

THE DOCTRINE OF REVELATION Chapter 18

REVELATION IN GLORY THE JOY OF DEATH AND HEAVEN

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Transcript

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THE JOY OF DEATH AND HEAVEN

We are now to consider some of the details revealed in Scripture about the death of a child of God. It is a most important and practical subject, and, though a solemn one, a very blessed one too; for it is then that the saint enters into glory. Let it be pointed out that if we are prepared for God's summons to pass from this life, then, whether His messenger be death or the appearing of the Lord of life, we shall be equally ready. On the other hand, those who are unprepared for death, yet profess to be daily looking for that Blessed Hope, are woefully deceiving themselves that they will be among the number who shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. What we have here said requires no proof: it is self-evident that since a saint's departure from this scene is in order for him to enter the presence of God, that if he be prepared for that, it can make no difference to his soul whether death or Christ personally be the one to conduct him thither. Let the Christian make his calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10) by ascertaining that he has a valid title to Heaven through Christ (Rom. 5:11) and a personal meetness by the miracle of the new birth (John 3:5; Col. 1:12), and he has no good reason to dread either death or the Redeemer's return. Death may be defined as the dissolution of that union which exists between the constituent elements of human nature: it is a separating of the immaterial part of man from the material, an emerging of the soul from the body. But that severance in the Christian for a while produces no separation of either his soul or his body from the Lord Jesus. The union there is between the redeemed and regenerate members of Christ's mystical body and their glorious Head is indissoluble and endless, and is both the basis and security of every blessing they enjoy in time and eternity. His people are as truly His in death as in life. Their union with Christ is the same, nor is their interest in Him lessened. As the beloved Hawker said, "The covenant rots not in the grave, however their bodies molder into dust." Moreover, that separation which the believer sustains of soul and body at death is but for a season; and among other blessings with which it is accompanied, will be amply compensated on the resurrection morning, when an everlasting union shall be effected between

them, nevermore to be broken. Let us now consider four expressions used in the New Testament in connection with the death of a believer, none of which, be it noted, contains the least suggestion of an experience to be dreaded. (1) The Apostle Paul spoke of his decease as a departing from this world: "having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better" (Phil. 1:23). Young's concordance defines the word as signifying "to loose up (an anchor)." It is a nautical term, which describes a vessel leaving her temporary moorings. The figure is a suggestive and picturesque one. The hour for sailing has arrived. The anchor is weighed, the gangway raised, the ropes are released, and fond farewells are said and waved to beloved friends who have come to see us off. The ship now moves gently away from the quay, down the river, into the vast reaches of the ocean beyond. That is what death is to a Christian: a loosening of those moorings which bound him to the earth, a gliding out into a life of freedom, a going forth unto another Country. This same figure is used again in "the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6)—the exact hour of sailing has been Divinely appointed! (2) The Apostle Peter likened his impending dissolution unto the taking down of a tent: "knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me" (2 Pet. 1:14, and, cf. John 21:18, 19). In the previous verse he had similarly spoken of his body, declaring that he would continue urging upon the saints their obligations and duties "as long as I am in this tabernacle," or better "tent." The body, for whose wants the majority of our fellows are as anxious as though it were the whole man, is but a tent. The figure is a very suggestive one. A "tent" is a frail structure, designed only for temporary occupation, is suited for use in the wilderness, and is exchanged for a "house eternal in the heavens." In the verse Peter employed a mixed metaphor, as Paul did in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, where the breaking up of the earthly house of our tabernacle is spoken of as our being "unclothed." Here, then, is the Christian concept of death: it is no more terrible or distressing than the removing of a tent (which is easily taken down), or the putting off of our garments when retiring to rest—to be resumed at the dawn of a new day! (3) Death is likened unto an exodus. The term is used first in connection with our Saviour: when He was transfigured before His disciples on the holy mount, there talked with Him Moses and Elijah, "who spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:31). The Greek word is *exodos* and is found again in Hebrews 11:22, where it is recorded that, "By faith Joseph when he was a dying [in Egypt] made mention of the departing [*exodos*] of the children of Israel." It is hardly to be thought that Moses and Elijah would confine their speech unto Christ's death, but would rather converse upon "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11). Dr. Lightfoot was of the opinion that Christ's exodus included His ascension, pointing out that Israel's exodus from Egypt was a "triumphant and victorious one." The term literally means "exit," and Manton regards its scope in Luke 9:31, as including Christ's death, resurrection (Acts 2:24) and ascension (Luke 24:51). Peter also made use of the same term when he referred to his own "decease" or exodus (2 Pet. 1:15), thereby giving it a general application unto all of God's people. Here, then, is another simple but suggestive figure to express the blessedness of a believer's departure from this life. Like the previous one, this also imports the going forth on a journey; but, in addition, the leaving behind of the house of bondage and the making for the promised inheritance—the antitypical Canaan. There is a striking analogy between the death of a Christian and Israel's emancipation from the cruel slavery of Pharaoh. One of the distinct features of the Christian's life in this world is his groaning under the burden of indwelling sin (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:2), a crying "who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But death is, for him, a snapping of his fetters, an escaping from the bonds that hold him, a going forth from sin and sorrow into freedom and immortality. Israel's exodus from Egypt was a leaving behind of all their enemies, and such is death for the saint: the world, the flesh, the Devil—all that opposes God and hinders him forever done with. Israel's exodus included their safe passage through the Red Sea, a crossing over unto the farther shore, their faces turned unto the land of milk and honey. How eagerly should the Christian welcome death! (4) The

