

PAUL'S DESIRE TO DEPART NO. 274

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, SEPTEMBER 11, 1859
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS

*“Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”
Philippians 1:23*

WE know that death is not the end of our being. By a confident faith we are persuaded that better things await us in another state. We are speeding onwards through our brief life like an arrow shot from a bow, and we feel that we shall not drop down at the end of our flight into the dreariness of annihilation, but we shall find a heavenly target far across the flood of death.

The force which impels us onwards is too mighty to be restrained by death. We have that within us which is not to be accounted for, if there be not a world to come, and especially, as believers, we have hopes, and desires, and aspirations, which cannot be fulfilled, and which must have been given us purposely to make us miserable, and to tantalize us, if there be not a state in which every one of these shall be satisfied and filled to the brim with joy.

We know too, that the world into which we shall soon be ushered is one which shall never pass away. We have learned full well by experience that all things here are but for a season. They are things which shall be shaken, and therefore, will not remain in the day when God shall shake both heaven and earth.

But equally certain are we that the inheritance which awaits us in the world to come is eternal and unfailing, and that the cycles of ages shall never move it, that the on-flowing of eternity itself shall not diminish its duration. We know that the world to which we go is not to be measured by leagues, nor is the life thereof to be calculated by centuries.

Well does it become every one of us then, professing the Christian name, to be questioning ourselves as to the view which we take of the world to come. It may be there are some of you now present who call yourselves believers, who look into a future state with shuddering and awe. Possibly there may be but few here who have attained to the position of the apostle, when he could say that he had a desire to depart and to be with Christ. I take it that our view of our own death is one of the readiest tokens by which we may judge of our own spiritual condition.

When men fear death, it is not certain that they are wicked, but it is quite certain that if they have faith it is in a very weak and sickly condition. When men desire death, we may not rest assured that they are therefore righteous, for they may desire it for wrong reasons, but if for right reasons they are panting to enter into another state, we may gather from this not only that their minds are right with God, but that their faith is sanctified and that their love is fervent.

I hope that the service of this morning may have the effect of leading every one of us to self-examination. I shall endeavor while preaching to search myself, and I pray that each one of you may be led to hear for himself, and I beseech you to put home each pertinent and personal question to your own souls, while in a quiet, but I hope in a forcible manner, I shall endeavor to describe the apostle's feelings in prospect of departure.

Three things I shall observe this morning. First of all, *the apostle's description of death*, secondly, *his desire for it*, and thirdly, *the reasons which justified such a desire*.

I. THE APOSTLE'S DESCRIPTION OF DEATH.

We are to understand this of course as being a description not of the death of the wicked, but of the death of the righteous. And you will remark the apostle does not call it an *arrest*. In the death of the

wicked, the sheriff's officer of justice does lay his clay-cold hand upon the man's shoulder, and he is his prisoner forever. The sergeant-at-arms in the name of the justice which has been incensed, puts the fetters about his wrists, and conducts him to the prison of despair and everlasting torment.

In the Christian's case, however, there is no such thing as an arrest, for there is no one that can arrest him. We sometimes talk of death arresting the believer in the midst of his career, but we misuse terms. Who shall arrest a man against whom there is neither conviction nor accusation? Who is he that condemneth the man for whom Christ has died? Nay, further, who shall so much as lay anything to the charge of God's elect? How then can the Christian be arrested? It is no such thing, it is an arrest of the ungodly, but not of the believer.

Nor does Paul speak of the believer's death as being a sudden *plunge*. This is a proper description of the death of the ungodly. He stands upon the brink of a precipice, and beneath him there is a yawning and bottomless gulf. Through thick darkness he must descend, and into it his unwilling spirit must take a desperate leap.

Not so the believer. His is no leap downwards, it is a climbing upwards. He has his foot upon the first round of the ladder, and joyful is the hour when his Master says unto him, "Come up higher; ascend to another guest chamber, and here feast upon richer dainties than those I have given thee below." Aye! 'tis no leap in the dark. 'Tis no plunge into a cold sea, 'tis simply a departure.

Let me describe what I think the apostle means by the figure of a *departure*. Many deaths are preceded by a long season of sickness, and then I think we might picture them by the departure of a ship from its moorings.

