

THE TENT DISSOLVED AND THE MANSION ENTERED

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*“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God,
a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”*
2 Corinthians 5:1.

PAUL ranks among the bravest of the brave. We note, also, with admiration, how the hero of so many dangers and conflicts, who could glow and burn with fervor, was yet among the calmest and quietest of spirits. He had learned to live beyond those present circumstances which worry and disturb. He had stolen a march upon the shadows of time and entered into possession of the realities of eternity! He looked not on the things which are seen, but he set his whole regard on the things which are not seen—and by this means he entered into a deep and joyful peace which made him strong, resolute, steadfast, immovable. I would to God that we had all acquired Paul's art of being “always confident”—his habit of having the inward man renewed day by day!

The most of us are far too like the insect of the summer hour which sports away its life of moments among the flowers and lo, all is over! Are we not too apt to live in the immediate present which is revealed by the senses? The ox projects no thought upward or beyond—to stand in the cool brook or lie down in the fat pasture is its all in all—even thus is it with the mass of men, their souls are tethered to their bodies, imprisoned within the circumstances of the day! If we could be completely delivered from the thralldom of things seen and felt, and could feel the full influence of the invisible and the eternal, how much of Heaven we might enjoy before the celestial shores are reached!

Paul's life was rough and stormy, yet who might not desire it? Had there been no life to come, he would have been, of all men, the most miserable, for he was one of the poorest, most persecuted, most despised, most slandered, most wearied and most suffering of mortals! And yet, if I had to put my finger upon happy lives, I should not hesitate to select among the foremost, the life of the Apostle Paul, for whom to live was Christ! It is also to be especially noted, as to his happiness, that he had a reason for it. My text begins with the word, “For.” Paul is always argumentative—the leaning of his mind is in that direction. Therefore, if he is cast down, he has a reason for it and if he is calm, he can show just cause for his peace.

Some religionists are deliriously happy, but they cannot tell you why. They can sing and shout, and dance, but they can give no reason for their excitement. They see an enthusiastic crowd and they catch the infection—their religion is purely emotional! I am not going to condemn it, yet I will show you a more excellent way. The joy which is not created by substantial causes is mere froth and foam and soon vanishes away. Unless you can tell why you are happy, you will not long be happy. If you have no principle at the back of your passion, your passion will burn down to a black ash and you will look in vain for a living spark. Some professors have not enough emotion—their hearts are too small. Though I cannot say that their heads are too large, there are others whose hearts are their main force, who are soon on fire, blazing away like shavings and brushwood when first the flame lights upon them. But their brains are an uncertain quantity, never sufficient to manage the furnace of their emotions.

It was not so with Paul—he was a well-balanced man. If able to defy the present and rejoice in prospect of the future, he had a solid reason for doing so. I like a man who is fervent and enthusiastic and yet in his fervor is as reasonable as if he were some cool logician. Let the heart be like a fiery, high-mettled steed, but take care that it is curbed and managed by discretion. An instructed Christian man is rational even in his ecstasies—ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him—and that hope seems to rise above all reason. He is glad, most glad of the glad, but he knows the why of his gladness. And so he can bear the cruel tests to which the world exposes spiritual joy. The true Believer's peace can answer the quibbles of time or devils. It can justify itself in its opposition to all appearances. This is a house built upon a foundation,

a tree which has a firmly settled root, a star fixed in its sphere—and thus it is infinitely superior to the house upon the sand, the tree plucked up, the fleeting vapor of mere emotion.

May God, the Holy Spirit instruct us so that we may know the Truth of God out of which solid happiness is sure to grow! I see in the text before us, first of all, a catastrophe which Paul saw to be very possible—“If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved.” Secondly, the provision which he surely knew to be made should that catastrophe occur—“We have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And thirdly, I shall dwell for a minute or two upon the value of this knowledge to Paul and to the rest of us in our present trying condition.

I. First, then, consider THE CATASTROPHE WHICH PAUL SAW TO BE VERY POSSIBLE—“If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved.” He did not fear that he, himself, would be dissolved! He had not the slightest fear about that. The catastrophe which he looked forward to is known among us by the name of “death,” but he calls it the dissolving of the earthly house of his tabernacle—the taking down of his tent-house body. He does not say, “If I were to be destroyed,” or, “If I were to be annihilated.” He knows no supposition of that character. He feels assured that he, himself, is perfectly safe.