death of God's people is likened unto a sleep. This is the most familiar figure of all, and since it is used much more frequently in the Scriptures, and because certain errorists have perverted its meaning, we will dwell longer upon it. To the saints in his day the Apostle said, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep" (1 Thess. 4:13). We regard it as a mistake to restrict that to their bodies: obviously it is their persons ("them") which are "asleep"; yet that by no means warrants the conclusion which some have drawn—that at death the soul passes into a state of total inactivity and unconsciousness. Such a verse proves too much for the case of "soul sleeping," for it would make it teach that the soul died with the body, since "sleep" is here an image of death; which would be in direct variance with our Lord's words, "Fear not them which are able to kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul" (Matthew 10:28). Even in this life, when the body is soundly asleep, the soul or mind is not inactive, as our dreams manifestly evidence. Whether or not Luke 16:19-31, is a "parable," certain it is that our Lord was there setting forth the condition of both the righteous and the unrighteous immediately after death, and if their souls then pass into a state of oblivion His language would be utterly misleading where He declared the one to be "comforted" and the other "tormented" (v. 25). So, too, His promise to the dying thief had been meaningless unless he was to enjoy the company of Christ in Paradise that day and enter upon all the delights of that place. Further, it would not be true that "death" is one of the things which is unable to separate believers from receiving manifestations of God's love and their enjoyment of the same (Rom. 8:38, 39) if they pass from this world into a state of insensibility. Again, Paul, who was favored with such intimate and precious fellowship with Christ in this world, had never been in any "strait" between his desire to remain in the flesh for the sake of his converts and his longing to "depart," had the latter alternative meant the complete suspension of all his faculties, without any communion with God. Nor had he spoken of "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23) if they are without life and light, peace and joy, immediately after death. While rejecting the false glosses put upon this figurative expression, let us be careful the enemy does not rob us of its true import, and thereby deprive us of the comfort it contains. Was it not for the consolation of His disciples (and all His people) that the Saviour said: "I go to awake our friend Lazarus out of his sleep" (John 11:11)? Again, we are told that after the first Christian martyr had knelt down and prayed for his enemies, he "fell asleep" (Acts 7:60)! How much more was conveyed by that statement of the inspired historian than had he merely said that Stephen expired! Amid the curses of his foes, and while their stones were crushing the life from his body, he "fell asleep." Inexpressibly blessed is that! As the sleep of the body brings welcome relief when it is racked with pain, so death delivers from spiritual warfare and puts an end to all the wounding of the believer's soul by indwelling sin. As sleep gives rest from the toils and burdens of the day, so that we are oblivious to the perplexities and trials which harass our waking hours, so death for the saint puts an end to all the things which occasioned him anxiety and distress down here: he is released, henceforth, from all cares and troubles. No doubt the principal idea which this figure should convey to us is the entire harmlessness of death. What is there in sleep to dread? Instead of being an object of horror, it is a merciful provision of God's for which we should be most grateful. It comes to us not as a rough and terrifying foe, but approaches gently as a kind friend. Christ has removed the "sting" from death (1 Cor. 15:56, 57), and therefore it can no more harm one of His redeemed than could a hornet whose power to injure has been destroyed. In employing this comforting metaphor, God would have His people assured that they have nothing more to fear from the article of death than in lying down on their beds to slumber. Again—sleep is of but brief duration: a few hours of repose, and then we arise refreshed and reinvigorated for the duties of another day. In like manner, death is but a sleep, an entering into rest, and resurrection will be the restoration and glorification of our bodies. Finally, death is likened to a sleep to intimate how easily the Lord will quicken our mortal bodies. The skeptic may ridicule as an impossibility the truth of resurrection, but to Christ it will be simpler than waking a sleeper. A

