

A CHRISTIAN VIEW

OF

DEATH

BY

RALPH T. HENLEY

LECTURES
VESPER SERVICES

if you are ready
death becomes your friend
and
ushers you into the presence
of
GOD

"DEATH, BE NOT THOU PROUD"

INTRODUCTION:

1. In the 1600's, John Donne wrote these words about death:

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou doest overthrow
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me,
From rest and sleep, which but thy picture be,
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow;
And soonest of best men with thee do go -
Rest of their bones and souls' delivery!
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate
men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And Poppy or charms can make us sleep as well.
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more;
Death, thou shalt die!

2. At Death:

- (a) Man's Knowledge Is Incomplete.
- (b) Man's Plans Are Incomplete.
- (c) Man's Character Is Incomplete.

"The clock of life is wound but once,
and no man has the power
To tell just when the hands will stop,
at Late or early hour.

Now is the only time you own;
live, love, work and with a will,
Place no faith in the morrow,
for the clock may then be still."

I. THE TOMB IS NOT A BLIND ALLEY, IT IS A THOROUGHFARE TO GLORY.

- A. Moses to Israel: Deut. 31:1-2, 6, 23 - "Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them, 'I am 120 years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also

the Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.'... 'Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.'" To Joshua he said, "Be strong and of good courage."

B. Joseph to his Brothers:

- (1) Genesis 50:24-25: "And Joseph said to his brethren, 'I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. . . . God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.'"

C. Joshua to Israel:

- (1) Joshua 23:14: Behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed."

D. David to Solomon:

- (1) 1 Kings 2:2-4: "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn; that the Lord may fulfill His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul,' He said, 'you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'"

II. DEATH HAS A REAL MEANING IF OUR LIFE HAS FOLLOWED THE MASTER:

A. God's Desire For My Life Involves:

- (1) Being reared from childhood in the right direction.
- (2) Choosing an honest profession or trade for life's work.
- (3) Choosing the right person and making a Christian home.

- (4) Participating in the daily life of God's Church.
- (5) Ready to lend a helping hand to those in need.
- (6) To give one's shoulder to those with a heavy load.
- (7) To help build a better world.
- (8) To teach, encourage, influence others to follow Christ.
9. To let Heaven be the Center reference point in our lives.

Robert Frost stopping by the woods on a snowy evening:

"We have promises to keep and miles
to go before we sleep."

III. LOVE IS STRONGER THAN DEATH.

A. Some Things Transcend Death and Last An Eternity:

- (1) Death Cannot Take Away the Love of:
 - (a) The Preacher - Congregation Relationship.
 - (b) The Parent - Children Relationship (Precious Memories).
 - (c) The Husband - Wife Relationship.

"If God choose
I shall love thee more
after death."

FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are good reasons for comprehending early that learning to die is part of living. Such awareness heightens the dignity and fulfillment of all one's years. Even with the increasing longevity of man's life, his span on earth is not long enough to fulfill his heart's desires. (Charles Dickens said that it is a disquieting thought to do anything for the last time. The easy habit of procrastination may nurture the illusion that all the last times are crowded into the last years.) But

obviously this is not true for one who has learned to live each day to the fullest. He knows he may never meet a passing stranger again: This is the moment to entertain an angel unawares. Likewise, the graduation of his high school daughter comes and goes once in the period of his burgeoning responsibilities. That memorable June evening will never come again, except as a memory stirred by the music of a processional march. Now is the moment to live. Now is the time to forgive. Each hour takes on the fuller significance of eternity and loses the dreariness of seemingly endless days.

2. But more than the value of days counts in the fulfillment of a life. There is also the magnitude of direction. It is one thing to walk through life's hours as if they were chambers in a maze where one hopes to find the shortest and most interesting route to the exit. It is a more profound schema of life to consider fully the end of one's years and then build toward achievement from that viewpoint. A person walks a shorter distance when he measures backwards from his desired goal to the point where he is. Then rather than strolling aimlessly down every bypath, he can choose a thoroughfare. It is the certainty of night that heightens the function of any day and the certainty of death that adds direction to all life.
3. It is the line of spiritual direction which steadies a scale of values in the buffeting crosswinds which blow from different corners in the maturing decades of life. Something which may escape a young man's eye will become the treasure of his life in later years. Other interests which preoccupy his youth will lose their attraction when he is older. Paul said, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." The Saviour Himself raised the haunting question of values when he asked, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" A better way to live the full life is to spend the years in the light of divine direction. The Lord said, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Matt. 6:33).
4. There is still another reason for learning that dying is part of living. It not only adds dignity and direction to life, it motivates a sense of contributing to the well-being of others. It prompts one to remember others follow his trail. What he does to mark the way clearly makes it easier for others to follow. The romance of map-making over the centuries attests to the contributory sense of ancient and modern navigators. The primitive sketches of the Atlantic coastline bear a good resemblance to the refinements of modern cartographers. Over the centuries, men of the sea have kept adding to the growing body of data the discoveries and changes observed in water boundaries. Even more startling is the capacity of a modern astronaut to photograph

the whole coastline from his space platform and so confirm the faithful sketches of those before him.

5. People who reflect deeply about life recognize the contributions of others to their faith and courage as they make their own pilgrimage. It is part of the graciousness of maturity to leave a clear marker for someone else. The validity of Christ's own promise, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world," is enhanced by the fact it has come down from generation to generation from those who first observed his grace in others and then discovered it in their own lives besides.
6. Families make great preparation for children when they go off to college and even more so when the wedding bells start to ring. It is natural that one generation should share its wisdom with the next which will surpass it. Unfortunately, sharing light on life's deepest hour of death is often neglected. A man who will confide the wisdom of his life to his son about wine, women, and war may be reticent to counsel his boy, even in middle years, about death, destiny, and deliverance. This is partly so because he is preoccupied with making his own decision. Since few have shared their life's depths with him, he likewise is embarrassed to open up with others. But where hearts do open and share the fear of the specter of death with each other, they are knit in fathomless understanding.
7. It is not only helpful to share one's strengths and consolations discovered on the road to the end of life, but it is the only fair thing to do in consideration of one's family and associates. No one would leave a party abruptly. Rather he will intimate regretfully that he must leave and spend time expressing his felicity for the pleasant evening. At the threshold, he will clasp hands to build a bridge until the next meeting.
8. How very necessary is it for families to prepare for the long "goodnight," and leave memorable expressions of love and gratitude with affirmations of confidence and peace. It is one thing to leave a memory -- everyone does that. It is another art to build a memory that will nurture and guide as long as it lasts! Is it not a form of selfishness induced by fear to drift beyond the limit of time and not have prepared the inner circle for the timelessness of life? *
9. If it is not selfish for love's sake, then it certainly is so for economic reasons. In the hard realities of life, many a sentimental man, who thought to spare his family from any maudlin grief, actually worked a hardship on them by not living his whole life in the light of death. In one case, a man delayed making a will which would have carried out his wishes of love. So, many of his dreams for his family were lost. In another case, two partners enjoyed a cordial relationship and

a profitable engineering business, but they never made any provision for what would happen to the firm if one of them died. They engineered for all the stresses of life except the last one. When that came, the surviving partner had to liquidate the firm to satisfy all claims and share with the widow, since he could not buy the partnership outright. So two families suffered as one. (How much better it might have been to have faced the need.)

DEATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Psalm 90:12: "So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

1. A Greek View of Life and Death Is Expressed By Sophocles:

"Anyone who scorns the middle way,
Craving an excessive length of days,
Him I consider to be the slave of follow;
For the longer life span serves only
To heap up misery upon woe.
Joys - where are they,
When a man lives on beyond a moderate span,
Until at last the Deliverer comes
Who sets things right for everyone,
When the messenger of Hades extends an invitation
Death is the end.

Oedipus at Colonus 1213ff
(Sophocles, Ajax 473ff)

A. This is not the Christian view of death.

2. Psalm 39 Gives the View of the Brevity of Life - And Our Hope in God:

"Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days,
That I may know how fleeting I am.
Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths,
And my age is as nothing before You;
Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah
Surely they busy themselves in vain;
He heaps up riches,
And does not know who will gather them.

And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in You.

3. Psalm 90:1-6 Depicts the Utter Frailty of Man and the Greatness of God:

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. You turn man to destruction, and say, "Return, O children of men."

For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night. You carry them away like a flood; they are like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass which grows up: In the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers.

Vs. (The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength
10 they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.)

4. Listen to the Ancient Greek. Sophocles, Concerning Facing Death:

"No noble man will strive for longer life
When his misfortune holds no hope of change.
What pleasure is there, when every day brings death
One step closer, then draws back half a step?
I would not give a copper for a man
Who warms himself on empty hopes.
The noble person lives in honor or in honor
Dies. This is all I have to say." Sophocles, Ajax, 473ff

- a. There was a sense of finality with the Greeks.
- b. There is a qualified hope with the ancient Hebrew.

NOTE:

There is no clear-cut view of existence beyond this life with the ancient Jew, nor a definitive view of a resurrection of any kind. Just a sketchy sense of hope here and there in the Old Testament.

I. CONTINUITY WITH RELATIVES WHO HAD DIED IS EXPRESSED HERE AND THERE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT .

- A. Genesis 25:7-10: "This is the sum of the years of Abraham's life which he lived: 175 years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, the field which Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth. There Abraham was buried, and Sarah his wife."
- B. Genesis 35:28-29: "Now the days of Isaac were 180 years. So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and fully of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him."

- C. Genesis 49:33: "And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people."
- D. Genesis 50:24-26: "And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being 110 years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt."

Note: Joshua 24:32: "The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at SHECHEM, in the plot of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for 100 pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph."

- E. Numbers 20:24: "Aaron shall be gathered to his people, for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah.
- F. Numbers 27:12-13: "Now the Lord said to Moses: "Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered."

II. LOOK WHAT THE HEBREW WRITER TELLS US ABOUT THE HOPE OF EACH OF THESE GREAT MEN:

- A. Hebrews 11:8-10: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. . . ." vs 15-16: "And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

"Hope, as an anchor so steadfast,
Rends the dark veil for the soul,
Whither the Master has entered,
Robbing the grave of its goal;
Come, then O come, glad fruition,
Come to my sad - weary heart;
Come, O Thou blest hope of glory,
Never, O never depart.
Whispering hope, O how welcome thy voice,
Making my heart in its sorrow - REJOICE."

III. JOB, OVER HIS GREAT PAIN AND ANGUISH, WELCOMED DEATH AS A CHANCE FOR REST.

- A. Job 3:11-17: "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breasts, that I should nurse? For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; then I would have been at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who built ruins for themselves, or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver; or why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light? There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

Job 20-22: "Why is life given to him who is in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, who long for death, but it does not come, and search for it more than hidden treasures; who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad when they can find the grave?"

IV. THE ANCIENT HEBREWS THOUGHT OF ONLY THE LIVING BEING ABLE TO PRAISE GOD.

- A. Psalms 30:9: "What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your Truth?"
- B. Psalms 6:5: "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?"
- C. Psalms 115:17: "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence. But we will bless the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. Praise the Lord!"
- D. Psalms 88:10-11: "Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?"

- E. Isaiah 38:18-19: "For Sheol cannot thank You, death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living man, he shall praise You, as I do this day; the father shall make known Your truth to the children." (Words of Hezekiah).

V. **SOLOMON REMINDS YOUNG PEOPLE TO SEEK GOD AND THE FINAL END OF MAN:**

- A. Ecclesiastes 12:1-5: "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them' ... For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets."

VI. **DANIEL GIVES A SLIM RAY OF HOPE:**

- A. Daniel 12:2: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."

NOTE:

When the aged die, we know that they have gone to a state where time's finger can never etch the lines of age upon the face of a ransomed one there...When a youth dies, we know that he has gone to a "land where we shall never grow old."

"In vain our fancy strives to paint
the moment after death
The glories that surround the saints,
when yielding up their breath." (Newton)

FOR DISCUSSION

1. "The man who loves life lives a fuller and better life because he has put death in its proper place."
2. Some people have the opportunity to look death straight in the face and turn back to life to bestow their blessings on the circle of loved ones who have made up the diameter of their joy and sorrow. When they use those urgent days and hours to measure love and count the

cost of pain, they leave a comfort seldom known and achieve a courage newly found.

3. Perhaps, however the majority push all thoughts of death farthest from their minds. By an odd trick that long-suppressed dimension then vanishes from their thinking; instead, they transfer their anxiety to worry about the safety of absent ones. They lament the passing of old friends. The sobering confrontation of their own swiftly spent years is always postponed for tomorrow. Then, when the most eventful days of their lives come, it is difficult to frame their thoughts and share their confidence with the loving hearts who stand about with eloquent eyes but speechless lips.

