), and man became a living being (that's soul.)"

But to our understanding, these three elements of our life can be condensed down to what is visible and what is invisible. So, it's easier to understand if we say:

Human life consists of: (1) The invisible—(spirit & soul)

Your soul (Greek: *psuche*—"psychology") is your mind, emotions, and will. It's your personality. It is through your soul that you relate to other people. Your spirit (Greek: *pneuma*—"pneumatic") is the deepest part of your being, and it is the part of you that gives you a hunger to know God. Before you come to know Christ, your spirit is dead. When you become a Christian, your spirit becomes really alive through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. We spend a lot of time, money, and attention on our bodies. But Jesus said, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?" (Mark 8:36)

(2) The visible—(body)

Your body (Greek: *soma*—"psychosomatic") contains the five senses, sight, smell, sound, touch, and taste. Through your body, you relate to the physical world. To simplify it, with your body, you make contact with the physical world beneath you; with your soul, you make contact with the social world around you; and with your spirit you make contact with the spiritual world above you. The fact that your body is like a temporary tent doesn't diminish its importance. When your spirit is energized by the Holy Spirit, your body becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit. Before Solomon's temple was built in Jerusalem, the Ark of the Covenant was kept in a tent, a tabernacle. In the same way, your body is important. That's why you should take care of your body. Everyone needs to practice temple maintenance.

So the real you (invisible) lives within a body like a camper lives in a tent. When you look at me there's more here than meets the eye. You can only see the "outer me" but there is also an "inner me." That inner person is often called the ego, or the personality, or the soul of a person. President Woodrow Wilson's favorite limerick was: I know how ugly I are; I know my face ain't no star; But I don't mind it; cause I'm behind it; It's the others who get the jar.

Your body is like a tent in that it is a temporary dwelling place for the "person" who lives inside: You. When an astronaut goes into space, they wear space suits in order to survive in an airless atmosphere and where the temperature is extremely cold. In much the same way an astronaut lives in his space suit, so our bodies are like an "earth suit" that we wear while we are here on planet earth. It is what the Bible calls the "outer person."

The Apostle Paul also employed the metaphor of living in a tent. Paul was a tentmaker. He understood that tents grow old and sometimes wear out. That's why he wrote, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal...while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened." (II Corinthians 4:16; 5:4)

What's the condition of your tent this morning? Did you "groan" when you crawled out of bed this morning? The real "me" lives inside a 52-year-old tent, although I don't feel that old. I feel like the same person I was when I was 18 years old, but when I look in the mirror I wonder, "What's my dad doing in that mirror?"

2. DEATH IS THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPIRIT FROM THE BODY

Verse 14: "I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made it clear to me." The lesson we learn is that death is like leaving a tent. Peter wrote that he sensed his death would be soon. He said when he died, he would simply "put his tent aside." When you die, you leave your old body, and your spirit goes to be with God.

A group of tourists was visiting the grave of the famous composer, Beethoven, in Vienna, Austria when they heard strange sounds coming from the composer's grave. The police were summoned and they immediately exhumed Beethoven's grave. With a huge crowd of curious tourists watching, they opened Beethoven's casket. They were shocked to see the composer sitting in the coffin. In one hand he had a large eraser and in his other hand he had a musical score. The strange sound was made as he was furiously erasing the notes in the musical score. Someone asked, "What is he doing?" A police detective said, "It's obvious. Beethoven is decomposing."

When we die, our bodies decompose—they return to dust. The Bible says, "Dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

In the KJV the word "spirit" is usually translated "ghost." That's why the Holy Spirit is often called "the Holy Ghost." At death, a person's spirit leaves their body. That's where we get the expression "he gave up the ghost." The word for "death" in the Hebrew language literally means "to breathe out." It's like our English word "expire." The Bible says in John 19:30 when Jesus died on the cross He said, "It is finished." With that Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit."

When the Apostle Paul considered his impending death he wrote, "The time of my departure is at hand." (II Timothy 4:6) It's the same word Peter used in verse 15 to describe his death—a

departure. It was a word used to describe a soldier who broke camp and folded up his tent to move on to another assignment. It was also a word used to describe a prisoner set free from his chains. For a Christian, death is not an ominous, scary prospect. It is something we can face with as much confidence as we have when we leave one room and walk into another.