slumbering person is aroused most easily by one speaking to him, and "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice" (John 5:28)! In addition to those figurative expressions, which so manifestly depict the harmlessness of death, God has made many plain statements in His Word for the comfort and assurance of His saints. It is evident from Genesis 15 that He preached the Gospel to Abraham in clear terms: not only the basic doctrine of justification by faith and the righteousness which is imputed to the believer, but also that state of blessedness into which all His people enter immediately upon their death. First, He made known to the "father" or prototype of all the faithful of what Heaven is and wherein the happiness of the saints consists: "I am thy Shield" in this life, "and thy exceeding great Reward" in the life to come (v. 1). For as Goodwin pointed out, "Reward is after the finishing of work, and what is this reward but the blessedness of Heaven? Christ Himself says no other, nor no more, of it, 'The Lord is the portion of Mine inheritance.' For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the Cross knowing that 'in Thy presence is fullness of joy.'" Second, God informed him what the condition of his soul should be: "thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace" (v. 15). No wonder Balaam said, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his" (Num. 23:10). What a blessed declaration is this: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints" (Ps. 116:15)—then certainly it ought not to be dreadful in theirs! That verse presents an aspect of our subject which is all too little considered by Christians. They look at it, as at most other things, too much from the human angle—but here we have what may be termed the Godward side of a believer's death—it is precious in His sight! The Hebrew word *yaqar* is rendered "costly" in 1 Kings 5:17, "honourable" in Psalm 45:9, "excellent" in Psalm 36:7. It occurs again in "precious stones" (1 Kings 10:10), yea, is used of Christ Himself—"a precious Cornerstone." Whatever form it takes, and no matter what be the attendant circumstances, such is the death of His people unto the Lord: an honourable, costly, excellent, precious thing. Note well the words, "in the sight of the LORD": His eyes are fixed upon them in a peculiar and special manner. Their death is precious unto Him because it releases them from sin and sorrow, because it is sanctified by His own death for them, because it is a taking unto His immediate presence those upon whom He set His heart from all eternity, because they are the trophies of His own victory, and because they then "enter into the joy of their Lord." In the closing verses of 1 Corinthians 3 a number of things are mentioned as pertaining to God's children: "all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours." Those words were first addressed to shame some who sought pre-eminence in the house of God and whose affections were too much set upon things on the earth; yet they are full of instruction and comfort for us today. The ministry of God's servants, the things God has provided for us in the world, life or death, are equally ours. Death is ours not by way of punishment and curse, but as a privilege and blessing. It is ours not as an enemy, but as a friend. It is our conquered foe, and is not to be feared, for it has neither strength nor sting to harm us: Christ, our victorious Captain, has disarmed it of both—"He hath abolished [rendered null and void] death" (2 Tim. 1:10). Life and death are administered by God so as to fulfil His gracious designs unto His people. Death is theirs because they share in Christ's triumphs over it, because it furthers their interests and ministers to their wellbeing, because it is a means of their inexpressible advantage, removing them from a world of ills, conducting them into a world of glory and bliss. What a word is this: "And I heard a voice from Heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13). Here was a special and immediate revelation from Heaven. It was to be placed upon imperishable record for the comfort of believers to the end of time. "Blessed are the dead": pronounced so by God, happy in themselves. Not "blessed shall they be," at the resurrection morning, though that will be their case; but "blessed are" they at the moment. Why? Because they "die in the Lord": whether conscious of the fact or not, they die in union and communion with Him, His smile of approbation