4. The early Greek conception of the after-life, expressed in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* centered upon the *psyche* or soul, which Erwin Rohde described as ‘the body’s shadow-image’ or ‘a feebler double of the man’. At death, this descends into erebus or hades where, whilst still recognizable and still bearing its earthly name, it persists as a depleted, joyless entity, a mere bloodless shadow of its former embodied self: “There remaineth then even in the house of Hades a spirit and phantom of the dead, albeit the life be not anywise therein.” To quote Rohde, ‘Down in the murky underworld they now float unconscious, or, at most, with a twilight half-consciousness, wailing in a shrill diminutive voice, helpless, indifferent.’ And in an often cited passage, the shade of the great Achilles, briefly re-energized by the blood of a goat, says, ‘Nay, speak not comfortably to me of death, oh great Odysseus. (Rather would I live upon the earth as the hireling of another, with a landless man who had no great livelihood, than bear sway among all the dead that be departed.)’ *

5. As has often been pointed out, the ancient Hebrew sheol is similar in conception to the Greek hades. Sheol was thought of as a vast underground cavern or pit -- probably the tribal burial place magnified into a dark subterranean world -- where the dead exist or persist. The prospect was wholly uninviting, so that Job could cry:

Let me alone, that I may find a little comfort
Before I go whence I shall not return,
To the land of gloom and deep darkness,
The land of gloom and chaos,
Where light is as darkness.

Further, the descent into sheol was irreversible: ‘He who goes down to sheol does not come up’, although there are also texts which suggest God’s power over death and sheol and which thus provide the starting-point for the development in the post-exilic period of the idea of the resurrection of the dead. The general Old Testament view however was that to go down to sheol was to pass forever out of the land of the living and out of the on-

going life of the nation in its covenant relationship with Yahweh. The dead were not in active communion with God. So the psalmist says, ‘The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any that go down into silence.’ Again,

For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to Sheol.
I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit;
I am a man who has no strength,
Like one forsaken among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Like those whom thou dost remember no more,
For they are cut off from thy hand . . .
Dost thou work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise thee?

METAPHORS FOR DEATH

INTRODUCTION

1. Pascal observed that between us and heaven or hell there is only life, which is the frailest thing in the world.

2. Chaucer expressed it well:

"When I was born, so long ago,
Death drew the tap of life and let it flow;
And ever since the tap has done its task,
And now there's little but an empty cask.
My stream of life's but drops upon the rim.

The Canterbury Tales

3. Death does not lurk threatening in the future, it penetrates - present concerns, is part and parcel of life itself. Death cannot be divorced from life and should not be viewed in isolation. It might almost be called a way of life, a mode of existence. Death permeates life. Life and death co-exist. Man's mortality does not begin at the moment of death; death is the horizon of life, it is part of the scenery.
4. Few people ever witness an actual death since most dying persons are carefully segregated from the living and die in solitude. At least 80 percent of the U.S. population dies in institutions - hospitals, nursing homes, or similar establishments. This is one of the most distressing aspects of dying. There is no valid reason for the patient not to die at home, surrounded by loved ones who make the transition from life to death much easier. *
5. If the biblical God exists, judgment after death is certain. If God does not exist, death is annihilation and life becomes meaningless.
6. The fear of death is rooted in the fact that God must be faced - a thought which indeed inspires terror if we are not assured of acceptance and forgiveness. On the other hand, if God is denied, the sheer nothingness and emptiness of life deprives it of all meaning. The Christian can thoroughly enjoy life because he has been set free from the fear of death.

7. THE OLD TESTAMENT GIVES ONLY A DIM FRAGMENTED VIEW OF DEATH.

Job 10:22 speaks of Sheol as "a land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness."

Psalm 94:17 as a "land of silence."

Psalm 88:12 as a "land of forgetfulness."

Psalm 39:12-13: No wonder the psalmist prayed, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not be silent at my tears; for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as all my fathers were. Remove Your gaze from me, that I may regain strength, before I go away and am no more."

8. GOD GAVE THE ANSWER IN HEBREWS 2:14-15:

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

I. THE NEW TESTAMENT USES A NUMBER OF METAPHORS TO DESCRIBE DEATH.

A. PAUL Thought of Death as Pulling Up Anchor and Setting Sail.

1. 2 Tim. 4:6: "And the time of my departure is at hand."

ἀναλυσέως Analysis, used as a nautical term for loosing the mooring of a ship. Also, used as a military term for striking tents and moving an encampment.

At the funeral of Dr. John Mason Neale, Archbishop Trent suggested the hymn:

Safe home, safe home, in port.
Rent cordage, shattered deck,
Torn sails, provisions short,
And only now a wreck;
But oh, the joy upon the shore,
To tell our voyage - perils o're.

2. Phil. 1:21-23: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor: yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better."

ἀναλυσθαι ariost active infinitive. To weigh anchor and put out to sea, to unloose (as threads).

a. Death therefore is a departure from:

- (1) Material Possessions.
- (2) From threads of friendship.
- (3) From earthly honors.

b. Victor Hugo, the renowned French novelist and poet, wrote these memorable words expressing what his death would mean:

AMEN
APD
AMEN

"For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in history, prose, verse, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode and song. I have tried all, but I feel that I have not said the thousandth part of what is in me. When I go down to my grave, I can say, like so many others, 'I have finished my day's work; but I cannot say I have finished my life. My day's work will begin again the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare; it closes in the twilight, to open with the dawn.'"



3. 2 Corinthians 5:1-4: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened: not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life."

_____ kataluo, "for striking down a tent. Life below is a pilgrimage, with the temporary abode of a fragile tent. Here we have no permanent residence. We seek one to come, and Death will be the pulling up of the tent, pegs:"

Here in the body pent
Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
A day's march near Home.

Phillips' translation of 2 Cor. 5:1-4 says this:

"We know, for instance, that if our earthly dwelling were taken down, like a tent, we have a permanent house in Heaven, made, not by man, but by God. In this present frame, we sigh with deep longing for the heavenly house, for we do not want to face utter nakedness when death destroys our present dwelling - these bodies of ours. (As long as we are clothed in this temporary dwelling, we have a painful longing, not because we want just to rid of these clothes but because we want to know the full cover of the permanent house that will be ours.) We want our transitory life to be absorbed into the life that is eternal."

4. Professor William Clow has well written:

"Every reader of the New Testament is disconcerted by the contrast between the expectancy and desire of the Primitive Church and the bewilderment and shrinking of Christian men today.

Stephen saw Heaven opened; Paul longs to depart and be with Christ; Peter exults in an 'inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away'. The early believer might be pictured as looking steadfastly up to Heaven. Even a generation or two ago devout men and women died with a psalm of desire on their lips ... To the true believer, Death is the passing out of one life in which its purpose is probation, and whose distinction is the opportunity of attaining a higher and nobler life."