There is latent within the text an element of deep quiet as to his real self. “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God.” The “we” is all unharmed and unmoved. If our house were dissolved we should *not* be undone. If we were to lose this earthly tent we have “a building of God, eternal in the heavens.” The real man, the essential self, is out of harm’s way and all that he talks about is the falling to pieces of a certain tabernacle, or tent, in which, for the present, he is lodging! Many people are in a great fright about the future, yet here is Paul viewing the worst thing that could happen to him with such complacency that he likens it to nothing worse than the pulling down of a tent in which he were making ready to reside in for a little season. He was afraid of nothing beyond that—and if that happened he had expectations which reconciled him to the event—and even helped him to anticipate it with joy!

Paul was not absolutely sure that his body would be dissolved. He hoped that he might be alive and remain at the coming of the Lord—and then he would be changed and be forever with the Lord, without passing through death. Still, he was willing to leave this in the Lord’s hands. And when he saw it to be possible that he should be numbered among the blessed dead who die in the Lord, he did not shrink from the prospect, but bravely found a metaphor which set forth the little fear which he entertained concerning it. The Apostle perceived that the body in which he lived was frail in itself. Paul was accustomed to make tents. I do not suppose he ever manufactured any very large or sumptuous ones—probably he did not have enough capital for that—but he was a tent worker and mender.

The use of tents was common enough among the Roman people in Paul’s day. The gentry delighted in bright pavilions which they could set up at pleasure—and the common folk found pleasure in spending a part of their time under canvas. While he was sitting writing this letter, it is most likely that Paul had a tent or two to repair lying near, and this suggested to him the language of the verse before us. When a tent is newly placed, it is but a frail structure, very far removed from the permanence of a house—in that respect it is exactly like this feeble corporeal frame of ours which is crushed before the moth! Paul felt that his body would not need any great force to overthrow it—it was like the tent which the Midianite saw in his dream—it only needed to be struck by a barley cake, and lo, it was down!

A house of solid masonry may need a crowbar and a pick to remove its stones from their places, but feebler tools will soon overturn a tent and make a ruin of it. The body is liable to dissolution from causes so minute as to be imperceptible—a breath of foul air, an atom of poisonous matter, a trifle, a mere nothing may end this mortal life! I hope that you and I duly remember the frailty of our bodies. We are not so foolish as to think that because we are in robust health, today, we must necessarily live to old age! We have lately had among ourselves abundant evidence that those who appear to be the healthiest are often the first to be taken away—while feeble persons linger on among us, whose lives are a continued wonder and a perpetual struggle! When we think of the brittle ware of which our bodies are made, it is not strange that they should soon be broken.

Is it not a wonderful thing that we continue to live? Much more wonderful than that we should die? Dr. Watts has wisely said—

*“Our life contains a thousand springs,
And dies if one is gone.*

*Strange that a harp of thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long!"*

Some small affair interferes with a minute valve or organ of secretion, mischief is engendered by it, the whole current of life is hindered and, by-and-by, death ensues. It is a very delicate process by which dust remains animated! A thousand things can stop the process and then our body is dissolved! Paul, therefore, because he saw his body to be frail as a bubble, looked forward to the time when the earthly house of his soul would be dissolved. When he was writing this Epistle, he had many signs about him that his body *would* be dissolved. His many labors were telling upon him. He was worn down with fatigue. He was spent in his Master's service.

He was so full of the heavenly fire that he could never rest! After he had evangelized one city, he was forced to hasten to another. If he were driven out of one village, he hurried to the next, for he was eager to deliver the message of salvation. He wore himself out with labor and he felt, therefore, that the day would come when his body would give way under the intense excitement of his life-agony. In addition to this, he endured cold and hunger, nakedness and sickness brought upon him by his missionary sacrifices. He had a hard time of it as to physical endurance and I should think there was scarcely a limb of the man that did not suffer in consequence of the imprisonments, scourging, stoning and other hardships which he had suffered. He felt that one of these days, in all probability, the house of his tent would come down through the violence of his persecutors.