resting upon them. To die in the Lord is "to die in the favour of God, in a state of peace with Him as members of His mystical body" (Thomas Manton). But more: they are blessed "from henceforth," without delay or cessation, which at once gives the lie to their lapsing into a state of entire unconsciousness. "Yea, saith the Spirit." Here is solemn confirmation: the Holy Spirit maketh affidavit" (Manton). They "rest from their labours": not only the toils of their temporal callings, but their conflicts with sin. "And their works do follow them": we carry nothing out of the world with us but the conscience and comfort of what we have done for God" (Manton). We continue by borrowing a few thoughts (though clothing them mostly in our own language) from Boston's counsels on why a Christian should be reconciled to death, and then how to prepare for it. Some dread the prospect of leaving behind their wives and children in this cold world: yet they have a reliable Guardian to commit them unto. Says He, "Leave thy fatherless children: I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in Me" (Jer. 49:11). But death will remove me from my dearest friends! True, yet it will conduct you unto your best Friend; and if those you leave are God's children, you will meet them again in Heaven. But the approach and pains of death are sometimes very dreadful! Not nearly so terrible as pangs of conscience caused by apprehensions of Divine wrath—remember that each pang of bodily disease brings you a step nearer unto a soul made every whit whole. But I am naturally timorous, and the very thoughts of death alarm me! Then familiarize yourself with it by frequent meditations thereon, and especially view the bright side of the cloud, and by faith look beyond it. That there may be a readier disposition of heart and preparedness of mind, make it your care to "have always a conscience void of offense toward God and men" (Acts 24:16). Walk closely with God, maintain a diligent and strict course in the way of His precepts; and because of the infirmities which cleave to us in this present state, renew your repentance daily and be ever washing in that Fountain which has been opened for sin and for uncleanness. Be constantly engaged in weaning your heart from this world. Let the mantle of earthly enjoyments hang loosely upon you, that it may be easily dropped when the summons comes to depart for Heaven. Set your affections, more and more, upon things above, and pass through this wilderness scene as a stranger and pilgrim. We are ready for Heaven when our heart is there before us (Mathew 6:21). Be diligent in laying up evidences of your title to Heaven, for the neglect of so doing renders uncomfortable the dying pillar of many a Christian. Grieve not the Holy Spirit, so that He will bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16). Though our specific subject is that revelation with which God favors His people in Heaven, yet because the great majority of them pass thereto through the door of death, and since quite a number of our readers have been denied the comforting teaching of Scripture thereon, we have taken the opportunity to write upon the same. We come now to consider some of the accompaniments of a Christian's death. Among these, first place must be given unto the presence of the Lord with him at that time. While it is blessedly true that He never leaves nor forsakes them, being with them "alway" (Matthew 28:20), yet He is with them in a special manner at certain crucial times. This idea seems to be clearly borne out by the statement that God is "a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1), as though He draws nearest of all to us in the seasons of acutest need. Do we not have an illustration and example of that fact when the three Hebrews were cast alive into Babylon's furnace, and the king beheld Another walking with them in the midst of the fire? "And the form of the fourth is like the Son of God" said he (Dan. 3:25). Again—has not the Lord declared, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name: thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee" (Isa. 43:1, 2). How blessedly that was demonstrated at the Red Sea, where God so gloriously showed Himself strong on behalf of His people; and again at the Jordan, which was more definitely a figure of the safe passage of believers through death. Was not the passing of Israel dry shod through Jordan into Canaan a blessed adumbration of the saints' harmless exit from this world and entrance into their everlasting inheritance? As Jehovah manifested Himself most conspicuously on

