

PREPARATION FOR HEAVEN

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A SERMON

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*“Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God,
who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.”*

2 Corinthians 5:5

HOW very confidently Paul contemplates the prospect of death! He betrays no trembling apprehensions. With the calmness and serenity, not merely of resignation and submission, but of assurance and courage, he appears joyous and gladsome, and even charmed with the hope of having his body dissolved and being girt about with the new body which God has prepared for His saints. He that can talk of the grave and of the hereafter with such intelligence, thoughtfulness, faith, and strong desire as Paul did, is a man to be envied.

Princes might well part with their crown for such a sure and certain hope of immortality. Could emperors exchange their treasures, their honors, and their dominions, to stand side by side with the humble tent maker in his poverty, they would be great gainers. Were they but able to say with him, “We are always confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord,” they might well barter earthly rank for such a requital.

This side of heaven, what can be more heavenly than to be thoroughly prepared to pass through the river of death? On the other hand, what a dreary and dreadful state of mind must they be in who, with nothing before them but to die, have no hope and see no outlet—the pall and the shroud their last adorning, the grave and the sod their destination. Without hope of rising again in a better future, or realizing a better heritage than that which should know us no more ere long, no prospects of seeing God face to face with rejoicing, well may men dislike any reference to death. So they shrink from the thought of it, far less can they tolerate its being talked of in common conversation. No marvel that they recoil from the shade of mortality when they are so ill prepared to face the reality of the soul’s departure.

But, dear friends, since it is so desirable to be ready to depart, it cannot be inexpedient sometimes to talk about it, and on my part the more so, because there is a proneness in all our minds to start aside from that grave topic which, as God shall help us, shall be our subject this evening—preparation for the great hereafter. “For,” says the apostle, “God hath wrought us for this selfsame thing,” He has prepared us for the dropping of the present body, and the putting on of the next, and He has “given us the earnest of his Spirit.”

Our three departments of meditation will be—the *work of preparation itself*, the *Author of it*, and the *seal which He sets to it*, the possession of which may resolve all scruples as to whether we are prepared or not.

I. THE WORK OF PREPARATION stands first.

Is it not almost universally admitted that some preparation is absolutely essential? Whenever the death of a friend or comrade is announced, you will hear the worst instructed say, “I hope, poor man, he was prepared.” It may be but a passing reflection or a common saying. Yet everybody will give expression to it, “I hope he was ready.” Whether the words are well understood or not, I do not know, but the currency given to them proves a unanimous conviction that some preparation is necessary for the next world. And in truth, this doctrine is in accordance with the most elementary facts of our holy religion.

Men by nature need something to be done for them before they can enter heaven, and something to be done in them, something to be done with them, for by nature they are enemies to God. Dispute it as you will, God knows best. He declares that we are enemies to him and alienated in our hearts. We need, therefore, that some ambassador should come to us with terms of peace and reconcile us to God. We are debtors as well as enemies to our Creator—debtors to His law. We owe Him what we cannot pay, and what He cannot pardon. He must exact obedience, and we cannot render it. He must, as God, demand perfection of us, and we, as men, cannot bring Him that perfection. Some Mediator, then, must come in to pay the debt for us, for we cannot pay it, neither can we be exempted from it.

There must be a substitute who shall stand between us and God, one who shall undertake all our liabilities and discharge them, and so set us free, that the mercy of God may be extended to us. In addition to this, we are all criminals. Having violated the law of God, we are already condemned.

We are not, as some vainly pretend, introduced to this world on probation, but our probation is over, we have forfeited all hope, we have broken the law, and the sentence is gone out against us, and we stand by nature as condemned criminals, tenants of this world during the reprieve of God's mercy, in fear of a certain and terrible execution, unless someone come in between us and that punishment, unless some gracious hand brings us a free pardon, unless some voice divine plead and prevail for us that we may be acquitted. If this be not done for us, it is impossible that we should entertain any well-grounded hope of entering heaven.

Say, then, brethren and sisters, has this been done for you? I know that many of you can answer, "Blessed be God, I have been reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, God is no enemy of mine, nor I of His, there is no distance now between me and God, I am brought near to Him and made to feel that He is near to me, and that I am dear to Him." Full many here present can add, "My debts to God are paid, I have looked to Christ, my Substitute. I have seen Him enter into suretyship engagements for me, and I am persuaded that He has discharged all my liabilities, I am clean before God's bar, faith tells me I am clean."

And, brethren, you know that you are no longer condemned. You have looked to Him who bore your condemnation, and you have drunk in the spirit of that verse, "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Surely this is a preparation for heaven. How could we enter there if our debts were not discharged? How could we obtain the divine favor eternally if we were still condemned criminals? How could we dwell forever in the presence of God if we were still His enemies? Come, let us rejoice in this, that He has wrought us for this selfsame thing, having championed our cause from the cradle to the grave.

Preparation for heaven consists still further in *something that must be wrought in us*, for observe, brethren, that if the Lord were to blot out all our sins, we should still be quite incapable of entering heaven unless there was a change wrought in our *natures*. According to this Book, we are dead by nature in trespasses and sins—not some of us, but all of us, the best as well as the worst, we are all dead in trespasses and sins. Shall dead men sit at the feasts of the Eternal God? Shall there be corpses at the celestial banquets? Shall the pure air of the New Jerusalem be defiled with the putrefaction of iniquity? It must not, it cannot be.

We must be quickened, we must be taken from the corruption of our old nature into the incorruption of the new nature, receiving the incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever. Only the living children can inherit the promises of the living God, for He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, we must be made living creatures by the new-creating power of grace, or else we cannot be made meet for glory.

By nature we are all worldly. Our thoughts go after earthly things. We "mind earthly things," as the apostle says. We seek after the world's joys, the world's maxims govern us, the world's fears alarm us, the world's hopes and ambitions excite us. We are of the earth earthy, for we bear the image of the first Adam. But, brethren, we cannot go to heaven as worldly men, for there would be nothing there to gratify us. The gold of heaven is not for barter to use, nor for covetousness to hoard. The rivers of heaven are

not for commerce, neither are they to be defiled by men. The joys and glories of heaven are all spiritual, all celestial.

*“Pure are the joys above the skies,
And all the region peace.”*

Such peace is of a heavenly kind, and for heavenly minds. Carnal spirits, greedy, envious spirits—what would they do in heaven? If they were in the place called heaven, they could not be in the state called heaven, and heaven is more a state than a place. Though it is probably both, yet it is mainly the former, a state of happiness, a state of holiness, a state of spirituality which it would not be possible for the worldly to reach. The incongruity of such a thing is palpable.

Therefore, you see, brethren, the Holy Spirit must come and give us new affections. We must have a fresh objective set before us. In fact, instead of minding the things that are seen, we must come to love and to aspire to the things that are not seen. Our affections, instead of going downwards to things of earth, must be allured by things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

In addition to our spiritual death and worldliness, we are all unholy by nature. Not one of us is pure in the sight of God. We are all defiled and all defiling, but in heaven they are “without fault before the throne of God.” No sin is tolerated there, no sin of thought, or word, or deed. Angels and glorified spirits delight to do God’s will without hesitation, without demur, without omission, and we, like them, must be holy, or we cannot enter into their sacred fellowship.

*“Those holy gates forever bar
Pollution, sin, and shame;
None shall obtain admission there
But followers of the Lamb.”*

But what a change must come over the carnal man to make him holy! Through what washings he must pass! What can wash him white, indeed, but that far-famed blood of the Son of God? Through what purification he must pass! What, indeed, can purify him at all but the refining energy of God the Holy Ghost? He alone can make us what God would have us to be, renewed in His image in holiness and righteousness.

That a great change must be wrought in us, even ungodly men will confess, since the idea of the heaven of the Scriptures has always been repulsive, never agreeable, to unconverted men and women. When Mohammed would charm the world into the belief that he was the prophet of God, the heaven he pictured was not at all the heaven of holiness and spirituality. His was a heaven of unbridled sensualism, where all the passions were to be enjoyed without let or hindrance for endless years. Such the heaven that sinful men would like, therefore, such the heaven that Mohammed painted for them, and promised to them.

Men in general, be they courtly, or be they coarse in their habits, when they read of heaven in the Scriptures with any understanding of what they read, curl their lips and ask contemptuously, Who wants to be everlastingly psalm singing? Who could wish to be always sitting down with these saints talking about the mighty acts of the Lord and the glorious majesty of His kingdom? Such people cannot go to heaven, it is clear, they have not character or capacity to enter into its enjoyment.

I think Whitefield was right. Could a wicked man be admitted into heaven, he would be wretched there, being unholy, he must be unhappy. From sheer distaste for the society of heaven, he might fly to hell for shelter. With the tumult of evil passions in his breast, he could not brook the triumph of righteousness in the city of the blest. There is no heaven for him who has not been prepared for it by a work of grace in his soul. So necessary is this preparation—a preparation for us, and a preparation in us.

And if we ever have such a preparation, beyond all question we *must have it on this side of our death*. It can only be obtained in this world. The moment one breathes his last, it is all fixed and settled. As the tree falls, so it must lie. While the nature is soft and supple it is susceptible of impression, stamp

what seal you may upon it, once let it grow cold and hard, fixed and frigid, you can do so no more, it is proof against any change. While the iron is flowing into the mold you can fashion it into what implement you please, let it grow cold, in vain you strive to alter its form. With pen of liquid ink in your hand you write what you will on the paper, but the ink dries, the impress remains, and where is the treachery that shall tamper with it? Such is this life of yours. It is over, all over with you for eternity, beyond alteration or emendation, when the breath has gone from the body. Your everlasting state is fixed then.

*“There are no acts of pardon passed
In the cold grave to which we haste;
But darkness, death, and long despair
Reign in eternal silence there.”*

We have no intimation in the Word of God that any soul dying in unbelief will afterwards be converted to the faith. Nor have we the slightest reason to believe that our prayers in this world can at all affect those who have departed this life. The masses of priests are fictions, without the shadow of divine authority. Purgatory, or “Pick-Purse,” as old Latimer used to call it, is an invention for making fat larders for priests and monks, but the Scriptures of truth gave it no countenance.

The Word of God says, “He that is holy, let him be holy still; he that is filthy, let him be filthy still.” Such as you are when death comes to you, such will judgment find you, and such will the eternal reward or the eternal punishment leave you, world without end. Preparation is needed, and the preparation must be found before we die.

Moreover, we ought to know—for *it is possible for a man to know whether he is thoroughly prepared*. Some have said not, but they have usually been persons very little acquainted with the matter. The writings of those grand old divines of the Puritan period abundantly prove how thoroughly they enjoyed the assurance of faith. They did not hesitate to express themselves in such language as the apostle used, “We *know* that if this earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” They were wont to speak as Job doth when he said, “I *know* that my Redeemer liveth.”

And indeed, many of the children of God among us at this present time are favored with a confident, unstaggering confidence that, let their last hour come when it may, or let the Lord Himself descend from heaven with a shout, there will be nothing but joy and peace for them—no cause of trembling, nothing that can give them dismay. Why, some of us live from year to year in constant assurance of our preparation for the bliss that awaits and the rest that remains for God’s people.

Beloved, God has not so left us in such a dubious case that we always need to be inquiring, “Am I His, or am I not?” He has given us good substantial grounds to go upon to make sure work of it. He tells us that “he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,” if we have been obedient to these two commands, we shall be saved, for our God keeps His word. He tells us that such believers, patiently continuing in well-doing, inherit eternal life. If we are kept by His grace, walking in His fear, we may rest assured that we shall come to the ultimate end of such a life, namely, the glory which abides for the faithful. We need not harbor endless questionings. What miserable work it is to stand in any doubt on this matter. Let us not be satisfied till we are sure and confident that heaven will be ours.

Alas! how many put off all thoughts of being prepared to die! They are prepared for almost anything except the one thing for which it is most necessary to be ready. If the summons should come to some of you at this moment, how dread it would be! Were we to see an angel hovering in the air, and should we have intelligence by a message from the clouds that someone of us must, on a sudden, leave his body behind him and appear before God, what cowering down, what trembling, what muttering of forgotten prayers there would be with some of you! You are not ready. You never will be ready, I fear.

The carelessness in which you have lived so long has become habitual. One would think you had resolved to die in your sins. Have you ever heard the story of Archæus, the Grecian despot, who was

going to a feast, and on the way a messenger brought him a letter, and seriously importuned him to read it? It contained tidings of a conspiracy that had been formed against him, that he would be killed at the feast. He took the letter and put it in his pocket. In vain the messenger urged that it was concerning serious matters. "Serious matters tomorrow," said Archaeus, "feasting tonight." That night the dagger reached his heart while he had about him the warning which, had he heeded it, would have averted the peril.

Alas! too many men say, "Serious things tomorrow!" They have no misgiving that when their sport is over, they will have alike the leisure and the leanings for these weighty matters. Were it not wiser, Sirs, to let these grave affairs come first? Might you not, then, find some better sport of nobler character than all the froth and frivolity to which fashion leads on? a holy merriment and a sacred feasting that well become immortal spirits.

How vain and groveling the mirth which reduces men to children, pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw, then brings them down to driveling fools, and degrades them often till they become worse than brutes. I wish I could imprint a solemn thought on the mind of some careless individuals. Reck you not that time is short, that life is precarious, that opportunities cross your path at lightning speed, that hope flatters those on whom the fangs of death are fixed, that there is no vestibule in which to fit your frame of mind, that the shock will always come sudden at last.

What sentence more trite, what sentiment more prevalent, yet what solemnity more neglected than this, "Prepare to meet your God"! Propound it, profess it, preach it as we may, the most of men are unprepared. They know the inevitable plight, they see the necessity of preparation, but they postpone and procrastinate, instead of preparing. God grant you may not trifle, any of you, until your trembling souls are launched into that sphere unknown, but not un-feared, and read your doom in hell.

Now—

II. AS TO THE AUTHOR OF THIS PREPARATION FOR DEATH, the text says, "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is God.*"

It is God alone, then, who makes men fit for heaven. He works them to the selfsame purpose. Who made Adam fit for paradise but God? And who must make us fit for the better paradise above but God? That we cannot do it ourselves is evident. According to the Scriptures, we are dead in trespasses and sins. Can the dead start from the grave of their own accord? Do you think to see coffins opened and gravestones uplifted by the natural energy of corpses? Such things were never dreamed of. The dead shall surely rise, but they shall rise because God raises them. They cannot vitalize their inert frames, neither can the dead in sin quicken themselves and make themselves fit for the presence of God.

Conversion, which prepares us for heaven, is a new creation. That word "creation" puts all the counsel, the conceit, and the contrivance of man into the background. If anyone says that he can make a new heart, let him first go and make a fly. Not until he has created such a winged insect let him presume to tell us that he can make a man a new creature in Christ Jesus. And yet to make a fly would not demonstrate that a fly could make itself, and it would offer but a feeble pretext for that wonderful creation which is supposed in a man's making himself a new heart.

The original Creation was the work of God, and the new creation must likewise be of God. To take away a heart of stone and give a heart of flesh is a miracle. Man cannot do it, if he attempts it, it shall be to his own shame and confusion. The Lord must make us anew. Have not we, who know something of the Lord's working in us, this selfsame thing, been made to feel that it is all of His grace? What first made us think about eternal things? Did we, the stray sheep, come back to the fold of our own accord? No, far from it.

***"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God."***

And ever since we have been living men in Christ Jesus. To whom must we ascribe our preservation and our progress? Must we not attribute every victory over sin, and every advance in the spiritual life, to

the operation of God, and nothing at all to ourselves? A poor simpleton once said, “’Twas God and I did the work.” “Well, but Charlie, what part did you take in it?” “Surely, then,” said he, “I did all I could to stop the Lord, and He beat me.” I suppose, did we tell the simple truth, we could say much the same. In the matter of our salvation we do all we can to oppose it—our old nature does—and He overcomes our evil propensities. From first to last, Jesus Christ has to be the Author and the Finisher of our salvation, or it never would have been begun, and it never would have been completed.

Think, beloved, of what fitness for heaven is. To be fit for heaven a man must be perfect. Go, you who think you can prepare yourselves, be perfect for a day. The vanity of your own mind, the provocation of this treacherous world, and the subtle temptation of the devil, would make short work of your empty pretensions. You would be blown about like chaff. Creature perfection, indeed! Was ever anything so absurd? Men have boasted of attaining it, but their very boastings have proved that they possessed it not. He that gets nearest to perfection is the very man who sighs and cries over the abiding infirmities of his flesh.

No, if perfection is to be reached—and it must be, or we shall not be fit for heaven—by the operation of God it must be wrought. Man’s work is never perfect, it is always marred on the wheel. His best machinery may still be improved upon, his finest productions of art might still be excelled. God alone is perfect and He alone is the Perfecter. Blessed be God, we can heartily subscribe to this truth, “He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God.”

But what shall I say to those of you, my friends, who have no acquaintance with God? You certainly cannot be fitted for heaven. Your cause is not committed to Him. He is doing nothing for you. He has not begun the good work in you. You live in this world as if there were no God. The thought, the stupendous thought of his “Being” does not affect you. You would not act any differently if there were twenty Gods, or if there were no God. You utterly ignore His claims on your allegiance, and your responsibility to His law. Virtually in thought and deed you are without God in the world.

Poor forlorn creature, you have forgotten your Creator. Poor wandering soul, you have fallen out of gear with the universe, you have become alienated from the great Father who is in heaven. I tremble at the thought. To be on the wide sea without rudder or compass, to be lost in the wilderness, where there is no way! Cheerless as your condition is, remember this, though you see not God, God sees you. God sees you now, He hears you now. If you breathe but a desire towards Him, that desire shall be accepted and fulfilled. He will yet begin to work in you that gracious preparation which shall make you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

And now, thirdly—

III. LET THE SEAL OF THIS PREPARATION be briefly, but attentively considered.

The apostle says, “He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us *the earnest of the Spirit*.” Masters frequently pay during the week a part of the wages which will be due on Saturday night. God gives His Holy Spirit, as it were, to be a part of the reward which He intends to give to His people, when, like hirelings, they have fulfilled their day. Our country friends just before harvest go out into the fields, and they pick half a dozen ears that are ripe, braid the ends, and hang them up over the mantle shelf as a kind of earnest of the harvest.

So God gives us His Holy Spirit to be in our hearts as an earnest of heaven, and as the ears of wheat are of the same quality and character as the harvest, so the gift of the Holy Spirit is the antepast of heaven. When you have Him, you have a plain indication to your soul of what heaven will be. You have a part of heaven—“a young heaven,” as Dr. Watts somewhere calls it, within you.

Ask yourself, then, dear hearer, this question, “Have I received the earnest of the Spirit?” If so, you have the preparation for heaven, if not, you are still a stranger to divine things, and you have no reason to believe that the heaven of the saints will be your heritage. Come, now, have you received the Holy Spirit? Do you reply, “How may I know?” Wherever the Holy Spirit is, He works certain graces in the soul—repentance, to wit. Have you ever repented of sin? I mean, do you hate it? Do you shun it? Do

you grieve to think you should once have loved it? Is your mind altogether changed with regard to sin, so that what once seemed pleasure now is pain, and all the sweetness of sin is poison to your taste?

Where the Holy Spirit is, repentance is followed by the whole train of graces, all in a measure, not any in perfection, for there is always room to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ. Such is *patience*, which submits to the Lord's will, such too, the gracious disposition of *forgiveness*, which enables us to bear injuries and to forgive those that vex us, such likewise, that holy courage which is not ashamed to own our Lord, or to defend His cause.

In fact, where the Holy Ghost is bestowed, all the graces of the Spirit will be communicated in some degree. Though they will all need to grow, yet there will be the seeds of them all. Where the Holy Spirit is, there will be the joy. No delight can be more animating or more elevating than that which springs from the indwelling of God in the soul. Think of God coming to abide in this poor bosom! Why, were a cross of diamonds or pearls glittering on your breast, some might envy you the possession of such a treasure, but to have God within your breast is infinitely better.

God dwells in us, and we in Him. Oh! sacred mystery! Oh! birth of unspeakable joy! Oh! well of bliss divine that makes earth like heaven! Have you ever had this joy—the joy of knowing that you are pardoned, the joy of being sure that you are a child of God, the joy of being certain that all things work together for your good, the joy of expecting that ere long, and the sooner the better, you shall be forever beyond gunshot of fear, and care, and pain, and want? Where the Spirit of God is, there is more or less of this joy, which is the earnest of heaven.

This gift, moreover, will be conspicuously evidenced by a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Ghost is not in you if you rely on anything but Jesus, but if, as a poor guilty sinner, you have come to Him, partaken of His gracious pardon, kissed His blessed feet, and are now depending upon Him alone, you have received the Holy Ghost, and you have got the antepast of heaven.

Brethren and sisters, it is intensely desirable that we should seek more to be consciously filled with the Holy Spirit. We get easily contented with a little spiritual blessedness. Let us grow more covetous of the best gifts. Let us crave to be endued with the Holy Spirit, and to be baptized in the Holy Ghost and in fire. The more we get of Him the more assurance we shall have of heaven for our peace, the more foretastes of heaven for our happiness, and the more preparation for heaven in lively hope.

Thus have I shown you the need of preparation, the Author of preparation, and the great seal which proves the verity of that preparation. If your honest conscience allows your humble claim to have received this sacred token of salvation, how happy you should be! Do not be afraid to be happy. Some Christians seem to court the gloom of despondency as if they dared not bask in the sunshine of heaven.

I have sometimes heard people say that they have *not enjoyed themselves*. No, dear friends, pity, I think, if any of us ever should. It would be a poor kind of enjoyment if we merely enjoyed ourselves. But oh! it is delightful when you can enjoy your God, and when you can enjoy the mercies that are in Him, the promises that are in Him, and the blessings which, through Him, come to you. When you gather round the table of the Lord's love, do not be afraid to partake of the feast. There is nothing put there to be looked at. There is no confectionery spread out for show. If you dare conclude that you are living in Christ, and living on Christ, do not be afraid to sing as you go home—

*“Now I can read my title clear
To mansions in the skies;
I bid farewell to every fear,
And wipe my weeping eyes.”*

It will be a blessing to your family for you to be happy. You may find that something has gone wrong while you have been away. Go home as happy as you can be, and you will be better able to bear the cares and vexations that must and will befall you. Keep your spirit well worked up to the fear of the Lord, and the enjoyment of His presence. Then, if some little cross matter should come to disquiet you,

you can say, “Who am I that I should be vexed and chafed, or lose my temper, or be cast down about such a matter as this? This is not my sphere of well-being, this is not my heaven, this is not my God.”

*“If Thou shouldst take them all away,
Yet should I not repine;
Before they were possess’d by me,
They were entirely Thine.*

*Nor would I speak a murmuring word,
Though the whole world were gone,
But seek enduring happiness
In Thee, and Thee alone.”*

But oh! suppose you feel persuaded and honestly admit that you are not prepared to die, not made meet for heaven? Do not utterly despair, but be grateful that you live where the Gospel is preached. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Be much in hearing the Word, and be much in earnest prayer that the hearing may be blessed to your soul. Above all, give diligence to that divine command which bids you trust in Jesus Christ, whom He has sent.

Eternal life lies in the nutshell of that one sentence, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” All that is asked of you—and even that grace gives you—is simply to trust in Him who, as Son of God, died for the sins of men. God give you that faith, and then may you meet death with joy, or look forward to the coming of the Lord with peace, whichever may be your lot. Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.