There lies the ship in its haven, there is a friend of yours about to journey away to some distant clime. You will never see his face again in the flesh. He is going to emigrate, he will find a home in another and he hopes a happier land. You stand upon the shore, you have given him the last embrace. The mother has given her son the last kiss, the friend has shaken him by the hand for the last time, and now the signal is given, the anchor is taken up, the rope which held the ship to the shore is loosed, and lo, the ship is moving and she floats outward towards the sea. You look, you still wave your hand as you see the ship departing. Your friend stands on some prominent spot on the deck, and there he waves his handkerchief to the last.

But the most sharp sighted of friends in such scenes must lose sight of one another. The ship floats on, you just now catch a sight of the sails, but with the strongest telescope you cannot discover your friend. He is gone, it is his departure. Weep as you may, you cannot bring him back again. Your sorrowful tears may mingle with the flood that has carried him away, but they cannot entice a single wave to restore him to you.

Now even so is the death of many a believer. His ship is quietly moored in its haven. He is calmly lying upon his bed. You visit him in his chamber. Without anxiety of spirit he bids you farewell. His grip is just as hearty as he shakes your hand, as ever it was in the best hour of his health. His voice is still firm, and his eye is still bright. He tells you he is going to another and a better land. You say to him, "Shall I sing to you"—

"Begone unbelief, my Savior is near"?

"Oh, no" says he, "sing me no such a hymn as that, sing me—

*"Jerusalem my happy home,
Name ever dear to me,
When shall my labours have an end
In joy, and peace, and thee."*

He bids you a last farewell. You see him for a little season even after that, although he is too far gone again to address you. It may be a partial insensibility seizes hold of him, he is like a ship that is just going out of sight, you look at his lips and as you bow down your ear, you can catch some faint syllables

of praise. He is talking to himself of that precious Jesus who is still his joy and hope. You watch him till the last heaving breath has left the body, and you retire with the sweet reflection that his spirit on a glassy sea has floated joyously to its post.

Thus the believer's death is a departure. There is no sinking in the wave, there is no destruction of the vessel, it is a departure. He has gone, he has sailed over a calm and quiet sea, and he is gone to a better land.

At other times deaths are more sudden, and are not heralded by prolonged sickness. The man is in health, and he is suddenly snatched away, and the place which knew him once knows him no more forever. I am about to use a figure which will seem to you extremely homely and certainly could not be classical.

I remember to have been once a spectator in a sorrowful scene. A company of villagers, the younger branches of a family, were about to emigrate to another land. The aged mother, who had not for some years left her cottage and her fireside, came to the railway station from which they must start on their departure. I stood among the sorrowful group as a friend and minister. I think I see the many embraces which the fond mother gave to her son and daughter, and the little ones, her grandchildren.

I see them even now folding their arms about her aged neck, and then bidding farewell to all the friends in the village who had come to bid them adieu. And well I remember her, who was about to lose the props of her household. A shrill sound is heard, as if it were the messenger of death, it sends a pang through all hearts. In great haste at the small village station the passengers are hurried to their seats. They thrust their heads out of the carriage window. The aged parent stands on the very edge of the platform that she may take the last look. There is a sound from the engine, and away goes the train.

I remember well the instant when that poor woman, leaning on her staff, sprang up from the chair with which she had been accommodated, and jumping from the platform, rushed along the railway with all her might, crying, "My children! My children! My children! They are gone, and I shall never see them again."

The figure may not be classical, but nevertheless I have been reminded of it by many a death. When I have seen the godly suddenly snatched away—no time to watch them—they are gone, swift as the wind itself could bear them, as if the hasty waves of the sea had buried them out of sight. It is our affliction and our trouble, but we must stand behind and weep, for they are gone beyond recall.

Notwithstanding, there is something pleasant in the picture. It is but a departure, they are not destroyed, they are not blown to atoms, they are not taken away to prison. It is but a departure from one place to another. They still live, they still are blessed. While we weep they are rejoicing. While we mourn they are singing psalms of praise. Remember this my brethren in the apparel of mourning, and if you have lost friends of late, this may tend to console your spirits.

