

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ 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.

^{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.

Theme: We fix our eyes not on what we see, but what we don't see.

How well did you know Arlene? Maybe you worked with her, grew up with her, lived with her, or simply worshiped the Lord with her. Whether you knew Arlene well or not, you have memories of her. The past couple days all of those memories started flooding back into your minds. When you think of those memories, what do you see? They are memories of working with her, growing up with her, living with her, worshiping with her, and so on. You can see her and all the great times you had with her in your memories. Many of you shared some of those memories her Arlene's family and friends.

And those are good. Hold on to those memories; treasure them. But here's the truth: they don't really matter in the long run—what I mean by that is that those memories don't really offer any true comfort. You can think about all the great times you had with Arlene or all the good things she did; but in the end they are just memories, they won't do anything for you or her.

When you look at Arlene now, what do you see? You see evidence—evidence that this life doesn't last forever. Our lives on earth are like living in a tent. A temporary structure, that does not last, that fails and perishes over time—that is our earthly bodies.

When you look at Arlene now, she serves a reminder of what awaits all of us; we will all die. No matter what you do in life, no matter how many people love you, no matter how many memories you make with others, you'll end up just like everyone else. The fact is that as we speak, your body is wasting away; today we are all one step closer to death. And there is nothing glorious about death.

That is what we can see. But we fix our eyes not on what we see, but on what we can't see. That is where our comfort lies—not on who Arlene was or what Arlene did; but on who Christ is and on what Christ did. No one here has ever seen Christ. He ascended into heaven almost 2000 years ago. There he sits on the throne of God, watching over all of us. Although we have not seen him, we still fix our eyes on him. As the Writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 12, **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

It is Christ who came down from heaven so that he could become our substitute—perfectly obeying the law for us and suffering the eternal punishment that we deserved. On the cross Christ took our sins upon himself and credited us with his perfect life. He endured the shame of the cross and was forsaken by his Father so that we wouldn't be eternally condemned. It was Christ who rose from the dead three days later. He defeated death, won for us the ultimate victory and promises us that we too will rise again on the Last Day.

None of us saw any of this; but we know it to be true, and so did Arlene. Sure we couldn't see Arlene's heart; but we saw her live her faith. She lived a life of love for her Savior. I didn't know Arlene as well as many of you. I only knew her for about six short years. But I saw her cheerfully worshiping her Savior, and greeting her fellow Christians with a smile on Sundays. And even though by the end her old age started getting the best of her, she still loved to hear God's Word and Christian songs; until recently would join in the Lord's Prayer with me as best she could. Again and again Arlene displayed her faith in Christ and love for her Savior.

And through this faith, she has received everything Christ has won for her—including the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. She has passed from this veil of tears to receive the crown of life. Arlene has joined the heavenly choirs of saints and angels, singing "Hallelujah" to her victorious king and Savior, Jesus Christ. Now in heaven, as a child of God and co-heir of Christ, she has received an eternal inheritance, she now shares in the glory of Christ. Arlene isn't upset about her life; she doesn't think back on her earthly life with remorse, and she isn't sad about the last years or her life or any other part of her life. She is too busy living with Christ and singing his praises!

And now she has a permanent dwelling. The earthly tent in which she dwelled is now gone. It has been destroyed by sin. And yet Arlene's soul lives on. She lives and dwells in heaven. And she looks forward to the Last Day, when Christ will raise her life-less body and make it a new and glorious body that will join her soul in heaven. Arlene now a permanent dwelling in the house of God. And house not made by the hands of humans, it is not a tent tainted with sin that only lasts a short while. But is a house built by God, a place without sin, with sickness and disease, without pain or sorrow. It is a perfect house, and eternal house.

Of course, Arlene isn't alone in heaven. She is reunited with William and with all the other saints. She is there with all the angels, and most importantly with Christ himself, as she lives with him and sees him in his whole glory. And soon we will see her again too. For what Christ did for Arlene he has also done for you and me. The forgiveness and eternal life which Christ won was given to the whole world. And all who believe in him will be saved. Even though we die we will live. And not just live, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That is where our comfort lies here today—not on what we can see, or what we have seen. But on what we can't see. We can't see Arlene in heaven right now with her Savior; but we know she's there because of Christ. We fix our eyes on the sure hope that we will see her again soon; that when we die, through faith in Jesus as our Savior, we will be reunited with her and all believers as dwell in the perfect and eternal house of our Lord.

Therefore we do not lose heart, as Paul says. Saying goodbye to a loved one is never easy. We mourn Arlene's death for a reason. And yet, we don't lose heart. For this is not simply a goodbye for good; but a goodbye for now. For soon we will see her again with all other believers, and most importantly Christ.

And we can take comfort in Paul's words from verse 17, **our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all**. Death for Arlene and for us is not an end the beginning of a new and permanent life in heaven. It is not sad for her; she rejoices in her Savior as she shares in his glory. The same stands for us. The pain and sorrow that we now endure cannot compare to the glory and joy that we'll have in heaven because of our risen Savior, Jesus Christ. So today we look not at what we can see or have seen. Rather we fix our eyes on what we can't see—on the glory that is ours

through Christ. An eternal glory that is far greater than any joy or pain we have on this earth. For it is the eternal glory of Christ. This is a glory that Arlene enjoys now; and a glory you will share with her; and most importantly with Christ forever. Amen.