5. John Oxenham had the idea of Death as striking a tent when he wrote:

"Fold up the tent. The sun is in the west;
This house was only lent

For my apprenticeship,
And God knows best.

Fold up the tent.
Its slack ropes all undone,
Its pole all broken, and its cover rent,
Its work is done."

6. Anna L. Barbauld wrote this stanza, repeated by Wordsworth:

"Life, we have been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather,
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear,
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;

Then steal away; give little warning;
Choose thine own time.
Say not, Good-Night. But in some brighter
clime,
Bid me, Good-Morning."

NOTE:

Paul is the classic example of one who lived life to the fullest in the service of both God and man; who faced death with eager anticipation - a desire to weigh anchor and chart the seas into the eternal presence of the Christ who loved him and had died for him. Death would be the exit for this world to a better one.

- B. PETER uses a double metaphor of putting off the tent and death as an exit to another place.

1. 2 Peter I:13-15: "Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease."

_____ Tabernacle, skenomati.

_____ "putting off my tabernacle"
he apothesis tou skenomatou mou.

_____ tachinos - means either soon or speedy, or possibly sudden.

_____ "after my decease" meta ten
emen exodon.

NOTE: _____
Peter had been present at the Transfiguration
when the discussion of the Lord's EXODUS was
being discussed by Christ, Elijah and Moses.
(Luke 9:31) _____ his departure.

Peter is probably referring to the words of the Lord:

John 21:18-19: "I tell you truly, Peter, that when you
were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where
you liked, but when you are an old man, you are going
to stretch out your hands and someone else will dress
you and take you where you do not want to go. He said
this to show the kind of death by which Peter was going
to honor God." (Phillips)

II. DEATH IS THE CONSUMMATE EXPERIENCE OF THIS LIFE:

- A. Hebrews 9:27: "And it is appointed for man to die once...."
- B. Psalms 90:12: "So teach us to number our days that we may
gain a heart of wisdom."
- C. Isa. 38:1: "Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order, for
you shall die and not live."
- D. Isa. 25:8: "He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord
God will wipe away tears from all faces."
- E. Ps. 39:4-5: "Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the
measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am. Indeed,
You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as
nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but
vapor."
- F. Psalm 23: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil."
- G. Rom. 14:7-8: "For none of us lives to himself, and no man dies
to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die,
we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are
the Lord's."

- H. 1 Cor. 15:54-55: "So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*"

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Perhaps the late Robert Frost was as prophetic as any modern poet. Certainly a leisurely reading of his lines night after night gives one the sense of urgency and destiny in human life. Always in the shadow and perspective of his works there is the urgency of life and the imminence of death. Besides, there is often a lighthearted touch, sometimes a whimsical one, to indicate that even in the austerity of a New England winter the sudden knock on the kitchen door should not take one by surprise, but merit the confident reply, "I am ready."

Summer was past and day was past.
 Sombre clouds on the west were massed.
 Out in the porch's sagging floor,
 Leaves got up in a coil and hissed,
 Blindly struck at my knee and missed.
 Something sinister in the tone
 Told me my secret must be known:
Word I was in the house alone
 Somehow must have gotten abroad,
Word I was in my life alone,
Word I had no one left but God.

1. Poets try to say for a man what he may be unable to articulate for himself, save as he recognizes the same cry in another human spirit. When one is alone with the thoughts he is reticent to share with his family, it is comfortable to sit down with the poets and select or discard from their experimental imagery what adequately encompasses his own stirred feelings. Then possessing some new conception, it is an easier step to shape that into one's personal conviction of hope. Because the poet knows the deep silences of dread which are unexpressed in every heart, he can release the psychic restraint for every man to say, "I was afraid, but no longer." *
3. When the main shadow of death is lifted, then all the sharp surprises of life diminish their threat and contribute their full meaning. But alone in life, an individual feels a certain furtive urgency to make the best possible terms with whatever life brings. A lack of any final assurance adds to his anxiety. But a trust in a providential God puts all of life's unexpectancies within the scope of his divine, intelligent *

concern and wise direction. It was thus, despite the brutal strength and massive forces of the Roman Empire in their contrast of the teaching of the kindly Shepherd and the Carpenter from Nazareth, that Paul could stoutly affirm: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” (Rom. 8:28).

4. To absorb the spirit of the Bible is an even greater preparation of the soul for death than to read the poets. While the poets may open the spectrum of the heart’s feelings, the Scriptures open the rainbow plenitude of God’s dealings with me over the centuries. Humanism may cause a man to question his own impudence of tranquility before death’s threat, but theism describes God’s own acts of self-revealing love which give the full ground for assurance of life beyond this span and the persuasion of a welcome into the Father’s home.
5. One way to become familiar with these great themes of life and death in the bible is to know the location of such classical chapters of instruction and comfort. They can be turned to regularly and appreciated. They can be memorized easily and assimilated. As noble themes of music have nourished generations, so the stirring chapters of the Bible enthrall anyone who seeks to live beyond the mere beginnings of his life.

Here are some of the chapters which have added perspective to many and to which many others may be added from preference or experience:

Gen. 1: - “In the beginning God.”

Ps. 23: - “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Also Ps. 139:7-12.

Isa. 40: - “Comfort My people.”

John 11:1-46: - “I am the resurrection.”

John 14:1-31: - “In My Father’s house are many mansions.”

1 Cor. 15: - “Now is Christ risen from the dead.”

2 Cor. 5:1-20: - “Absent from the body ... present with the Lord.”

Phil. 1:20-30:- “For to me to live is Christ.”

Rev. 21:1-7: - “I saw a new heaven and a new earth.”

Rev. 22: - “The tree of life ... for the healing of the nations.”

In these and other chapters which treat the magnitude of life and death, there are three great themes of personal inspiration that enable one to face death on more familiar grounds.

6. Both in Genesis and in Isaiah, the reader gets caught up in the sense of God’s creative energy. The world system is not like a clock which is slowly running down from its initial thrust of energy. Rather the Creator still manifests His power in the natural orders which daily enrich and purify the earth. He also has the power to renew both men

and their history. For back of the Christian confidence in the resurrection and the life to come is not only the idea but also the creative force of God. He who brought all things into existence in the first place continues to sustain the interacting whole. As one takes comfort on moral grounds in the ancient query, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" so on physical grounds one takes hope in the declaration, "The Lord's hand is not shortened" that he cannot perform it. As man is the product of God's creative energy, so man's hope beyond death rests on that same creative power.