Death to a believer is but a departure, yet what a departure it is! Can you and I think calmly of it? The time must come when I must depart from wife and children, and from house and home, when I must depart from everything that is dear to me on earth. The time is coming to you, oh rich Christian, when you must depart from all the comforts of your estate, from all the luxuries of your household, from all the enjoyments which your rank confers upon you.

And oh, poor Christian, lover of your home, the time is coming when you must depart from your cot, homely though it is, still dear unto you, you must leave the place of your toil, and the sanctuary of your rest. We must mount as on eagle's wings far from this world. We must bid adieu to its green fields as well as its dreary streets. We must say farewell to its blue skies and to its dusky clouds, farewell to foe and friend, farewell to all we have, alike to trial and to joy. But blessed be God, it is not the last look of a criminal condemned to die, it is the farewell of one who departs to another and a happier land.

The apostle's description of death, however, is not finished. He has here only pictured that which is visible. We now come to notice his description of the invisible part of death—

"In vain the fancy strives to paint

*The moment after death;
The glories which surround the saint
When yielding up his breath.
This much—and this is all we know,
They are supremely blest;
Have done with sin, and care, and woe,
And with their Savior rest.”*

This is precisely the apostle's description of the state of the believer after death. They depart, yes, but whither? To be with Christ. Just observe how quickly these scenes follow each other. The sail is spread, the soul is launched upon the deep. How long will be its voyage? How many wearying winds must beat upon the sail ere it shall be reefed in the port of peace? How often shall that soul be tossed upon the waves before it comes to the sea that knows no storm.

Oh tell it, tell it everywhere, yon ship that has just departed is already at its haven. It did but spread its sail and it was there. Like the old ship on the lake of Galilee, there was a storm that tossed it, but Jesus said, "Peace, be still," and immediately it came to land.

Yes, think not that there is a long period between the instant of death and the eternity of glory. There is not so much as space for the intervening of a lightning's flash. One gentle sigh, the fetter breaks, we scarce can say it is gone before the ransomed spirit takes its mansion near the throne. We depart, we are with Christ, more quickly than I can say the words, swifter than speech can express them they become true. They depart, and they are with Christ, the same instant they have closed their eyes on earth they have opened them in heaven.

And what is this invisible part of death? "*To be with Christ.*" Who can comprehend this but the Christian? It is a heaven which the worldling cares not for, if he could have it, he would not pawn his meanest lust to gain it. To be with Christ is to him a thing of nought, as gold and silver are of no more value to little children than the pieces of platter with which they will amuse themselves. So heaven and being with Christ is of no value to the childish sons of earthly mirth. They know not what a mass of glory is crowded into that one sentence. "To be with Christ."

To the believer who understands it, it means, first, *vision*. "Thine eyes shall see him." I have heard of *Him*, and though I have not seen His face, unceasingly I have adored Him. But I shall *see* Him. Yes, we shall actually gaze upon the exalted Redeemer! Realize the thought. Is there not a young heaven within it? You shall see the hand that was nailed for you, you shall kiss the very lips that said, "I thirst," you shall see the thorn-crowned head, and bow with all the blood-washed throng, you, the chief of sinners, shall adore Him who washed you in His blood, when you shall have a vision of His glory.

Faith is precious, but what must sight be? To view Jesus as the Lamb of God through the glass of faith makes the soul rejoice with joy unspeakable, but oh! to see Him face to face, to look into those dear eyes, to be embraced by those divine arms, rapture begins at the very mention of it! While I speak of Him, my soul is like the chariots of Amminadib, and I desire to depart and to be with Him.

But what must the vision be when the veil is taken from His face, and the dimness from our eyes, and when we shall talk with Him even as a man talks with his friend. But it is not only vision, it is *communion*. We shall walk with Him, He shall walk with us, He shall speak to us, and we shall speak to Him. All that the spouse desired in Solomon's Song, we shall have, and ten thousand times more.