The Bible says when we leave this tent we are immediately in the presence of the Lord. "While we are 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." (II Corinthians 5:6-8)

When I was a boy, I can recall on several occasions my parents loaded up the family in our good old 1955 Chevrolet station wagon, and we attended "all night gospel singings." They were held at high school football stadiums in Northwest Florida and South Alabama. I can only recall two songs from those singings. One was the Florida Boys' favorite "on the wings of a snow white dove; He sends His pure sweet love..." The other song was one about an old house that was falling down. I distinctly remember asking my dad what that song was about. He told me the old house in the song was a picture of a person's body when they got old. The song "This Old House" was written by Stuart Hablen and the lyrics are: This old house is getting shaky; / This old house is getting old; / This old house lets in the rain and; / This old house lets in the cold. / On my knees I'm getting chilly; / But I feel no fear or pain; / 'Cause I see an angel peeking through / A broken window pane! The chorus said: Ain't gonna need this house no longer; / Ain't gonna need this house no more; / Ain't got time to fix the shingles; / Ain't got time to fix the floor; / Ain't got time to oil the hinges; / Nor to mend the window pane; / Ain't gonna need this house no longer; / I'm getting ready to meet the saints!

Death isn't a scary experience for us. It's simply leaving one tent and moving into a better place.

I once read about a child who was suffering from a terminal illness. He asked his mother if death would be unpleasant. After thinking for a moment she said, "Do you remember when we used to visit grandmother, and we'd be driving home? You'd fall asleep in the car and then when we got home, your dad carried you into your room and tucked you in bed. When you woke up the next morning, you were in your bed, even though the last thing you remembered was riding in the car. Death is like that. You go to sleep here and your Father carries you to your new home, and when you wake up, that's where you'll be.

3. OUR FUTURE "TENTS" WILL BE PERFECT "TENTS"

In verse 15 we read: "after my departure you will always be able to remember these things" The important LESSON we learn is: death is like trading a pup tent for a mansion!

When a Christian dies, they leave this body (this tent) and they immediately go into the presence of the Lord. At that time they also receive a new body—and it's not like this old tent. Paul writes about what happens in II Corinthians 5: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. we are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (II Corinthians 5:1,

6-8)

One of the most popular shows on television is "Trading Spaces." It's a reality show on The Learning Channel in which two homeowners trade homes for a weekend. During this time, each homeowner has \$1,000 to remodel one room in the home they are visiting. I've never seen the show, but I understand most of the people are happy to return to their homes, because they consider the changes to be a welcome upgrade.

The Ultimate trading spaces is when we trade spaces for eternity! Our old tent is like a broken-down pup tent, and our new dwelling in heaven will be like a mansion in comparison. Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2)

Tents may be okay to live in temporarily, but nobody wants to live in them permanently. About 10 years ago, when both my daughters were still living at home, Cindy and I took them on a summer vacation to the Rocky Mountains. We stayed in a condominium, but being the planner that I am, I scheduled a surprise for Cindy and the girls. I booked an overnight horseback ride and campout up into the mountains. I discovered once again that Cindy's definition of rustic is the second floor of a Holiday Inn. She declined that offer, so Jenni, Laura Grace and I followed our guide to ride up into the great outdoors. After hours of horseback riding that removed any hair left on the inside of my thighs, we arrived at our campsite.

After a cookout and a few stories around the campfire, it was time for us to enter our tent and sleep. Just before going into the tent, one of the girls happened to ask why the guide locked all the all the garbage and leftover food in a metal box. The guide said, "Oh, that's to keep the bears from eating it." "Bears?" The guide said, "Don't worry, if a bear comes near, the horses will make plenty of noise."

Well, I can testify the horses made noise all night long. Our tent was small, smelly, and all three of us were crowded together. We all realized this little tent would not give us any protection from a hungry bear! None of us got much sleep that night. I had a daughter on each side shivering (and it wasn't cold). Every time the horses snorted or stomped, they'd sit up and say, "What was that? Was that a bear?" It was a night of Sleepless in New Mexico.

