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“DEATH — a leap in the dark or a step in faith?”



Kilskeery Free Presbyterian church and Christian school.

The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, 9th May 2004.

“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 Corinthians 5:1.

The Bible is a book of knowledge. David claimed: “I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts,” Psalm 119:100. John stated at the close of His gospel: “And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name, John 20:30-31. This blessed book leads to life and immortality through Jesus Christ. The Saviour said: “Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man,” Matthew 7:24. Wisdom comes from believing and obeying the Word of God. I repeat, it is a book of knowledge.

Grave

It is a book which imparts a knowledge of that world that lies beyond the grave. Note what Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth. “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.” The Christian has access to information through which he can then say, “I know!” It was not just the learned apostle who was informed, but he includes those to whom he was writing. “We” know! Note the substance of what it was that Paul and the Corinthians knew. They knew about death and what followed on for the child of God. I wish to speak upon three matters which are touched upon in this verse.

I. HERE IS AN EXPLANATION OF DEATH

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved.” Death is a mystery about which men give little thought, except as to how they can avoid its approach. Were they to consider what the One who holds “the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18), had to say about this vital subject, they would be less inclined to try to avoid death and give thought to how to prepare for their inevitable encounter with it.

Tentmaker

Paul was a tent-maker by trade. This we learn from Acts 18:3. “And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.” From the environment of the tent-dweller he draws a picture of death. “If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved . . .” Death is a “dissolving” of our earthly house. The word dissolve means to “take apart”, to “dismantle”. As the traveller would take down



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his tent and prepare to move on, so it is with each one of us. At death, our earthly tent is taken down and we move on.

1. Death sees a dissolving of the link between bodily members. That is what sickness is all about. The unity and the efficiency of the body decline and then at death cease to function altogether. Heed the voice of stiff joints and slow limbs! They speak to us of the approach of our dissolution.

2. Death sees a dissolving of the link between body and soul. "Absent from the body . . . present with the Lord," verse 8. The word absent means "to emigrate." At death, the Christian emigrates to glory. Emigration was always associated with the beginning of a new life. This most certainly is the case for the child of God, for at death he enters upon the joys of heaven — a fulness of life which cannot be imagined here in this world.

There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.
There everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heavenly land from ours.

3. Death sees a dissolving of the link between friends and companions. For Christians who die, the separation between them and Christ ends. "Knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord," verse 6.

Joy

That is why the Christian rejoices. For those who are left behind, their loved ones are absent and that is why they sorrow. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," verse 8.

II. HERE IS AN EXCHANGE OF DWELLINGS

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God." At death, the child of God departs from the earthly tent to take up residence in the building that God has made ready for him.

1. It is a better dwelling. The present building is compared to a tabernacle. It is therefore a temporary structure. The Christian's home in heaven is a permanent building. It is "an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," verse 1. Man's best structures are but temporary. They crumble before long. They must be demolished as decay sets in. But God's buildings are eternal.

2. It is a glorious dwelling. It is built by God. He is its architect and builder. He designed our home in glory, supplied the material and constructed it. It is a palace fit for a king. Of the Christian it is said, "With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king's palace," Psalm 45: 15.

3. It is a holy dwelling. Holiness has always marked the dwelling place of God. "Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation," Exodus 15: 13. The holiness of our heavenly home may be seen in the words used to describe that great city, the holy Jerusalem. "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life," Revelation



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21:27

Unconverted

Unconverted sinners can have no place in such an abode. That is why the Saviour said: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John 3:3. Being a holy place, it is a happy place. Sin is the disrupter and destroyer of happiness. It is the source of every tear and heartache. Deliverance from sin means entrance to happiness. Happy indeed is the man whose sins are forgiven.

4. It is the Father's house. It is the house from which sinners departed long ago. It is the home from which prodigal mankind rebelliously departed so long ago on its pilgrimage of defiance to the far country of sin and transgression.

The end

The believer's arrival at the Father's house marks the end of the great work of redemption undertaken by Christ. It is that depicted in the parable of the lost sheep. "And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost," Luke 15:5-6. The Father stands at the door of this glorious abode waiting to greet His returning children. What a glorious day that will be!

III. HERE IS AN EXPRESSION OF CONFIDENCE

Just who is it that shares this confidence and is able to say, "We know"? It is that people into whose heart the light of gospel knowledge has shone, that people whose experience of grace Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4:6. "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It is that people who have been born again.

1. Their confidence is based upon God's Word. The testimony of Holy Scripture is that the child of God, upon death, passes into the presence of God. "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord," verse 8. The Christian's absence from the body marks his presence with the Lord. Paul indicated the same truth when he wrote to the Philippians of his desire for heaven. "For I am in a strait (Greek- 'tied about with a rope') betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better," Philippians 1:23. dying in peace The important point to note is that Paul anticipated that departure from amongst believers here on earth would signal his being with Christ. This same truth of the believer's instant transportation to glory upon death is seen in the words of Christ to the believing thief on the cross. "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise," Luke 23:43. What sweet knowledge to be given as death approached! What confidence belonged to that thief as death drew near! He had Christ's own word that he would be instantly carried to glory when death overcame him on the cross.

2. Their confidence is based upon the Holy Spirit's witness within. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," Romans 8:16. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father," Galatians 4:6. Where else will the children be brought upon death other than to



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the Father's house. "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," 2 Corinthians 1:22. The joy of the child of God here on earth may be limited and often disrupted but it is nevertheless real. Furthermore, it is a joy that is not of this earth. It is not based upon earthly possessions or circumstances. Paul, a penniless preacher, could rejoice and sing along with his equally poor companion, Silas, as their backs ran red with blood from the whipping they had received at the hands of cruel persecutors, but they were still filled with joy and burst forth into irrepressible singing in the jail at Philippi. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them," Acts 16:25. Such joy in the Holy Ghost, while not enjoyed to the same measure by all believers, is nevertheless the blessing of all who trust in Christ, and that joy is but an "earnest", a down payment, of the joy that awaits the Christian in heaven. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise," Ephesians 1:13. The Holy Spirit's graces are but foretastes of the promised glory that awaits the believer in heaven. He seals and sustains us on our pilgrimage with foretastes of glory. "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption," Ephesians 4:30.

3. Their confidence is upon the basis that it has been the universal hope in every age of those born again. "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come," Job 14:14. Job looked for the change of which Paul is here speaking in our text. Throughout the ages, since the fall of Adam, the child of God has looked in faith for the day of leaving this world and entering upon the glory that God has prepared for them in heaven. What a blessed privilege to be possessed of such a hope! Is this your hope today?

*Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Are you walking daily by the Saviour's side?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
Do you rest each moment in the Crucified?
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?
When the Bridegroom cometh, will your robes be white,
Pure and white in the blood of the Lamb?
Will your soul be ready for the mansions bright,
And be washed in the blood of the Lamb?*

How do you answer? What is your response to this vital question?