

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Live by faith, not by sight

Presented by Richard Quadrio

Introduction

I was recently listening to talk back radio and I was a bit surprised to hear the topic for discussion. Normally the discussion is filled with politics or whatever is the hot item on the news. No the topic for discussion that day was rather unusual. It was a subject that is not normally discussed in polite company. Sure it affects almost everyone- in fact it does affect everyone. But it is topic we somehow tend to ignore or deliberately don't talk about. The subject of the topic, that day was death!

It a bad clique but they say there are only to certainties in life – death and taxes. For some of you listening today – tax time is fast approaching for another year. Death we all hope is a little further away – but it pays to be well prepared and to have a plan for life beyond death.

Part 1

One of the Bible writers, the apostle Paul, describes our earthly bodies as being like tents! This is striking image for anyone to use but Paul of course was a professional tent maker so he knew what he was saying. To say our life and bodies are like a tent is not all bad. After all tents are portable and get you in to all sorts of places a permanent building would not allow.

One couple in our church in their late 50s told me the other day that they went camping for the first time in their married life. They spent three weeks camping in the Kimberlys and came back to tell many magnificent stories about a wondrous part of Australia. You know why they went camping – because there was no other way to be accommodated in that part of Australia.

Sure tents are portable, flexible and by and large reliant. But of course they are also not permanent. They are for temporary use – they are not a permanent fixture that will be here forever.

As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 1, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.” You see our bodies are only our temporary home – they are fallible – at times weak – and one day they will let us all down.

More than fifty years ago Sir Edmund Hillary climbed Mt Everest for the first time. He returned recently to Nepal and was asked if he was willing to climb again. Edmund Hillary's reply expressed the feeling many share: “In my *mind*,” he said, “I would be ready to climb again tomorrow but not in my 83 year old *body*.”

Maybe you have the same feeling as Hillary. Maybe at times you even can get a little annoyed that this body – this tent is not what it used to be! For some, you might even feel that your tent is flapping a bit in the breeze. The young – the rich – the beautiful believe in what they see and believe it will last forever.

But it will not and the eyes of faith know that our bodies are but a tent that one-day we will pack away before our final journey begins

Of course there is a more positive side as well. For some – there bodies – like a worn tent- have let them down. For some, wheelchairs and beds have replaced hiking and climbing. Pain and decay have replaced laughter and running. Disease and ageing have replaced youth and hope. And they hope this tent is not their permanent home. For those whose hope is out of this world we will all one day discard our earthly tent for a permanent dwelling with heavenly views.

Part 2

The apostle Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5 verse 1, says it so simply and clearly: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

For all who trust in Christ’s death and resurrection there is a resurrection hope! We look forward to a day when we will discard this earthly tent to receive a building from God. And this building will be permanent. And this building will not let in rain or be knocked down in the wind. No, this eternal building will stand forever.

But you know, you may be a cynic, and say, “How does he know this?”

How does anyone know what lies beyond the grave? How can we know the future you may ask if we cannot go and try before we buy – or in this instance try before you die! Well, you are right – I have not wandered though death to the afterlife- so I have no first-hand experience. But for all who follow Christ our trust is that he has done just that!!

Jesus died upon the cross. And Jesus rose up from the tomb. For all who know Jesus, there is a sure and certain hope of the a resurrection to a secure eternal future.

You know, it’s funny: I have been to plenty of funerals as a minister and people say the strangest things. What people often say is that at least now Fred or Joan after death – at least they are now in a better place. Sometimes people with no professed knowledge of God. People who have never gone near a church often say things like – oh well at least they are now at peace!

I have often wondered on these occasion why people think that? Do they have any evidence? Or are they just hoping – not willing to face the bleak reality of a God’s less eternity?

You see to hope for heaven without any reason is to have no hope at all. But I have a friend whose hope is entirely based on the risen Jesus. This friend is confined to a wheel chair as he suffers from cerebral palsy. He is the classic example of a person whose tent has let him down. He cannot run or walk or even control his vocal cords enough to speak. But you know, he loves those famous words from the book of Isaiah: words of hope of eternal and better days when our tent will be discarded. My friend’s favourite verses are these:

29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

31 but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Part 3

For all who put their faith in the risen Jesus the words we have been talking about this morning are very special indeed: “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

But please don't misunderstand me this morning. Those who put their hope in God do not welcome death – for life is a gift God has given us. After all each life is precious and each day has its holy calling. For the believer the tent will flap in the breeze – yet each day will have its special blessings and challenges. For the Christian does not welcome death – but the Christian also does not fear death – for it is but a pathway to everlasting life.

I remember an old movie with a scene when a member of the family died. There was of course sadness and grief and disbelief and despair. But then came the funeral and words of the minister were profound and simple. I don't know the name of the movie, but I can see the scene like I had watched it yesterday.

The minister's message was simple. Death was not the end – as though we imagined we had reached the end of a path. No death is but a doorway- through to another place, a better place, a permanent place , a place of no more tears and no more pain – and no more leaky tents!

Do you know the old children's story of the court jester. The king asked the court jester to travel throughout his kingdom to find the greatest fool in the kingdom. The king was always amused by the jester but he hoped there might be a greater fool somewhere in the kingdom who would provide him with more amusement.

The jester travelled with a golden ring – a treasurer from the King to be given to the greatest fool. But before the search was complete news reached the jester that the King had taken gravely ill. The jester returned to the King and saw with his own eyes that the king was dying. The jester told the king that he still had not given the golden ring for he was yet to find the greatest fool.

The jester then inquired as to whether the king was ready to face eternity – had he made his peace with God – was he prepared for the afterlife. The King said no – he had done none of that he had been too busy to ever worry about death or heaven.

With that the jester presented the king with the golden ring – at last he had found the greatest fool in the kingdom. To know God is to know a heavenly future –to ignore God – is a hell of a mistake!

If your earthly tent is letting you down this morning, if you are in a bed of hospital or sickness, don't despair. Our tents have an amazing surprising ability to bounce back – at the least expected times. But one day for all of us our hope is to leave this body behind and fly into the everlasting arms of God.

For those who are fit and well – don't be deceived by what you see. Life is not permanent. This world is not secure. By all means enjoy the ride –enjoy God's gift of life. But remember that life is but a tent. One day it too will be packed away – and our only hope will be to put our trust in the one who has faced death on the cross and defeated death via the empty tomb.