Once he most touchingly spoke of himself as, "such an one as Paul the Aged"—and aged men cannot get away from the consciousness that their body is failing. Certain crumbling portions warn the old man that the house is dilapidated; the thatch which has grown thin or blanched tells its tale. There are signs about the aged which warn them that their earthly house was not built to stand forever—it is a tabernacle or tent set up for a temporary purposes—and it shows signs of waxing old and being ready to pass away. Therefore Paul was led to feel that both from the natural frailty of the body and, also, from the injuries which it had already sustained, there was before him the evident probability that the earthly house of his tabernacle would be dissolved.

Besides, Paul's frail body had been subject to exceedingly great perils. I saw, the other day, an encampment of gypsies out upon the common. Many of this wandering race were sitting under a coarse covering sustained by sticks. I should exaggerate if I called them poles—and I could not help feeling that such an abode was all very well on a warm day, but not at all desirable when the east wind was blowing, or a shower of sleet was driving along, or a deluge of rain descending. The Apostle's body was a tent which was subjected to great stress of weather. God had not screened him, though one of the most precious men that ever lived! He was exposed to more danger than almost any other of the Lord's servants.

Here is his own account of the matter—"Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeying often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watching often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness." Well might he reason that before long his poor shepherd's shanty would give way under such rude blasts! Besides, Paul knew that so many others whom he had known and loved had already died, and he gathered from this that he would, himself, die.

There used to sit in this house a Brother who has often assured me that he would not die, and that if any Christian man *did* die it was because he grieved the Lord. I am sorry to say that I have missed that Brother for many months. I hope he has not yet disproved his own theory, but I am sure that he will do so, sooner or later, unless our Lord should hasten His advent. Whenever I meet with an enthusiast who boasts that he shall never die, I find it best to let him wait and see. One fine old Irish clergyman has frequently sought to instruct me in the art of being immortal! And he has been grieved and angry because I never set much store by the long life which he offered me. Though an old man, he assured me that he would never die—he expected, in a short time, to throw out all the infirmities of his years in the form of a rash—and then to be as vigorous as ever!

Alas, the good rector is buried and his crazy brain is at rest. It is appointed unto men once to die. I should have thought that since so many of the excellent of the earth have fallen asleep, *nobody* would ever have been so mad as to raise a question about its being the common lot. Our crowded cemetery supply 10,000 arguments why each one of us may expect to die in due time. This earthly house of our tabernacle will be dissolved—all things unite to warrant the belief.

Now, Brothers and Sisters, this was all that Paul expected on the sad side and, truly, it is not much, is it? Certain Swiss peasants not very long ago were feeding their flocks on one of the lofty upland valleys. On one side of the pasture stood a number of chalets, or wooden huts, in which they were accustomed to live during the summer. They were poor shelters which they left as soon as the winter set in. One day they heard a strange rumbling up in the lofty Alps and they understood what it meant—it meant that a mass of rock or snow or ice had fallen and would soon come crushing down in the form of an avalanche. In a brief space, their fears were realized, for they saw a tremendous mass come rushing from above, bearing destruction in its course. What did it destroy? Only the old, crazy chalets—that was all. Every man of the shepherds was safe and untouched—the event was, to them, a matter which caused a Te Deum to be sung in the village Church below rather than a subject for mourning and sorrow. They said, “The avalanche is terrible, but it has not slain the aged mother, nor crushed the babe in its cradle. It has injured none of us, but only buried a few hovels which we can soon rebuild.”

Their case is a picture of ours. The avalanche of death will fall, but O you saints, when it comes, this is all it will do for you—your earthly house will be dissolved! Will you fret over so small a loss? No evil will come near to you! The poor hut of the body will be buried beneath the earth, but as for *yourself*, what will you have to do but to sing an everlasting Te Deum unto Him who delivered you from death and danger—and raised you to His own right hand? It would not long affect a man if his tent should be overthrown—he would shake himself clear of it and come forth—it would not otherwise disturb him. So death shall not affect us for the worse, but for the better! The dissolution of this hampering frame shall give us liberty! Today we are like birds in the egg—so long as the shell is whole, we are not free—death breaks the shell!