7. When Dr. Edward A. Wilson was lost with Captain Robert Falcon Scott on their ill-fated expedition to Antarctica, he left a brave heritage for those who face the storms of life and death today. Dr. Wilson sensed above the breathtaking blasts of cold wind and the thudding of his benumbed feet that he would not arrive home safely. Before he perished on the paralyzing ice, he pencilled this note to his loved ones:

"Don't be unhappy. We are playing a good part in a great scheme arranged by God Himself . . . We will all meet after death, and death has no terrors . . . All is for the best to those that love God . . . All is well."

DEATH: AS AN ENEMY, AS A FRIEND

1. SOME BIBLE PASSAGES VIEW DEATH WITH RELUCTANCE AND DESPAIR:

- A. Psalm 88:12 speaks of "the land of forgetfulness."
- B. Psalm 39:13 says: "Before I go away and am no more."
- C. Psalm 39:5: Every man at his best state is but vapor."
- D. Job 7:9-10: "As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up. He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore."
- E. Job 7:15-16: "So that my soul chooses strangling and death rather than my body. I loath my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone. For my days are but a breath."
- F. Job 14:1-2, 5-6: "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue..."

vss. 7-12: "There is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant. But man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep."

- 2. WILLIAM JAMES wrote that "the test of the meaning of anything is the answer to the question, "What Difference Does It Make?"

I. DEATH BECOMES OUR ENEMY BECAUSE IT SEPARATES US:

- A. From Close Relatives.
- B. From Close and Dear Friends.
- C. From All our Material Possessions.
- D. From Our Life's Work and Aspirations.

II. THE TOLL OF THE BELL STRIKES FEAR IN OUR HEARTS OF THE UNKNOWN.

"Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind;
And therefore never seem to know for
Whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

John Donne

A. The Bell Brings:

A New World

A New Self

A New Relation Between Self and THAT World.

"He who has a WHY to live
Can bear most any HOW."

B. The Bell Brings Memory:

"REMEMBER - the word has a terrible force in its bearing on future life. Only the faith Christian can afford it. Death is a time for REFLECTION."

C. THE TOLL OF THE BELL:

1. Is a Call to Evaluate Our Values.

2. To Get Our Perspective On Our Being.

"It is the denial of death that is partially responsible for people living empty, purposeless lives; for when you live as if you'll live forever, it becomes too easy to postpone the things you know you must do. You live your life in preparation for tomorrow or in remembrance of yesterday, and meanwhile, each today is lost. In contrast, when you fully understand that each day you awaken could be the last you have, you take the time that day to grow, to become more of who you really are, to reach out to other human beings."

Elizabeth-Kubler Ross

II. A DYING PATIENT GOES THROUGH SEVERAL EMOTIONAL STAGES:

- A. Shock and Denial.
- B. Anger.
- C. Depression. Why Me?
- D. Followed by a Period of Setting things Right.
- E. Finally, An Acceptance of Death.

NOTE: Young people expect older people to die. What hits a teenager is another teenager's death. Everyone has a kind of subconscious list of who will die before me. "I expect to die when I am old" we say to ourselves when death has taken one of our peers. "Old Age" is always older than we are.

IV. BUT DEATH IS ALSO VIEWED AS A FRIEND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

- A. Heb. 2:14-15: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."
- B. 1 Cor. 15:53-55: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, ad this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: '*Death s swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory.*'"
- C. 2 Cor. 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."
- D. Phil. 3:20-21: "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."

(We have no tomb in our religion - We have no corpse.)

E. DEATH BECOMES OUR FRIEND:

1. The Swinging Door Into a Better World.
2. Because It is The Escape Hatch From Unbearable Pain.

"When life is so burdensome, death has become for man a sought-after refuge."

Herodotus

3. For the Christian, it is a Door of Hope.

NOT SO
TO
THE
FAITHFUL
CHILD
OF
GOD

Robert Ingersol, at his brother's casket -
AGNOSTIC

"Life is a narrow vale between the cold and barren peaks of two eternities. We strive in vain to look beyond the heights: we cry aloud, and the only answer is our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the unreplying dead, there comes no word: but in the night of death, hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing."

F. DEATH BECOMES GOD'S MESSENGER TO OPEN ANOTHER WORLD.

Mae Yingling Cotterman has so well written: ON DEATH

"I thought of you as an enemy, a foe
Whom came to claim that which I held most dear,
To leave me empty handed, stark with fear
By grief attended. Waiting, head bowed low,
I heard your quiet steps, now swiftly, now slow,
As surely down my days your tread drew near;
Then I beheld your face unveiled and clear,
And stood ashamed that I should dread you so.

You who, since time began, held in your hand
The key to worlds unseen by mortal eye.
How weak my faith that I'd not understand
That souls live on and only bodies die. *
Seeing with mercy's wings your feet are shod,
I now believe you, messenger of God."

'TO GO AND BE WITH
THE LORD IS FAR BETTER'

FOR DISCUSSION

(It is in confronting his death that modern man finds the ground of his being in God.)

DEATH, COME NOT AS A STRANGER

1. The Christian faith, with its promise of forgiveness of sin and personal renewal in Christ, enables a person to declare, "Death, come not as a stranger but as a friend." Such a confidence enables one to deal with humanity's basic anxiety early in life and thus release more creative energy to fulfilling all his years.
2.

<p>No man dies all at once. The physical and mental processes of every day include a lot of living and a little dying. Old ideas pass away, new ideas are born; old tissues expire, and robust new cells are formed. Actually fixing the hour and minute of death is a legal necessity, because the moment of death is a difficult one to establish. Men die by degrees. Sometimes they have been revived when all hope has been abandoned. Actually each one lives in the very midst of death. <u>The apostle said that we die daily.</u> Therefore, death as a process of life should not be a stranger. Death as a destiny of the personal ego should be resolved <u>by spiritual preparation and a personal commitment to Jesus Christ.</u> He is the one historical person who has triumphed over the tomb. *</p>
--
3. There are several different ways to make friends with death before it comes. What appeals to one person may not help another as much. Certainly the human outlook changes with the decades as each life matures. A younger man may risk his life with hardly a thought of the reality of his survival chances, since to him death is something that happens only to other people. But a man in middle age, or a mother, would willingly cry out in the silent night, "O God, take my life from me, but spare the life of my child!"
4. One way to prepare the soul so that death comes not as a stranger is to read the poets who have caught the beauty of the heart and the wisdom of the years. In circumstances more varied than any one person can experience, poets have left living pictures of moods and crises met and resolved. They have lifted into the universal of meaning that which comes in the wordless solitude of personal experience, anxiety, and tragedy.
5. The poet has left a memory for every passing season and every haunting cry. He seems to have heard the sound of trumpets from the other side and to have been able to sustain the long last note to echo *

for others their own silent hopes. "From the mud of Flanders, where poppies grow, to the wild blue yonder, where ethereal vapors trail, the poet has left a record of the tense panic and the abiding peace which has come to mankind in a hundred different ways when he faces death and finds it comes not as a stranger but with the reconciling grace of One who died and rose again."

6. Each year, when autumn leaves fly before the chilling winds and the migratory birds make their long way to warmer climates, memory recalls the expression of faith that John Greenleaf Whittier wrote in "*The Eternal Goodness.*"

I know not where His islands lift
Their froned palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

7. Even the younger poets are not spared from thoughts of death as being a part of the crucial aspect of human existence. William Cullen Bryant was only seventeen when he wrote "*Thanatopsis.*"

So live, that when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan
* * * * *
Thou go not, like the quarry-slave at night,
Scourged to his dungeon, but, sustained and soothed.

ARE
YOU READY?

8. Still more critical for penetrating reflection on one's life is the period when one is thirty and forty. Stephen Vincent Benet was only thirty-eight when he gave his expression to the discovered impact that time speeds to its end in every life.

To the familiar childhood prayer of surrender, one can add the newer lines of confidence:

If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.

If I should live for other days,
I pray the Lord to guide my ways.

THERE'S A LAND THAT IS FAIRER THAN DAY

9. Samuel Fillmore Bennett, a physician from Elkhorn, Wisconsin, composed the hymn whose first line is the title of this chapter. After three years of military service with the Wisconsin Volunteers, he returned from the War Between the States to continue his medical

practice. One day a friend and musician came to see him. Obviously, his comrade, Joseph P. Webster, was depressed and morose, because he said very little but went over to sit glumly by the wood stove. Dr. Bennett entered sympathetically in his visitor's mood but could not seem to reach him.

Half-heartedly, Webster remarked from over by the stove, "I'll be all right by and by." This stimulus released a dynamic stream of thoughts in Dr. Bennett's mind which he immediately wrote on a pad upon his desk:

There's a land that is fairer than day,
And by faith we can see it afar;
For the Father waits over the way,
To prepare us a dwelling place there.

As the verses developed, Webster came over to peer at the writing on the desk and caught the creative spirit. He seemed to emerge from his despair. His eyes brightened, and soon he was humming the lines of the tune which he improvised. Within a half hour he wrote down the melody which has become known familiarly as "In the Sweet By and By." It was a quaint and simple tune, but it fitted the mood of a nation which was despondent.

10. Homecoming is always a pleasant, lively thing, especially in winter. Then the swift drop of darkness shortens the day and calls the family to its circle of love. There is a stamping of snow-covered feet on the steps, a gust of sharp air from the open door, and a hearty call of love toward the kitchen, "Are all the children home?" The answer is usually a stampede of little feet to greet the father, while the loving center of the home waits her impatient turn.

C
R
U
X

11. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sensed this mystery of "When the night is beginning to lower" and called it "The Children's Hour." It is typical of human nature to be apprehensive of the dark and more so for parents to be concerned for their children who generate a double portion of love -- love for themselves as they are and one's irreplaceable affection felt for them. Thus the first hours of winter's nights are glad hours of return to warmth and love and light.

12. Men and women find their way to their spiritual home, before darkness falls, in differing ways. Some are gathered home in the light of a united family, who surround them with care before the deep darkness Others hear the loving anxiety of parents calling into the night, "Come home," as in their excitement of play children have forgotten to start their laggard way home before dark. And still others, caught in the night's deep expanse, far from home and the

friendly guidance of some solitary crossroad lamp, hear the secret voice of God calling them home through the impenetrable darkness.

13. In his youth, Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote of his sorrow in terms of “Break, Break, Break,” and it released the same stifled cry of those who also “long for the touch of a vanished hand.” But it was in his larger, older years that Tennyson wrote what brings even more comfort to all sorts of hearts who face the unknown. He was eighty-one when he wrote:

Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!

It was the tested fruit of age that could affirm triumphantly,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have cros’t the bar.

It was the comfort of an older man who was only three years away from

Twilight and evening bell
And after that the dark.

Of “Crossing the Bar,” he said to his son, “It came to me in a moment. Put it at the end of all editions of my poems.”

14. The hymnbook also tells a story which indicates it is still possible to expect resilient changes to come with older, ripened years. Actually it takes the stereoscopic view of both age and youth to achieve the three dimensional viewpoint of a great faith. Such is the tale concerning one of the most uplifting hymns of Christian immortality.
15. A man learns to live more fully only when he learns to die daily into the confidence of his Saviour’s care. He becomes more of a true personality when he surrenders his selfish whims to perform the pleasures of the Almighty’s will. He finds his abiding home in the heart of the living Christ when he senses the darkness at noon in his youth and returns from his wandering.
16. The confidence that “though he were dead yet shall he live” with his loved ones in the presence of the Lord gives new energy to his toil, deeper love to his patience, satisfying reward to his sacrifices, and triumphant victory to his despair.

HOW BEAUTIFUL TO BE WITH GOD

How beautiful to be with God,
When earth is fading like a dream,
And from this mist-encircled shore
We launch upon the unknown stream.

No doubt, no fear, no anxious care,
But comforted by staff and rod,
In the faith-brightened hour of death
How beautiful to be with God.

Then let it fade, this dream of death,
When I have done my lifework here,
Or long, or short, as seemeth best --
What matters so God's will appear.

I will not fear to launch my bark,
Upon the darkly rolling flood,
'Tis but to pierce the mist -- and then
How beautiful to be with God.

SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER

Introduction:

1. Isaiah 38:1-17.

(1) In those days Hezekiah was sick and near death. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, went to him and said to him, "Thus says the Lord: 'Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live.'"

(2) Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall, and prayed to the Lord, (3) and said, "Remember now, O Lord, I pray, how I have walked before You in truth and with a loyal heart, and have done what is good in Your sight." And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

GOO
←
HAS
THE
POWER
TO DO
THIS.

(4) And the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, saying, (5) "Go and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father: "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; surely I will add to your days fifteen years. (6) I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.'"

(7) "And this is the sign to you from the Lord, that the Lord will do this thing which He has spoken: (8) "Behold, I will bring the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down with the sun on the sundial of Ahaz, ten degrees backward." So the sun returned ten degrees on the dial by which it had gone down.

(9) This is the writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick and had recovered from his sickness:

(10) I said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years."