those occasions, so— whether perceived by them or not—He is, in a most particular sense, present with His beloved ones as they walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Said the Psalmist, "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me: Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4). Thy rod and Thy staff: "by which Thou governs and rules Thy flock—the emblems of Thy sovereignty and of Thy gracious care" (Spurgeon). The meaning of those figures is plain: it is by His Word and Spirit that the good Shepherd governs and cares for His sheep, and is their "comfort" in the hour of their supreme crisis. That the believer is granted a special supply of the Divine Comforter at that hour can scarcely be doubted. "The Spirit was given us for that purpose, as a brother is said to be 'born for adversity' (Prov. 17:17). Certainly He who was given for a comfort to you all through your life long, and has delivered you out of all your distresses and fears, will carry you through this; and though your heart should for a while fail you, together with your flesh, yet God and His Spirit will not fail you (Ps. 73:26). The interest of the Spirit's own glory moves Him. No captain rejoices more to bring his vessel home into harbor, after he has sailed it safely through so many storms, than the Holy Spirit rejoices to bring a soul He has wrought upon and who was committed to His trust, safe to Heaven" (Thomas Goodwin). Let it be noted that "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" is given not only in life but also in death (Phil. 1:19, 20)!

2. The soul is rid of sin. There shall in no wise enter into the new Jerusalem "any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination" (Rev. 21:27). No serpent shall find admittance into the celestial paradise, nor will any who are still polluted by him. Not only the holiness of God, but the happiness of the saints also require that they be freed from all evil ere they enter Heaven, or otherwise their bliss would be marred. Their communion with and delighting themselves in the Lord is hindered down here by the sin which still cleaves to them. From the moment of the new birth until the moment a regenerated person leaves this world, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh," and since those two principles of action are "contrary the one to the other" it follows that he "cannot do the things that he would" (Gal. 5:17), and daily has he occasion to lament, "O wretched man that I am." Even when the power of God subdues the ragings of sin within His children, they are not delivered from its inbeing. But when the Divine summons to the soul comes to depart hence, it is entirely delivered from inbred corruption. The conflict is then ended; the victory over sin is complete. No propensity to evil remains, no guilt of conscience or defilement shall ever again be contracted. "Although the whole troop of evils, like the army of Egypt, will pursue me (as it did Israel) to the borders of the sea, death ends the warfare—'The Egyptians whom ye have seen today, ye shall see them again no more forever' (Ex. 14:13). O the inconceivable blessedness which immediately opens at death to every redeemed and regenerated child of God!" (Robert Hawker). Yet it is not death itself which effects this blessed purification of the soul. That is evident not only from the cases of Enoch and Elijah, who were caught up to Heaven without dying, but of those saints, too, who will be alive on earth at the personal return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:17). No, it is produced by the supernatural operation of God. It is the Lord Himself fitting His "temple" (2 Cor. 6:16) for His fuller and final possession. It is to be noted that Christ cleansed the temple at Jerusalem twice: at the beginning of His ministry (John 2:15-17) and again near the close thereof (Luke 19:45), which adumbrated His twofold cleansing of the hearts of His redeemed. At conversion they are purged from the love, the guilt, and the dominion of sin; at death they are delivered from its very inbeing and presence.

3. Enlarging of their faculties. We regard that expression, "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Heb. 12:23), as denoting not only their being purged of all evil and misery, but also of their being capacitated to take in immeasurably more good and happiness than ever they did previously. Sin has not only greatly impaired the vitality and functions of the body, but it has considerably injured the health and defiled and limited the faculties of the soul; and therefore the latter will experience a grand elevation when rid of the incubus of sin. As the resurrected body will be possessed of powers far transcending its present ones, so when the soul is glorified its faculties will be much

