

THE BAPTIST HOUR

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The Eternal Home

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SCRIPTURE—II Corinthians 5:1-9

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

No matter what your religion may or may not be, in your heart there is a longing for immortality. Epes Sargent puts it in these beautiful words. “The human soul is like a bird that is born in a cage. Nothing can deprive it of its natural longings, or obliterate the mysterious remembrance of its heritage.”

This is especially true when we stand in the presence of death. At the bedside of his dying daughter Louis Pasteur said, “I know only scientifically determined truth, but I am going to believe what I wish to believe, what I cannot help but believe—I expect to meet this dear child in another world.”

This hope even pierces through the fog of infidelity. Robert Ingersol delivered the funeral oration for his brother. In so doing he rose to an eloquence of mingled despair and hope.

“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 murmur is the echo of our wailing cry. From the voiceless lips of the un-replying Dead there comes no word. But in the night of Death, Hope sees a star, and listening Love can hear the rustling of a wing.

“Is there beyond the silent night
An endless day?

The tongueless secret locked in fate
We do not know—

We hope and wait.”

But the apostle Paul did know. Therefore with assurance he could “hope and wait.” “*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (II Cor. 5:1).

Jewish rabbis used to tell a beautiful story. During the famine in Egypt Joseph would thresh grain and throw the chaff in the Nile. As it floated down the river people would see it, and know that there was plenty of grain up the river.

Is not this a picture of what God has done for us? In our souls He has placed the "intimations of immortality" so that in the trials of this world we long for heaven. It was this which Paul had in mind as expressed in our scripture lesson.

Therefore, as we think of "The Eternal Home" let us note, first, the affirmation; second, the aspiration; third, the assurance.

First, consider the affirmation. "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

In this statement Paul makes two affirmations. In the first place, this life and all that goes with it is temporary. Even the body in which you live is but a tabernacle, or more exactly, a tent which may be taken down at a moment's notice. In the second place, life beyond the grave, and all that it involves, is eternal. The body which you will have is likened to a building which is erected on a firm, fixed foundation. It is a permanent dwelling place not made with man's hands. It is "a building of God . . . eternal in the heavens." The author of Hebrews expressed the same idea when he said that Abraham by faith dwelt in tents "*for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (11:9-10).

Note further that Paul says, "For we know . . ." that this is true. The word "know" in Greek may well be translated "soul knowledge." It is not a knowledge which comes through earthly experience or submits to physical proof. It is a knowledge which comes from perceiving a truth until it becomes a conviction of the soul. It is another way of saying, "By faith

. . . he looked for a city which hath foundations”

There are some things which the soul knows that the eye cannot see. They do not submit to analysis in a scientific laboratory. They are not discerned by the natural senses. But they are true nevertheless. The natural things about us are tents which may be removed at a moment's notice. Spiritual things are permanent and abiding, as is a dwelling place with fixed foundations.

What a chord of courage this truth strikes in our hearts! Amid the trials of this life “Hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustling of a wing.”

It was such a situation which evoked this note in the soul of the apostle. In his work for Christ he is “*troubled yet not distressed perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed*” (II Cor. 4:8-9). Why? Because of this conviction in his soul. Let the desert storm howl; let the biting sand beat him in the face; let the tent pegs give way, the cords break, the tent collapse!

Never mind. For in his soul is the knowledge that this soon will pass. And beyond looms large the permanent dwelling place provided by the grace of God. Like the grand old saint of God he could say, “This world is not my home. I'm just passing through.”

Second, note the aspiration. “*For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.*” Using a mixed figure of speech Paul says that he groans with earnest desire to put off the tent of his fleshy body that he might put on his eternal abode. Indeed it was the very troubles which he was enduring which made him long to be rid of earth that he might be raised in glory.

It is in this light that we can understand the troubles and trials of life. If this life were just one sweet song we should never want to leave

it. A friend tells of trying to win to Christ a man living in Southern California. He owned a large citrus grove which provided him with most every luxury his fleshy nature could desire. When my friend spoke to him of heaven he replied, "Heaven? Southern California's good enough for me." And this day those things are requiring his soul of him.

In the words of the song writer the Christian can sing,

"Home, home, heavenly home,
Fair are my dreams of thee.
The nearer I reach the end of time,
The sweeter thou art to me."

Is it not true that with the passing of time our gaze gradually turns from the things of earth to the things of heaven? The mounting aches and pains of the years serve only to focus our longing gaze upon the land where there will be "*neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be no more pain . . .*" (Rev. 21:4). Every setting sun reminds us of "*the city [that has] no need of the sun, neither of the moon . . . for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof*" (Rev. 21:23). The burdensome toils of the lingering day call us to that heavenly haven where "*there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him*" (Rev. 22:3), yet be ever refreshed as "*they shall see his face . . .*" (v. 4).

One of my dear friends is Charles B. Howard, a noble preacher of the gospel. Sometime ago I heard him say, "It's not *easy* to get old, but it's mighty *sweet* to get old when you've given the best you have in self and in substance and in service."

Yes, God even makes death to serve us as we groan, earnestly desiring the land that is fairer than day. I have noticed that every time I turn away from our family burial ground, leaving the mortal remains of a loved one who has gone to be with the Lord, heaven seems a little sweeter to me.

During World War I in a little town in Alabama a farmer went to the

public library and asked to see a map of Europe. Looking at it he asked the librarian to point out France. When asked his sudden interest in European geography where there had been none before, he replied, "Well, you see, I have a boy there now."

And so it is with heaven. Many a heart has turned longingly toward heaven because, "You see, I have a loved one there now."

One of the most beautiful stories that I ever read concerned a railroad engineer. Each day his train passed his home. He had removed a picket from the fence to enable his little daughter to put her head through the fence and watch him as he went by. One day she was absent from her accustomed place. When he arrived home he found her sick, near death. Her mother gave him a note which she had written to him. "Tell Papa I'm going to ask Jesus to take out the picket from his fence, and I'll watch for him until he comes."

Do you not know that ever thereafter heaven was sweeter to him! Like Paul he "*groaned, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with [his] house which is from heaven.*" And the Christian does not groan in vain.

Third, consider the assurance. "*Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given us the earnest of the Spirit*" (v. 5).

Paul is simply saying that when God in Christ saved us He put the desire for heaven in our hearts. Furthermore, He gave us the presence of the Holy Spirit as an "earnest" that heaven is our destiny. The word "earnest" is our term "earnest money." When you buy a house you put up earnest money to guarantee that you will go through with the transaction. So God gave the Holy Spirit to abide with us as God's earnest money that we shall go to be with Him.

Yes, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives which makes us long for our heavenly home. And He is our assurance that it shall become a reality.

There are so many things about life after death that are a mystery to us. The Bible does not tell us all that we wish to know about it. But it does tell us all that we need to know.

For one thing Paul does not expect to wander about in eternity for a million years as a bodiless spirit. Else he could hardly have wished to put off his earthly body. From his words he expects to put off his temporary tabernacle only to be clothed with his earthly body. Says he, "*If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we should be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up in life*" (vv. 3-4).

While he is at home in his earthly body he is absent from the Lord in His visible presence. But to him death is simply "*absent from the body present with the Lord*" (v. 8).

Is Paul thinking of physical death? Or is he longing for the Lord's return, when the dead shall be raised and the living transformed immediately into their incorruptible bodies (I Cor. 15:50ff.)? In either case death has no fear for him. For he knows that "whether present or absent" he is accepted of the Lord (v. 9).

What a glorious assurance for the Christian! Jesus said, "*I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also*" (John 14:2-3). In the meanwhile He has not left us as orphans in the world (14:18). In His Holy Spirit He indwells us to keep us secure. He has conquered death so that for us it need have no fear. With Paul we can cry, "*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*" (I Cor. 15:55-57).

Yes, through our Lord Jesus Christ. When Jesus came forth from the grave it was to show us that He had conquered death. His resurrection

body is a foretaste of that with which we shall be clothed.

On the night of the resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples. Standing in a body which they recognized His first words to them were "*Peace be unto you*" (John 20:21). It was His way once again of saying, "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me*" (John 14:1).

For the Christian death need hold no fear. Having stung once, it loses its sting (I Cor. 15:55). This is the assurance which we have in Christ.

A certain house was said to have a haunted room. To put an end to this dread one night the father slept in it. The next morning he came down smiling. "There," he said, "I told you. There is nothing to be afraid of there."

Through the centuries for men death was a haunted room. Jesus for three days and nights slept in this "haunted room." Then coming forth He said, "There. I told you. There is nothing to be afraid of there."

Death a haunted room? No. It is just the thin veil through which we step into the eternal, visible presence of our Heavenly Father, and our eternal home.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

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