Then will the prayer be fulfilled "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his lips, for his love is better than wine." Then we shall be able to say, "His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me." Then will He tell us His love, then will He rehearse the ancient story of the everlasting covenant, of His election of us by His own true love, of His betrothal of us through His boundless affection, of His purchase of us by His rich compassion, of His preservation of us by His omnipotence, and of His bringing us safe at last to glory as the result of His promise and His blood.

And then will we tell Him of our love, then into His ear will we pour out the song of gratitude, a song such as we have never sung on earth, unmixed and pure, full of serenity and joy, no groans to mar

its melody, a song rapt and seraphic, like the flaming sonnets which flash from burning tongues above. Happy, happy, happy day, when vision and communion shall be ours in fullness! "To be with Christ which is far better."

Nor is this all, it means *fruition* of Christ. Here we look and long to taste, or if we taste it is but a sip, and we long to drink to the full. *Here* we are like Israel in the wilderness, who had but one cluster from Eschol, *there* we shall be in the vineyard! Here do we have the manna falling small, like coriander seed, but there shall we eat the bread of heaven and the old corn of the kingdom.

We have sometimes on earth, lusts, ungratified desires, that lack satisfaction, but there the lust shall be slain and the desire shall be satiated. There shall be nothing we can want, every power shall find the sweetest employment in that eternal world of joy.

There will be a full and lasting fruition of Christ, and last of all upon this point there shall be a sharing with Christ in His glory, and that forever. "We shall see him," yes, and let us have the next sentence, and "shall be like him when we shall see him as he is."

Oh Christian, antedate heaven for a few years. Within a very little time you shall be rid of all your trials and your troubles, your aching head shall be girt with a crown of glory, your poor panting heart shall find its rest and shall be satisfied with fullness as it beats upon the breast of Christ. Your hands that now toil shall know no harder labor than harp-strings can afford. Your eyes now suffused with tears shall weep no longer. You shall gaze in ineffable rapture upon the splendor of Him who sits upon the throne.

Nay, more, upon His throne shall you sit. He is King of kings, but you shall reign with Him. He is a priest after the order of Melchisedec, but you shall be a priest with Him. Oh rejoice! The triumph of His glory shall be shared by you, His crown, His joy, His paradise, these shall be yours, and you shall be co-heir with Him who is the Heir of all things. Does not this very description of the unseen part of death stir up in the heart of the believer a longing "to depart and to be with Christ which is far better"?

II. I have thus, as well as I was able, spoken upon the first part. And now my friends, let us consider THE APOSTLE'S DESIRE.

How differently do men regard death. We have seen men shriek at the prospect of it. I have seen the man driven to madness when the skeleton king has stared him in the face. Pacing up and down his chamber, he has declared with many a curse and imprecation that he would not and could not die—shrieking so that you could scarcely bear his company. He has looked forward to death as the concentration of all despair and agony and he has vainly striven, with all his might, not to die.

When he felt at last that death was stronger than he, and that he must get a desperate fall in the struggle, then has he began to shriek and to cry in such a strain that scarce demons themselves could excel the despair concentrated in each shriek.

Others have we seen who have met death somewhat more calmly. Biting their lips, and setting fast their teeth, they have endeavored to keep up appearances, even in the last moment, but they have endured the inward suffering, betrayed to us most plainly by the staring eye, and the awful look. Others too, we have seen, who, callous through sin, totally deserted by God's Spirit and given up to a seared conscience, have gone to their death with idiot resignation. They have even played the madman yet more fully, and have tried to brag and bully even in the jaws of Hell.

Many Christians, have we met—true believers—who can go so far as to say they were willing to die. Please God, whenever the solemn hour should come, they were prepared to go up to their chamber and stretch themselves upon their bed and say, "Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace." But the apostle had gone further than they. He said he had a desire to depart, and the desire was a strong one. The Greek word has much force in it. He pants, he longs to be gone. I might paraphrase it by one of the verses of an old hymn—

*"To Jesus, the crown of my hope,
My soul is in haste to be gone."*

He desired not to get away from earth for he loved to serve his Master, but he desired to be with Christ, which he declared to be far better. I ask you, if you were in Paul's condition would not such a desire contain the very fullness of wisdom. There is a ship at sea, fully laden. It has a precious cargo of gold on board. Happy is the kingdom that shall receive the wealth which is contained within its hold. Would you not if you were a possessor of such a vessel, long to be safe in port. The empty ship needs scarcely fear the water for what has she to lose. If it casts its ballast into the sea, what is it the poorer? But when the ship is full of treasure, well may the captain long to see it safely moored.