(11) I said, "I shall not see YAH, The Lord in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants of the world. (12) My life span is gone, taken from me like a shepherd's tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night You make an end of me.

(13) I have considered until morning -- like a lion, so He breaks all my bones; from day until night You make an end of me. (14) Like a crane or a swallow, so I chattered; I mourned

like a dove; my eyes fail from looking upward. O Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me!

(15) What shall I say? He has both spoken to me, and He Himself has done it. I shall walk carefully all my years in the bitterness of my soul. (16) O Lord, by these things men live; and in all these things is the life of my spirit; so You will restore me and make me live. (17) Indeed it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; (but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back)

See verses 4, 10-12, 16-17.

THIS STATEMENT OF FINALITY BRINGS SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS:

1. AM I SAVED?
2. DO I YET HAVE TIME TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?
3. HAVE I BEEN FAITHFUL TO GOD AND HIS SERVICE?
4. WILL I BE ETERNALLY LOST?

5. WHAT ABOUT MY WIFE? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO HER?
6. WHAT ABOUT MY CHILDREN? MY GRANDCHILDREN?
7. WHAT ABOUT MY BUSINESS?
A. Jesus and Paul traveled light.
8. IS MY WILL LEGAL? IS IT UP-TO-DATE?
9. CAN I FACE DEATH WITH COURAGE?
10. WILL THE LORD MEET ME AT THE RIVER?

A. Psalm 23:4: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

RIGHT ON

- B. Heb. 13:5-6: "I will never leave you nor forsake you."
 So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"
- (1) T. B. Larimore's mother met him with a lantern to see across the log across the creek.
- (2) Angels carried Lazarus to Abraham's bosom.
- C. ("There will be light at the river, when the redeemed ones pass o're.") AMEN

FOR DISCUSSION

We have dreamed dreams beyond our comprehending,
 Visions too beautiful to be untrue;
 We have seen mysteries that yield no clue,
 And sought our goals on ways that have no ending.
 We, creatures o the earth,
 We have seen loveliness that shall not pass;
We have beheld immortal destinies.

.....

Ay, we whose flesh shall perish as the grass
 Have flung the passion of the heart that dies
Into the hope of everlasting life.

- DYING ALONE -

1. (The result is that many stronghearted men and women of faith have found no one willing to walk up to the end of life with them while they die.) They look in vain for someone to share their sense of loneliness, which creeps over them with cosmic doubts and creaturely misgivings. They would like to share these wordless anxieties without ready-made answers, which are often more rebukes than replies. They have regrets to articulate and unfulfilled dreams to recall. There is love to bestow and a hunger to receive forgiveness-- mostly for just have been human in situations which called for a more divine response of patience and kindness than was given. Thus, the last chapter of life calls more for assurance and understanding than it requires answers. It needs communion of heart, which is a communication of confidence.
2. Against such a shared depth of compassion about life and death there seems to be a mutual conspiracy of silence, which needs to be broken

- FORSAKE ME NOT -

by men and women of faith and courage. (Not only is there a rich consolation gained in such sharing by the one who leaves, but there is also reciprocal assurance given to those who remain) Like a distant, speeding, silver plane which flashes its wings in the setting sun before it climbs over the horizon of purple mountains, a valiant soul has the right, and privilege, of granting a lasting benediction to his family and associates by affirming, "It is well with my soul."

3. What hunger there is for some message from one gone on before! Often a forgotten letter in a desk drawer will reveal the depth of inner repose and thoughtful scope of his religious faith. Sometimes a sharp underlining of a passage in a book or a penciled exclamation mark in a Bible will give a clue to a spiritual hope that will sustain a family through months of turmoil and benumbed confusion. Such an affirmation might even set straight the wild-swinging compass needle of moral guidance in a distraught son or daughter who is tempted to "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die."
4. There are ways of gentle understanding whereby loved ones can share deepest thoughts and shifting values during the kaleidoscopic years of their companionship. There is a way of living the Christian life that can leave a rich deposit of confidence and assurance for the last days, when the only fitting speech is shared in silence.

READ
RE-READ
THEN
PRAY

KNOWING TODAY WHERE YOU WILL BE TOMORROW

Just think of stepping on shore,
And finding it heaven;
Of clasping a hand,
And finding it God's;
Of breathing new air,
And finding it celestial;
Of waking up in glory,
And finding it home.

Death is not the end of the road, it is only a bend in the road. (The road winds only through those paths through which Christ Himself has gone.)

As Dr. Hinson wrote:

The stars shall live for a million years,
A million years and a day,
But God and I will live and love
When the stars have passed away.

Yea, though I walk through the
Valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For thou art with me.

(Psalm 23:4 - KJV)

Death is the chariot our heavenly Father sends to bring us
to Himself.

But the famous English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon says that death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and we should leave him to the last. He adds:

“Brother, you do not want dying grace till dying moments. What would be the good of dying grace while you are yet alive? A boat will only be needful when you reach a river. Ask for living grace and glorify Christ thereby, and then you shall have dying grace when the time comes.

Your enemy is going to be destroyed but not today . . . Leave the final shock of arms till the last adversary advances, and meanwhile hold your place in the conflict. God will in due time help you to overcome your last enemy, but meanwhile see to it that you overcome the world, the flesh and the devil.”

Most of us find comfort in being told that we are going to go on living; Paul was comforted when he was told he soon would be dying! He kept referring to death as that which was “far better.”

The fact that we don't view death with optimism just might be because we think of death as taking us from our home rather than bringing us to our home! Unlike Paul, we have become so attached to our tent that we just don't want to move.

The old song says it best:

This world is not my home,
I'm just a pass'n through.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue

Why should we fear death if it is the route to our final home? Jesus assures us that there is nothing to fear, in fact, the knowledge that we shall die gives us the courage and hope to live triumphantly in this world!

Think of how powerless death actually is! Rather than rid us of our wealth, it introduces us to "riches eternal." In exchange for poor health, death gives us a right to the Tree of Life that is for "the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2). (Death might temporarily take our friends from us, but only to introduce us to that land in which there are no good-byes.)

Naturally, we would like to know in advance what we can expect on the other side. Human nature being what it is, we grasp for some clue, some hint we might glean from those who are about to cross the boundary. We are particularly anxious to hear a good word, the assurance that all will be well.

CRUX

One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable.

Pause, stranger, when you pass me by
As you are now, so once was I
As I am now, so you will be
So prepare for death and follow me.

An unknown passerby read those words and underneath scratched this reply:

To follow you I'm not content
Until I know which way you went.