greater—the understanding no longer beclouded, the affections purified, the will emancipated. In its present state the soul, even when engaged in spiritual acts, is sadly cramped and hampered, but upon its dismissing from the body, the Holy Spirit will strengthen, enlarge, and elevate the faculties of the soul, raising them up to a suitability and harmony with their new life in Heaven. Then will the believer know even as he is known (1 Cor. 13:12). It was, we believe, to this gracious operation of the Spirit that David referred in Psalm 23:5, where, after describing his passage through the valley of the shadow of death and before mentioning his dwelling in the house of the Lord forever, he declared: "Thou anointest my head with oil: my cup runneth over." In Old Testament typology "oil" was the outstanding type of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 John 2:27), and as the Lord Jesus was anointed by the Spirit at the beginning of His ministry (Acts 10:38) and again at the completion of it (Ps. 45:7; Acts 2:33), so the believer is anointed by Him first at conversion (2 Cor. 1:21, 22) and then receives a fuller infusion of Him at death. Then it is that mortality is "swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:4)—words which are "as applicable unto the condition of the soul then, as at the resurrection they are applicable to the condition of the body" (Thomas Goodwin). As that eminent expositor pointed out: "In 1 Corinthians 15, where the change of the body is insisted on, Paul says, 'this mortal shall put on immortality; this corruptible, incorruption,' but here he says 'swallowed up of life,' which is the proper happiness of the soul." We will condense below the rest of his remarks thereon. "Though the soul in the substance of it be immortal, yet take the condition of life which it now leads and it may be most truly said to have a 'mortality' adhering to it, yea, inhering in it as the adjunct of it. There is a mortal state the person is in. There is an animal life, as one calls it; there is a dying life, a life of death, in which as to a great part the soul now lives; and it is this present state, or this dying life of the soul, which causes believers to 'groan, being burdened,' and which the Apostle here terms 'mortality,' but which he assures us will, at its dismissal from the body, be 'swallowed up of life'—that which is life only, and only deserves the name of life: the true and eternal life, life indeed. For what is life? 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent' (John 17:3). It is a peculiar life of living in God, as knowing Him and seeing Him face to face." The soul which hitherto had been so trammelled by sin shall then be taken into a life so rich, so full, so overflowing with abundance, as to rid it in a moment of all misery and imperfection, freeing and perfecting all its faculties.

4. Perfuming of their persons. This too is intimated in Psalm 23, a part of which we have somewhat anticipated. It seems to us that each experience described in verses 4-6 receives a general fulfillment throughout the life of a saint, and a particular one at his death. Thus, "though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" well expresses his journey through the wilderness, for though men term this world, "the land of the living," it would be far more accurate to designate it "the land of the dying." The shadow of the grave is cast heavily across it; nevertheless, such language also suitably describes the believer's passage through the article of death. "I will fear no evil": why should he? A "valley," in contrast with a "mountain," suggests easy travel, and a "shadow" cannot harm him! Moreover, the "shadow" necessarily presupposes the presence of light. Unbelief may talk of "the dark valley of death"—not so David. It was far otherwise with him: the Light of life (John 8:12) was there, as his words acknowledge: "for Thou art with me"—to support, to guard, to comfort, to rejoice. "With me" now in a peculiarly intimate and special way. The One present was Jehovah, whom David knew and owned as "my Shepherd" in the opening verse. But observe a striking alteration in his language in the latter part of the Psalm. In the first three verses all the pronouns referring to the Lord are in the third person: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me. He restoreth my soul." But in the last three verses David changes to the second person: "Thou art with me. Thy rod [not "His" rod] and Thy staff. Thou preparest a table before me, Thou anointest my head." Why the variation? Ah, there is something inexpressibly blessed in that change. During life the believer speaks of the Lord—"He leadeth me"; but as he enters the valley of the shadow he speaks to the Lord, for He is there by his side! How

much we miss through our careless and hurried reading of God's Word! How we need to weigh and ponder every jot and tittle in it. Sometimes the tense of the verb, at others the number of the noun marks that which is most important for us to observe; here the change of pronouns brings out a precious line of truth. Having acknowledged the presence of the good Shepherd in the valley and the comfort derived from His gracious care, the Psalmist next went on to say: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." In Scripture, the "table" always speaks of fellowship, and that of the most intimate kind (Luke 22:21), and here it tells of the Lord's communion with the dying saint, and the loving and full provision He has made to supply his every need. His "enemies" may refer to the forces of evil, who would make their final assault upon him if they could. But they are prevented from doing so, for God has promised "the end of that man is peace" (Ps. 37:37). His enemies are not only thwarted, but mocked by the Lord in this "table." Then as he emerges from the valley, the believer exclaims, "Thou anointest my head with oil"—as Moses did the heads of the priests as they were on the point of entering upon their tabernacle privileges and duties (Ex. 28:41; 29:7), thereby preparing them for the presence of God. Thus the Redeemer puts upon the soul His own blessed fragrance as it enters into the courts above. Then David exultantly declared, "and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Thus this remarkable Psalm portrays the saint's happy life (vv. 1-3), comfortable death (vv. 4, 5), and blissful eternity (v. 6).