Now Paul was full of faith and love. He could say, "I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." And what wonder therefore that he was longing to be safely anchored at home. So the soldier, who in the midst of battle has smitten down foe after foe, knows that a high reward awaits him. He has charged upon the enemy and driven them back in many a desperate struggle. He has already been victor. Do you wonder he wishes the fight now were over, that his laurels may be safe? If he had played the coward he might long that the campaign should be protracted, that he might redeem his disgrace.

But having so far fought with honor he may well desire that the garment rolled in blood, may be rolled up forever. Ay! and so was it with the apostle. He had fought a good fight, and knew that the crown was laid up for him in heaven, and he anticipated the triumph which Christ would give him, and what marvel that panting and longing, he said, "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ which is far better." Upon this point I am constrained to be brief, because the next division involves the whole matter, and upon this I would be somewhat longer. And may God grant that what I shall say upon it may be impressive.

III. PAUL'S REASONS FOR LONGING TO DEPART.

There have been—it is the part of candor to admit it—there have been other men besides Christians who have longed to die. There is the suicide who, mad, from life's history hangs to be hurled, even though hell receive him. Tired of all life's troubles he thinks he sees a way to escape from his toil and from his sorrow through the grim gate of death. He stains his hand with his own blood, and red with his own gore appears before his Maker.

Ah fool, to leap from *one* evil to a myriad! Ah madman, to plunge from little streams of woe into an unfathomable gulf of agony! There can be no more absurd, revolting, and insensible act, than for a man to take away his life. Setting aside the horrors of crime that surround it, how foolish is the attempt to escape by rushing into the very midst of danger!

The ostrich who buries her head in the sand, and when she cannot see the hunter thinks the hunter cannot see her, is sensible and wise compared with such a man, who rushing into the very thick of the battle hopes in this way to escape from his enemy. How can it be you foolish man? Is the stream too deep for you already, and instead of seeking to find a shore by faith in God, do you seek the center of the stream that you may get a firmer footing there? Oh foolish generation and unwise, "Put up thy sword into thy scabbard and do yourself no harm," for harm you will do if you rush into a greater evil to escape the less.

There have been other men, who with a so-called philosophic spirit, have desired to die. Some men are sick altogether of mankind. They have met with so many ungrateful and deceitful wretches that they say, "Let me get rid of them all.

*'Oh for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Where rumor of oppression never more
May reach mine ear.'"*

And they have thought to find this lodge in the wilderness of death, and so they long for the wings of a dove to flee away from the degenerate race of men. Not so this apostle. He was no such coward as to fly from evils, he sought to better them. The apostle loved his race, he was no man-hater. He could say

that he loved them all, and thus he had prayed for them all, and had carried them in the bowels of Christ continually to the throne of mercy.

Others too, have thought by getting out of the world, they should get rid of their disappointments. They have struggled very hard to get rich, or they have striven for fame, and they have not succeeded in their ambitious designs, and then they have said, "Let me die."

Now the apostle was never disappointed in seeking wealth for he never cared for it. He had no desires whatever beyond food and raiment. He wished for nothing more, and as for rank, that he utterly despised. He did tread beneath his feet as the mire of the streets all the honors that man could give him. Nor was the apostle in any sense a disappointed man. He had sought to spread his Master's fame and he had done it. He had a standard to plant and right well had he planted it. He had a Gospel to preach and he did preach it everywhere with all his might. He was a singularly happy man, and therefore he had no such cowardly reasons for desiring to depart.

Others too, have said that they wished to depart because of their great suffering. Now the apostle thought of no such dastardly flight. He was ready for all weathers. He had been beaten with rods, he had been stoned, he had been shipwrecked, but he could say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto me." He did not wish to escape from persecution. He rejoiced therein. He had often sung a hymn in prison, besides that hymn which he had sung with Silas for his companion. He had often shouted in the prospect of the block or the flames.

Nor did he wish to die because of old age, for he was not an aged man when he wrote this epistle. He was just then, I suppose, in full vigorous health, and though in prison, I do think that an angel might have ransacked the whole world before he could have found a happier man than the apostle Paul, for a man's happiness consists not in the wealth which he possesses. In the bare dungeons of Rome, Paul, the tent maker, had a glory about him which Nero never had in all his palaces, and there was a happiness there to which Solomon in all his glory had never attained. So then, the desire of Paul to depart is for these reasons, far superior to the desire of the mere philosopher, or of the disappointed worldling.

What then made Paul wish to depart? I shall put it thus—the same reasons prompt the desires of every true believer, but they can have no power whatever with many here, who have no desire to depart, because for you to die would be not happiness and bliss, but an eternal weight of misery.

First, the apostle felt a desire to depart because he knew that in departing and being with Christ he should be clean rid of sin. Paul hated sin, every true believer does the same. There have been times with us brethren and sisters, when we could say, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Sin has been our plague. Like righteous Lot in Sodom, the sins of others have vexed us, but alas! we have had to bear a Sodom in our own hearts, which has vexed us still more.

As to the trials and troubles of this world, they are nothing at all to the believer, compared with the annoyance of sin. Could he get rid of his unbelief, of his murmuring disposition, of his hasty temper—could he get rid of the various temptations of Satan, could he be clean, and pure, and perfect, he would be thoroughly satisfied. And this made the apostle long to depart. "Oh," saith he to himself, "one baptism in the stream of death and I am perfect—but to pass the chill and dreary stream, and I shall stand without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, before the throne of God."

The dog of hell shall follow us to the very edge of Jordan, but he cannot swim that stream. The arrows of temptation will be shot at us as long as we are here, but on the other side of Jordan these darts can never wound us more. Rejoice then, believer, in the prospect of death, because in dying you are once and for all clean rid of sin. When I lay down this body I have laid down every infirmity, and every lust, and every temptation, and when clothed upon with that house which is from heaven, I have girt about my loins perfection and unsullied purity.

But oh! ye that believe not in Christ, ye do not desire to die for such a reason as this. For you there is no such a prospect. For you to die will be but to plunge deeper into sin. You sin now, and when you die, your spirit will descend to hell, where, in the midst of fit companions, whose guilt is ripened, you shall spend an eternity in oaths, and curses, and blasphemies.

O sinner! today you sow your sins in the furrows, and when you die you shall reap the harvest. Today you break the clods, today you work in the husbandry of iniquity, then there shall be a shouting of an awful harvest home. When pressed down with the sheaves of your sins, divine justice shall bring forth the harvest of misery and torment to you. You have reason enough to long to live, because for you to die is to reap the reward of your iniquities.

Again, Paul longed to die for another reason, because he knew that as soon as he should depart he would meet his brethren in faith who had gone before. This desire also prompts you and me. I long to see, though it is but a few hours since we have lost their society, those two sisters, and the dear brother who during this week have departed in Christ. Worshipping among us but a few days ago, it seems a strange thing to talk of them as being in heaven. But there they are, far from the reach of mortal vision. At our departure we shall see them.

It was our happiness to see them not long before their departure, and to mark it down as one of the notabilia of our life, that these three, all of them alike, died in quiet peace singing themselves into heaven, never staying their song so long as memory and breath held out. We shall see them.

But we have others we are longing for. Some of you may remember the departed wife, scarce cold within her grave. Many of you look back to dear little ones taken away in their infancy, carried off to their father's God. Many of you remember aged parents, those who taught you in the way of God, the mother from whose lips you learned the first verse of Scripture, and the father upon whose arms you were carried for the first time up to the house of God. They are gone, but the joyous reflection remains that we are going in the same direction, and that we shall meet them soon.

Some of us can look back through generations and trace our pedigree through the saints, and we are longing for the time when the whole band of us, those who have gone in olden time, and those who remain may sing together that new song of praise to our common God.

Beloved, we have high joys in prospect, we shall soon join the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. Our companions now are but poor and despised, but we shall soon be brethren with princes. Moses, who was king in Jeshurun, and David who ruled over Israel, shall not be ashamed to call us brethren, for the Highest himself shall acknowledge us, and He that on the throne does sit shall lead us unto living fountains of waters, and in His gracious fellowship shall wipe away all tears from off our faces.

I think that the company of apostles and prophets, and holy martyrs and confessors, who have gone before, will be a very sweet part of the bliss of the redeemed. And all this may make us pant to depart.

But O, ye ungodly ones! ye who have never been converted, and who fear not God, this hope is not for you. You must go to your own place. And whither must you go? To your drunken companions damned before you? Must you go down to the pit with harlots and with the profane? Whither away, whither away, you careless man, you lover of sin? Whither are you going when you die? Your answer might well be this doleful ditty, "I am going to be the guest of devils, I am going to feast with fiends, I am going to abide with murderers, and whoremongers, and adulterers, and with such as God has condemned. These must be my companions forever."

I think I see the wheat of God standing in the valley every year, about to be gathered into the garner of heaven in its own place, and yonder I see the tares, and what is the message for them? "Gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them." And who knows in what bundle you may be? You may be bound up in the same bundle with murderers and suicides.

Yes, the men who you despise may be your companions in the bundle of the wicked. The drunkard and the swearer, whom some of you pretendedly good people look down upon with scorn, may be your bundle companions, your bed-fellows forever when you make your bed in hell and abide in everlasting torment.

But last of all, Paul's grand reason for desiring to depart was to be with Christ. Again I say, simple though the words be—to be with Christ, have all heaven condensed in them. Like the sounding of the silver trumpet of jubilee rings this precious sentence, "To be with Christ." Like the harps of the

glorified—like the singing of the redeemed, like the hallelujahs of paradise, does this ring upon my ears, “To be with Christ.” Lift up your voices, ye seraphim! Tune your hearts anew, ye seraphs! Shout for joy, ye blood-washed, but your loudest strains cannot excel the thundering glory of this magnificent but brief sentence, “To be with Christ, which is far better.”

This, my beloved—this shall well repay the tiresome pilgrimage of life. This reward shall be sufficient for all our contests with temptation, for all the shame we have endured in following Christ, in the midst of a wicked generation. This, this shall be all the heaven that our largest desires shall crave. This immensity of bliss shall stretch across eternity.

But O unbeliever, what have you to do with such a hope as this? You cannot desire to depart and to be with Christ, for what is Christ to you? Today you despise Him. The man of sorrow you esteem not. Jesus of Nazareth you do not regard. He is preached to you every Sabbath day, but you despise Him. With many tears have I presented Him to you, but you have shut your heart against Him, He has knocked at your door and there He stands shivering even now, but you will not admit Him.

Beware you that despise Jesus, for in another world you shall see Him after another fashion. You too shall be with Him, but it shall be but for an instant. Summoned before His bar, dragged reluctantly to His dread tribunal, you shall see Him whom you despise, you shall see Him and not another.

But oh! with what astonishment will you behold Him, and what amazement shall seize upon you! You shall see Him, but no longer as the humble man! His eyes shall be as flames of fire. Out of His mouth shall go a two-edged sword. About Him shall be wrapped “the rainbow wreath, and robes of storm,” and He shall speak in louder tones than the noise of many waters, and in great thundering shall He address you, “Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire in hell, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

Oh “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the way when his wrath is kindled but a little.” Oh, go to your houses, may God the Spirit draw you to your chambers, and may you there be led to fall upon your knees, confess your guilt, and humbly seek for pardon, through that precious blood which flows freely this day, and which will freely give pardon to you if with all your heart you seek it.

May God's Spirit lead you so to seek that you may find, and may you and I, and all of us, in the day of our departure, see the land before us—the happy shore of heaven. May we know that as our vessel sails from earth it shall only take a hasty voyage “To be with Christ which is far better.” God the Spirit visit you now, God the Son bless you, God the Father remember you, through Jesus. Amen.

[The absence of the regular reporter is the publishers' apology for the incorrectness of this sermon. Mr. Spurgeon has found it utterly impossible to recall the words which he uttered, and which many of his hearers declare to have been attended with peculiar power.]

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. 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.