The doctor has just told you news that you thought could only be true about someone else. Your worst suspicions regarding that lump have been confirmed; you have a rare form of cancer, which almost certainly is terminal. The surgeon tells you that you have at most a year to live.

Where do you turn for comfort? To your family and friends, yes; you need them more now than ever. They sit in stunned silence when you give them the news, and they assure you of their prayers and love. You know you will not have to walk through these dark days alone.

Of course, you also turn to God. You have come to know Christ personally and have lived your life with single-minded devotion to Him and His agenda. You know the promises of God by memory.

No doubt you will vacillate between despair and hope, denial and determination. Perhaps you will have more concern for those you leave behind than you do for yourself. (Not a one of us can predict how we might react when it is our turn to hear the dreadful news.)

The book of Revelation describes those who follow the beast (Antichrist) as those who “have no rest day or night” (Revelation 14:11); but as for those who belong to the Lord, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them” (v. 13). (Believers find their death to be the joyous rest of fulfillment. And their deeds follow after them, never to be lost in the annals of eternity.) Like a pebble thrown into a pool whose ripples continue in ever-widening circles, so the deeds of the godly will reverberate for all of eternity. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord!

“As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” (Psalm 17:15).

Rest at last!

REFLECTIONS ON OUR LIVES AS DEATH APPROACHES

Heb. 9:27-28: “And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

AS DEATH APPROACHES, ALL MEN BEGIN TO TAKE AN INVENTORY OF THEIR LIVES.

1. Rom. 14:12: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

2 Cor. 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

2. Deep Soul Searching Begins: Our conscience demands our attention.

What kind of son was I to my parents?

How have I treated my parents?

What kind of husband have I been?

Have I met God’s approval as a father to my children?

Have I joyfully worked to care for my extended family?

Have I shown compassion and love to my fellow man?

What kind of person have I been in the work place?

How effective have I been as a Gospel preacher?

Is God pleased with my preaching career?

Have I really been concerned about others getting to heaven?

Have I invested my life in things that are eternal or have I wasted it in things that are perishing?

Have I caused others to fall into sin, and if so can I help to undo the wrong?

FOR DISCUSSION

A COLLAPSING TENT

Paul spoke of death as the dismantling of a tent. “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (2 Cor. 5:1).

Our present body is like a tent where our spirit dwells; it is a temporary structure. Tents deteriorate in the face of changing weather and storms. If used regularly, they often need repairs. A tattered tent is a sign that we will soon have to move. Death takes us from the tent to the palace; it is changing our address from earth to heaven. *

You’ve met camping enthusiasts who want to camp out most of the year. They can do that, of course, until the rains come or the snow begins to fly. The more uncomfortable they become, the more willing they are to move into a house. Thus, the persecuted and infirm long for heaven, while those who are healthy and fulfilled wish to postpone death indefinitely. But the time will come when even the strongest among us will have to leave the tent behind.

Some people act as if they intend to live in this body forever, not realizing that it is about to collapse around them. A tent reminds us that we are only pilgrims here on earth, en route to our final home. (Someone has said that we should not drive in our stakes too deeply, for we are leaving in the morning!)

A SAILING SHIP

Paul also speaks of death as the sailing of a ship. In a passage already quoted, he wrote, “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” (Phil. 1:23). That word depart was used for the loosing of an anchor. A. T. Robertson translates it, “To weigh anchor and put out to sea.”

Thanks to Christ, Paul was ready to embark on this special journey that would take him to his heavenly destination. Christ had already successfully navigated to the other side and was waiting with a host of Paul’s friends. Of course, he had some friends on this side too; that’s why he added, “Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.” (V. 24).

Paul’s bags were packed. But for now the Captain said, “Wait!” A few years later, Paul was closer to leaving earth’s shore. Again he spoke of death as his departure: “For I am already being poured out as a drink

offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.” (2 Tim. 4:6). The signal for him to push off was imminent. He said good-bye, but only for the time being. He would not return to Timothy, but Timothy would soon cross over and they would meet again.

The author of Hebrews picks up on the same imagery and says that we can flee to Christ to lay hold of the hope set before us. He adds, “This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us.” (Heb. 6:19-20). That means that we do not cast our anchor on anything within ourselves. We seek our security neither in feelings nor experiences. Our anchor is fastened to Christ, who is within the Holy of Holies where He resides now that His blood bought our salvation.

Philip Mauro suggests that the picture here is that of the forerunner used in ancient times to help a vessel enter the harbor safely. He would jump from the ship, wade to the harbor, and fasten the strong rope of the ship to a rock along the shore. Then, by means of a winch, the vessel was brought in.

Just so, our forerunner has gone to heaven, where He stands ready to guide us safely into the Holy of Holies. We are fastened to a rock that cannot be moved. Let the storms tear our sails to shreds; let the floors creak; let the gusts of wind attempt to blow us off course; let the tides overwhelm us; we shall arrive safely into the port. Each day, we are pulled a notch closer to the harbor by the One who proved He is more powerful than death.

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour’s love.

John Drummond tells the story of a sea captain who was asked to visit a dying man in a hospital. When the captain reached the sick man’s room, he noticed decorated flags of different colors surrounding his bed. As they talked, the captain learned that both of them had actually served on the same ship many years earlier.

“What do these flags mean?” the captain wondered.

“Have you forgotten the symbols?” the dying man asked.

HOW
GREAT
THOU
ART

Then he continued. “These flags mean that the ship is ready to sail and is awaiting orders,” the dying man replied.

Our flags must always be flying, for we know neither the day nor the hour of our departure. Some are given more notice than others, but all must go when the Celestial Clock strikes.

Thankfully, we can be ready to embark on the last leg of our voyage. Christ leads His own safely into the harbor.

A PERMANENT HOME

In a sense, to speak of heaven as our home is not a figure of speech; heaven is our home. Jesus, you will recall, spoke of leaving His disciples to build a mansion for them in the world beyond.

“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (John 14:2-3).

- The author of Hebrews wrote, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” (Heb. 2:14-15).
- Paul asked, “O Death, where is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:55).
- John assures us, “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the lord from now on’ “Yes,” says the Spirit, “That they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.” (Rev. 14:13).

IN THE TWILIGHT HOURS OF MY LIFE, CAN I DIE IN PEACE?

1. Because I have honestly faced my shortcomings and have asked a gracious God to forgive me through the blood of my Lord.
2. Because I know that through his love for me he has forgiven.
3. Because I have forgiven myself -- I stand upon God’s promises.
4. Because I know that my life goes on in eternity -- and that by God’s grace I shall see my Master face to face.
5. Being redeemed -- I shall join the ransomed dead -- to live forever.