Does the fledgling lament the dissolution of the shell? I never heard of a bird in its nest pining over its broken shell! No, its thought runs otherwise—to wings and flight and sunny skies! So let it be with us. This body will be dissolved. Let it be so—it is good it should be! We have been glad of it while we have needed it and we thank God for the wondrous skill displayed in it—but when we no longer require it, we shall escape from it as from imprisonment and never wish to return to its narrow bounds! Death, as it pulls away our sackcloth canopy, will reveal to our wondering eyes the palace of the King in which we shall dwell forever and, therefore, what cause have we to be alarmed at it? I have set out the whole catastrophe before you—and surely no Believer trembles in view of it!

II. So now we pass on to the second head—THE PROVISION OF WHICH THE APOSTLE PAUL MOST SURELY KNEW. He knew that if his tent dwelling was overthrown, he would not be without a home! He knew that he would not have to open his eyes in a naked condition and cry, “Woe’s me, where am I to fly? I have no dwelling place!” No, he knew that if this tent-house were gone, he had “a building of God.” Paul was not afraid of going to “purgatory”—though of late, some, even among Protestants, have, in a modified form, revived that grim lie and have told us that even Believers will have much to bear before they will be fit for eternal happiness! The Apostle held no such opinion! On the contrary, he wrote—“We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God.”

He did not expect to be roasted alive for the next thousand years and then to leap from “purgatory” to Paradise. But he did expect to go, as soon as ever his earthly house was dissolved, into his eternal house which is in the heavens! He had not even the thought of lying in a state of unconsciousness till the Resurrection. He says, “We know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have [we have *already*] a building of God.” He says not, “we *shall* have it,” but, “we *have* it”—“we know that we have it.” The picture seems to me to be as though one of you should dwell in his garden, in a tent, for a while. Somebody inquires what would happen if a gale of wind should blow your tent away in the night. “Oh,” you say, “I have a house over yonder. I would go within doors and live there.”

What a comfort to know that whatever occurs to our temporary gear, we have a fixed and settled abode to which we can at once repair! This makes us feel independent of all dangers and helps us joyfully to welcome the inevitable, come when it may! What did the Apostle mean, however? For this text is said to be a very difficult one. He meant, first—the *moment* his soul left its body, it would *at once* enter into that house of which Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you.” Do you want to know about that house? Read the Book of the Revelation and learn of its gates of pearl, its streets of gold, its walls of rarest gems! Read of the river which winds through it and of the trees which bear their fruit every month! If, after that, you desire to know more concerning this house, I can but give you the advice which was given by John Bunyan in a similar case.

One asked of Honest John a question which he could not answer, for the matter was not opened in God's Word and, therefore, Honest John bade his friend live a godly life and go to Heaven and see for himself. Believe no dreams, but bide your time, believing in the Lord Jesus, and you shall shortly know all about the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Paul, however, meant that in the fullness of time he would again be clothed with a body. He regarded the waiting time as so short that he almost overlooked it, as men forget a moment's pause in a grand march. Ultimately, I say, he expected to be housed in a body—the tent-house which was blown down and dissolved would be developed into a building so rich and rare as to be fitly called, “a building of God, a house not made with hands.”

This, also, is our prospect. At this present time, in this mortal body, we groan being burdened, for our spirit is liberated from bondage, but our body is not yet emancipated, although it has been bought with a price. We are “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” and so, “the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” Our soul has been regenerated, but the body waits for the process, which, in its case, is analogous to regeneration, namely, the resurrection from the dead. Disembodied saints may have to wait a few thousand years, more or less, dwelling in the Father's house above—but there shall come, eventually, the sounding of the trumpet and the raising of the dead—and then the perfected spirit shall dwell in a body adapted to its glory. The certainty of the resurrection raises us above the dread which would otherwise surround the dissolution of our body.

A child sees a man throwing precious metal into a melting pot and he is sad because fair silver is being destroyed. But he that knows the business of the refiner understands that no loss will come of the process—only the dross of that silver will be taken away—and the pure molten mass poured out into a comely mold will yet adorn a royal table! Well, my Brothers and Sisters, are we assured that to lose this vile body is clear gain since it will be fashioned according to the glorious Body of the Lord Jesus? Let us pass on to consider how Paul could say he knew this. This wonderfully enlightened 19th Century has produced an order of wise men who glory in their ignorance! They call themselves “Agnostics,” or know-nothings! When I was a boy, it would have seemed odd to me to meet with a man who gloried in being an ignoramus and yet that is the Latin for that Greek word, “Agnostic.”

Is it not singular to hear a man boastfully say, “I am an ignoramus”? How different is our Apostle! He says, “We know.” Where did this confidence come from? How did he know? First, Paul knew that he had a Father in Heaven, for he felt the spirit of sonship. He knew, also, that his Father had a house and he was certain that if ever he lost the tent in which he lived, he would be sure to be welcomed into his own Father's house above! How do our children know that if ever they are in need of a house they can come home to us? Did they learn that from their tutors at school? No, their childhood instincts teach them that our house is their home, just as chickens run under the mother hen without needing to be trained. Because they are our children, they feel that as long as we have a house, they have a house, too. Paul, therefore, unhesitatingly said, “We know.”

And Brethren, we know the same through like confidence in our Father's love. In the house of the many mansions we feel quite sure of a hearty welcome in due time! We cannot be shut out from our Father's home! We cannot be houseless wanderers while our royal Father dwells in His palace! We are not merely hopeful on this matter, but certain! And, therefore we say, “I know.” Paul knew, again, that he had an elder Brother and that this Brother had gone before to see to the lodging of the younger brothers and sisters. Paul remembered that Jesus had said, “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am you may be also.” So Paul had no question whatever! If the Lord had gone to prepare a place, there would be a place for him, for he never knew his Divine Lord to set about anything and fail therein!

Can we not all trust our Forerunner? Have we any doubts of Him who has entered within the veil as our Representative? No! As we are sure that Jesus has passed into the heavens on our behalf, so are we sure that when this tent-house body is dissolved, there remains a rest and home for our souls! Doubtless, Paul also thought of the Holy Spirit, that blessed One who deigns to live with us in this frail house of clay which is, in many ways, an uncomfortable and unsuitable abode for Him by reason of the sin which has defiled it. He condescends to dwell in these mortal bodies and, therefore, when we leave our earthly house, He will leave it, too! And we are persuaded that a place will be found where we may still abide in fellowship. As our bodies have been honored to entertain the Holy Spirit, we may be sure that in our hour of need He will find an abode for us. He has been our guest and, in His time, He will be our Host!

This we know, for we know the love of the Spirit. He who has made our body His temple will find a rest for our souls. Thus, from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we gather assurance that we shall not wander to and fro unhoused, even though this mortal frame should be dissolved! Besides, let me tell you something. Paul knew that when he died there was a Paradise prepared, for he had already been there! You remember how he locked up that story till he could keep it no longer and, then, 15 years after its occurrence, he let out the blessed secret? Let me read his words, “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows). Such an one caught up to the third Heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knows), how that he was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which is not lawful for a man to utter.”

He says he was taken up to the third Heaven! It was, therefore, idle to tell Paul that there was no home for him hereafter, for he had seen the place! “Well” you say, “I have not seen it.” No, but you fully believe the witness of Paul, do you not? For my own part, I am sure that Paul would not say that which is false and, inasmuch as he went into the third Heaven or Paradise, and saw it, I believe that there is such a place! Remember that this is the place to which the Lord Jesus admitted the dying thief, “Today shall you be with Me in Paradise.” This is the place where Jesus is and where we shall be with Him forever, when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved! Yet, again, dear Brothers and Sisters, you and I know that when this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, there will be a new body for us, because our Lord Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. In my mind the ultimate answer to my deepest unbelief is the fact of the rising of Jesus from the dead!

No matter of history is anything like so well attested as the fact that our Lord was crucified, dead and buried—and that He did, on the third day—rise again from the dead. This I unhesitatingly accept as a fact and this becomes my anchorage. Inasmuch as Jesus is the Representative of all who are in Him, it is as certain that the Believer will rise since Jesus has risen. The Apostle says, “We know,” and remembering these grand Truths of God, I am sure that his words are not a bit too strong! No, if I knew any word in the English language which would express more assurance than the words, “to know,” I would use it this morning for myself! Much more, then, might the Apostle use it for himself. This we are also sure of, namely, that if our Lord Jesus is alive and in a place of rest, He will never leave His chosen and redeemed ones without house or home! Where He has found a Throne, His people shall find a dwelling!

Delightful is our old-fashioned ditty—

*“And when I shall die, Receive me, I’ll cry,
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why.
But this I do find, we two are so joined,
He won’t be in Glory and leave me behind.”*

There is such an attachment between Christ and the Believer—yes, more—such a vital, essential, indissoluble, tender marriage union that separation is impossible! As no man among us would ever be content to see his wife in prison if he could set her free, or to leave her outside in the cold when he could bring her to his fireside in comfort, so Christ, to whom our soul is espoused in eternal wedlock, will never rest until He has brought every one of His own beloved to be with Him where He is—that they may behold His Glory—the Glory which the Father has given Him. No Believer in Jesus has any doubts about that! I am sure you can all say, as Paul did, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands.”

“Ah,” asks one, “but how is a man to know that he has an interest in all this? Suppose I know that the children of God are thus favored, how am I to know that I am one of them?” I invite you to self-examination on this point. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart? Then it is written, “He that believes in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live. He that lives and believes in Me shall never die.” Having believed in Christ, the Apostle knew that he was safe, for the promises are to Believers, and if any man is a Believer, every promise of the Covenant belongs to him. We obtain further assurance of this by our possessing the new life. Dear Friend, have you entered into a new world? Do you feel within you a new heart and a right spirit? Have old things passed away and have all things become new? Are you a new creature in Christ Jesus? Then it is all right with you! That new life cannot die, your new-born nature must inherit everlasting bliss. “Fear not, little flock; it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

In addition to this, do you commune with God? Do you speak with Christ? None perish who commune with the Father and the Son. Jesus cannot say, at the last, “I never knew you; depart from Me,” for He *does* know you, and you know

Him. “Oh,” you say, “He knows enough of me, for I am always begging.” Just so, go on with that trade! Be always a spiritual mendicant. The Lord of Love will never cast away a pleading suppliant! He who frequents the Throne of Grace shall infallibly reach the throne of Glory! Beside, does not the Spirit, Himself, also bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God? And if children and heirs, are we afraid of being left naked in the world to come? I hope that many of us have now reached the full assurance of faith so that we believe and are sure. Can you not say, each one for himself—“I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him until that day”?

These are the ways in which Believers know that they are Believers! And then, by the Word of God they know that all things are theirs, so that if their earthly house should fail they would be received into everlasting habitations.

III. Lastly, as to THE VALUE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE TO US. To be sure that when this body dies, all is well—is not that worth knowing? Secularists accuse us of taking men’s minds away from the practical present that they may dream over a fancied future. We answer that the best help to live for the present is to live in prospect of the eternal future. Paul’s confident belief that if his body should be dissolved, he would be no loser, kept him from fainting. He knew what the worst would be and he was prepared for it. Great storms were out, but the Apostle knew the limit of his possible loss and so was ready. All we can lose is the frail tent of this poor body. By no possibility can we lose more. When a man knows the limit of his risk, it greatly tends to calm his mind. The undiscoverable and the unmeasured are the worst ingredients of dread and terror—but when you can gauge your fears, you have removed them.

Our Apostle felt that he had been sent into the world with the great design of glorifying God by winning souls and building up saints—and he was fully resolved to keep to the ministry which he had received. He argues with himself that his most dangerous course would be to faint in his life-service, for perseverance in his calling could bring with it no greater risk than death—and that he summed up as losing a tent and gaining a mansion! The Roman emperor might strike off his head, or a mob might stone him to death, or he might be crucified like his Master—but he made light of such a fate! It was to him only the coming down of the old tent—it did not affect his undying spirit—he smiled and sang, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

The prospect of his heavenly house made his present trials seem very light, for he felt like a man who sojourns for a night at a poor inn, but puts up with it gladly because he hopes to be home on the morrow. If we were trying tent life for a season we should probably cry out, “A fearful draft comes in at that corner! How damp it is under foot! How cramped one feels!” Yet we should smile over it all and say, “It will not be for long. We shall soon be in our house at home.” Ah, Brothers and Sisters, an hour with our God will make up for all the trials of the way! Be of good courage and press on. This changed, for Paul, the very idea of death—death was transformed from a demon into an angel! It was but the removal of a tottering tent that he might enter into a permanent palace!