Finally the sun rose and we rode down the mountain. Upon returning to the condo, Cindy was just getting up stretching from her long night of sleep on in a soft bed. She smiled at the three campers and said, "How was it?" I don't recall anyone answered as we all headed for a soft bed. We were all glad to leave the tent and fall into a real bed. By they way, that was the last time I ever tried to sleep in a tent.

Give me a home anytime rather than a tent! That's what the Bible promises us. This body is susceptible to pain, weariness, and hunger. Our resurrection body will be like the body of our Lord. In heaven there will be no pain, no sorrow, no sickness and death. That's why death isn't a scary subject for a follower of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

From the tone of Peter's letter, we learn that Peter was expecting to die soon after he wrote it. In verse 14 he wrote, "I know that I will soon put it aside (his earthly body) as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me." When you read that you wonder if Jesus came to Peter in a vision and said, "Peter, you're going to die soon." But Peter was remembering a conversation he had with Jesus many years before he wrote this letter. They were having breakfast on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus told Peter, "when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out our hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." If you think Jesus was talking about Peter living a long life until he goes into a rest home, forget it. The next verse explains it: "Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God." (John 21:18-19)

Jesus was telling Peter that one day his arms would be stretched out and he'd be led to a place where he didn't want to go—it would be a trip from a dungeon to a cross. Eusebius, the early church historian wrote that Peter was arrested under the persecution of Nero. He was later brought out before a crowd to be nailed to a cross. Origen, another early writer, records when it came time for Peter to die, he requested to be crucified upside down, because he didn't feel he deserved to be crucified in the same position as his Lord.

In 1600, the Italian Painter Michelangelo Caravaggio portrayed Peter's inverse crucifixion in a moving painting. Peter is depicted as an old balding man with a great beard. The muscles of the big fisherman can still be seen as soldiers have stretched out his hands and nailed them to the crossbeam. Peter is large, old man with a grey beard. The picture captures that moment in time when they are lifting the cross up so Peter will be hanging upside down. At first glance, Peter is staring at the nail piercing his left hand. Certainly, it was painful beyond description. But when you look again, you can clearly see Peter's eyes are focused on a point well beyond the nail in his hand. It's as if he is looking beyond that pain to the time when he will see Jesus.

And after a few hours, as he had written in his letter, he simply laid aside the old tent he had been living in. At the same moment he entered into the presence of the Lord where he received a building not made with hands—eternal in the heavens! He was welcomed into heaven by His Lord! He got to experience what Paul wrote about when he said, "While we are home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, ye, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord." (II Corinthians 5:6-8)

Perhaps you've heard the story about the woman diagnosed with a terminal illness. The doctors told her she only had a few months to live. She was a Christian, so she started setting her affairs in order. She visited her pastor and even talked to him about the songs and scriptures she wanted at her funeral. Then she said, "Pastor, I do have one unusual request to make. It's very important to me, but I want to be buried with a fork in my hand." The pastor was surprised, but he didn't argue. He said, "Certainly, but I'm a little puzzled by your request."

She said, "I don't blame you. But here's why I want to have a fork in my hand in the casket. Whenever I've had dinner in someone's home or at church, the hostess always clears away the dishes from the main course. Sometimes she would lean over to me and say, 'Keep your fork.'

That was my favorite part because I knew something better was coming, like velvety chocolate cake or deep dish apple pie. So I just want people to see me in my casket with a fork in my hand, and I want them to wonder, 'What's with the fork?' And I want you to tell them 'Keep your fork. It means the best is yet to come.'"

Right now, we're living in-tents. But don't despair, even if your tent is getting a little shabby. Hang on to your fork, for the best is yet to come!

OUTLINE

1. OUR PRESENT "TENTS" (bodies) ARE IMPERFECT "TENTS" (like a leaking pup tent)

"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day...so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal...while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened." *II Corinthians 4:16, 18, 5:4*

Human life consists of:

- (1) The invisible—(spirit & soul)
- (2) The visible—(body)

2. DEATH IS THE DEPARTURE OF THE SPIRIT FROM THE BODY (like leaving a tent)

"While we are 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." *II Corinthians 5:6-8*

3. OUR FUTURE "TENTS" WILL BE PERFECT "TENTS" (like trading a pup tent for a mansion)

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens...while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord...we are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." *II Corinthians 5:1, 6-8*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes