

Rev. Janet Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
September 19, 2021
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4: 13-18

Sermon: Temporary versus Eternal

There was a 92-year-old woman who was moving into a nursing home after her husband of 70 years recently passed away. Every morning she got up at 8:00 a.m., got dressed, with her hair looking perfect and her face beautifully made up with makeup, even though she was legally blind. She sat waiting in the lobby of the nursing home until her room was ready for her to move in. As she maneuvered her walker to the elevator, her host provided a visual description of her tiny room, including the beautiful drapes that hung in her window. "I love it," she stated with the enthusiasm of an eight-year-old having just been presented with a new puppy.

"Mrs. Jones, you haven't seen the room...just wait." "That doesn't have anything to do with it," she replied. "Happiness is something you decide on ahead of time. Whether I like my room or not doesn't depend on how the furniture is arranged... it's how I arrange my mind. I already decided to love it. It's a decision I make every morning when I wake up. I have a choice; I can spend the day in bed recounting the difficulty I have with the parts of my body that no longer work or get out of bed and be thankful for the ones that do. Each day is a gift, as long as my eyes open, I'll focus on the new day and all the happy memories I've stored away...just for this time in my life."

It is important how we view our day and our life in general. Mrs. Jones had already made up her mind that her things weren't important, but her memories were. What is important in our life? What is temporary and what is eternal?

The Apostle Paul was rotting away in prison and his enemies were gloating. Things around him didn't seem to be going well but Paul writes, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far

outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4: 16-18)

Paul says that there is an outer you—your skin, hair, face, body, reputation, and persona. But there is also an inner you—your character, your spirit, and your soul.

John Ortberg writes about this in his book, **When the Game is Over it, All goes Back in the Box.** (p 48-49) He says, “The outer you is what everybody sees. It gets dressed up, applauded, whistled at and ignored. The inner you is invisible. The outer you can be coerced by other people or forces. The inner you is always free to choose.

The outer you can be measured and weighed and chemically analyzed. The inner you has a unity and mystery that is staggering. The outer you is temporary. The inner you is eternal. Sooner or later, Old Man Wrinkle is coming for everybody. Weight starts shifting from the poles of your body toward the equator. Hair will stop growing where you want it to and boldly go to places no hair has gone before. You can fight Old Man Wrinkle all you want. You can lavish time and money on the outer you; exercise it, starve it, Botox it, Rogaine it, stretch it, lift it, nip it, tuck it, tan it, dress it up at Neiman Marcus...Old Man Wrinkle will wait you out.”

So many of us place our focus on the outer person and the things of this world that we think will bring us happiness, but one day people will come to realize that it will all pass away.

I read in the paper a story about a man that died in the recent flooding in Bridgeport, NJ. His basement was beginning to flood, and he kept going down and bringing things up. The story in the paper read, “Back inside, Jack waded into the basement, the water up to his waist, to salvage belongings. He made a few trips, lugging cat litter and extra food upstairs, before remembering about the two metal boxes containing jewelry from Laura’s late father. He waded back down.” His wife dove into the water that was now only two inches from the ceiling and couldn’t find him. She was rescued but her husband died in the basement trying to rescue the family jewelry. The jewelry was only temporary, but her husband’s life was eternal. What earthly things we have are only

temporary, but what do we value that is eternal? Family, friends, co-workers, neighbors?

We can be tempted to place value and our focus on the things of this world and the outer person. But just like we saw recently in the tornados and the flooding in this area, it will all pass away. As humans we tend to naturally look at the outward appearance and the things people have, but the Lord looks at the heart, the inner person.

The Apostle Paul's body had been whipped and stoned and starved and beaten and locked up in a prison cell, but it didn't matter to him because he said what is on the inside of our body is what matters most. Paul was saying that his outer body was dying a little bit every day. But inside he was growing and learning and coming to life because of the love of God in his life.

That is what we talked about last Sunday in the sermon that leads into our thoughts today. We talked about confessing our sins to God and becoming transformed because of the love of Jesus. We talked about **Positional Sanctification**: Christ's work **FOR** us and **Progressive Sanctification**, which is Christ's work **IN** us. We are continuously transformed by God because his work is **ongoing in us**. It means we can grow in our faith and understanding of our relationship with God in the inside.

Outwardly, we are changing as we get older. Each birthday we see a change, especially if you are over forty, but Paul wants us to remember that the change that counts to God is the change on the inside. Are you growing in the LORD with reading the scripture, prayer life, joining a Bible Study, being involved in a church and fellowship group? Are you getting stronger in your relationship with the Lord, even during the difficult times of your life? During Covid, during illness, during financial crisis, during the storms of life?

Paul said, "Even though I know my body's going to die soon, I keep loving people more—even people who put me here. It's the strangest thing: I'm dying on the outside, but inside I'm coming to life."

Paul's thoughts were constantly eternal not temporary. He looked toward God and not the things of the earth.

We need to always treasure the eternal and not the things that are temporary. What is changing us on the inside for our eternal home is better than the temporary things for our earthly home.

“Oscar Wilde wrote a book called *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the story of a man who sells his soul for ceaseless youth and beauty. Very similar to the movie for children, “Tangled” by Disney where a woman wants to remain young at all costs. In the book *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, everyone marvels at his eternal youthfulness. But his beauty hides a soul marked by greed, lust, and betrayal. A painting of him shows the condition of his inner life. Initially the face in the painting is as handsome as he is in real life. But his sin begins to be reflected on the canvas. Every act of deceit, betrayal, and greed becomes another wrinkle or twisted feature until at last the face in the painting is too hideous to bear. He hides it in the attic. In the end, when death comes for him, the painting is who he has become.” (page 50-51 *When the Game is Over it all goes back in the Box*)

Our world tells us to always think about the outer you, clothes, exercise, makeup, dieting, but God wants us to think about the eternal and the inner you. What do you value? The things of this world or the people that God has placed in your life to show them that you value them.

Relationships you develop and conversations shared about God’s love are eternal but the new chairs or sofa you sit in are temporary. “For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

It is time to start taking better care of the inner you for eternity. Paul said that he was being renewed every day. How can we take care of our inner self for eternity? Pray. Sing or listen to Christian songs. Give your life in service to God. Fellowship with other believers. Worship God and praise Him for all He does for you. Remain hopeful in the midst of adversity. Ask God to fill you with the Fruit of the Spirit.

Start today, Living in such a way that you are preparing for eternity with God.

Spend as much time this week on the inner you, growing in your relationship with God, as you do on the outer you.