Some of God’s own children are much troubled through fear of death because they do not know what it is. If they were better taught, they would soon discover, in their present source of sorrow, a subject for song! I would like, here, to say that I have known some of my Master’s doubting and fearing servants die splendidly! Do you remember how Mr. Feeble-Mind, when he crossed the river, went over dry-shod? Poor soul, he thought he should surely be drowned, and yet he scarcely wet the soles of his feet! I have known men of God go like Jacob all day long, weary and faint, feeling banished from their Father’s house—and yet when they have laid their head down for their final sleep, they have had visions of angels and of God! The end of their journey has made amends for the rough places of the way.

It shall be so with you, Brother and Sister Believer. There is usually a dark place in every Christian’s experience. I have seen some travel in sunlight almost the whole of the way and then depart in gloom. And I have thought none the worse of them for it. And I have seen others struggle forward through a fog for the first part of their pilgrimage and then come out into cloudless day. At one period or another beneath these lowering skies the shadow falls across our way, but surely, “light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.” As I have thought of some of my dear Brothers and Sisters that I have seen die very sweetly, and I have remembered that they were, in life, lowly and self-distrustful, I have compared them to persons who, when they drink their tea, forget to stir the sugar at the bottom of the cup. How doubly sweet the drink becomes as they near the bottom—they have more sweetness than they can well bear!

Would it not be wise to stir the tea at once and enjoy the sweetness from the brim to the bottom? This is the benefit of faith as to the future, for it flavors the present with delight. But what if saints should miss immediate comfort for a

while—how richly will they be compensated! What will it be to open your eyes in Heaven! What a joy to fall asleep on the bed of languishing and to wake amid the celestial choir of Hallelujahs! “Where am I? Ah, my God! My Christ! My Heaven! My all! I am HOME!” Sorrow and sighing shall flee away! Does not this view of things give a transfiguration to death? O you poor unbelievers, how I pity you, since you have no such glorious hopes! O that you would believe in the Lord Jesus and enter into eternal life!

Faith had such an effect upon Paul that it made him always calm and brave. Why should he be afraid of a man that could not do him harm? Even if his persecutor killed him, he would do him a service! What had he to fear? This made Paul wise and prudent. He could use his judgment, for he was not fluttered. He was not like some of you that are only a little ill and straightway you are filled with fright—and you make yourselves worse than you otherwise would be, so that the doctor has to contend with a frightened mind as well as a diseased body! He who is calm, restful and happy is already on the road to a cure. He is quiet because he is in his Father’s hands, and whether he lives or dies, all is well—and this conviction helps the physician to remove his bodily malady. I say again, there is no way to live like learning to die! And he who can afford to be careless whether he lives or dies is the man who will so live as to die triumphantly. Oh, that all of you felt the quiet which comes of trusting in the Lord Jesus!

How sad to know that you may die at any moment and to be unprepared for the change! I do not wonder that you are unhappy! You have good reason for being so. Oh that you were wise and would make the future sure by faith in the risen Lord! In Martin Luther’s time and before his era, men who had lived evil lives were often in great fear when they came to die—and in their terror they would send to a monastery and procure a monk’s robe in which to be buried. What a foolish fancy! Yet so it was that they hoped to fare better in the day of judgment for being wrapped in brown cloth and covered with a hood! Be ours a better garment! Here is a wish of holy Rutherford—“His beloved love shall be my winding sheet and all my grave-clothes. I shall roll up my soul and sew it up in the web of His sweet and free love.”

Is not that your idea? It is surely mine! If we are laid to sleep in such a cloth, there will be no fear of our waking! It will happen to us as to the man who was laid in Elisha’s grave and at once arose as soon as he touched the Prophet’s bones. No man can lie dead if wrapped up in the love of Christ, for His love is life! He that has touched the love of Christ has touched the heart of the life of God and he must live! So let us give ourselves up to that Divine love and, trusting in our Lord, let us go onward to eternal bliss till the day breaks and the shadows flee away! Let us triumph and rejoice that there is prepared for us a “building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

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