5. An angelic convoy. This is clear from our Lord's statement in Luke 16:22: "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom." Abraham is the father of all them that believe (Rom. 4:11), and is here shown to be in Paradise. His "bosom" speaks of the place of peculiar privilege (John 1:18; 13:23): the once-despised beggar, counted unworthy of a seat at the rich man's table on earth, is accorded a position of honour on high—placed next to the eminent Patriarch. The same gracious provision has God made for the safe conduct of each of His people in their journey from earth to Heaven: "He shalt give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Ps. 91:11). Angelic ministry occupies, most probably, a far more extensive place in the lives of believers than any of them realize. "These encamp about them in the time of their life, and surely will not depart in the day of their death. These happy ministering spirits are attendants on the Lord's bride, and will doubtless carry her safely home to His house. The Captain of the saints' salvation is the Captain of this holy guard: He was their Guide even unto death, and He will be their Guide through it, too" (Thomas Boston). What we are now considering presents another most blessed though little-known contrast between the death of the righteous and the death of the unrighteous. The souls of the former are carried to Heaven by the holy angels, the souls of the latter are seized by demons and taken to Hell. In Luke 12:20, Christ declared that God would say to the rich boaster, "Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul" (margin, and see Greek). Upon which, after affirming, "the devils take others' souls away," Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan, asked: "Who are they?" And his answer, "Hell is a prison (1 Pet. 3:19) and the judge delivers to the officer, and the officer casts into prison (Luke 12:58). This 'officer' is the Devil that hales souls to that prison." In this convoy or guard of angels for the redeemed, saints are conformed to their Head, when He was "carried up to Heaven" (Luke 24:51). "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: The Lord is among them . . . Thou hast ascended on high" (Ps. 68:17, 18). "Angels were the chariots in which Christ rode, and these the guard that attends believers" (Gill). Thus, the soul of the saint is conducted in state from his earthly house to his heavenly abode. Immediately after death, without any interval of waiting either long or short, the ransomed soul is inducted into Paradise. The heir of glory enters at once upon his eternal inheritance: "absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8). This needs emphasizing in certain quarters, where the idea seems to obtain that the glorification of the saint's soul awaits the time of the glorification of his body. We do not like to see Protestants employing the term "intermediate state" (in contrast with "the eternal state"), for it savors too much of the imaginary "Limbo" of the Romanists; greatly

preferring the "disembodied" and the "resurrection state." Immediately at death spirits of just men are "made perfect" in knowledge, in holiness, in blessedness. Mortality is then "swallowed up of life": as Goodwin expressed it, the soul "is now all life and joy in God the Fountain of life." As we shall seek to show, the request of Christ in John 17:24, receives its fulfillment in the experience of His redeemed as soon as they leave this earth—the beatific vision is then theirs. In the very moment of his dismissal from the body, the Saviour receives His redeemed into the actual possession of that eternal heritage which He has purchased for them. It was this reception for which the expiring Stephen made request when he said, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59), and as Thomas Goodwin pointed out: "He not only receives it into His own bosom, but He brings it to God and presents it to Him with a joy infinitely more abounding than can be in us. Then it is that Christ is glorified and rejoices in us, and so we may be said rather to die to the Lord and His interest than to ours." Then it is that He "sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied." While at a later date Christ will present the entire company of His people to Himself a glorious Church, "not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27), yet He does so to each individual member of it at death, as His words to the dying thief clearly implied. Oh, what praise is due unto Him for having extracted the sting from death and robbed it of all its terrors! What cause have we to exclaim, "Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!" What has been before us should surely make it easier to bear the trials through which a Christian may now be passing: at longest they are but for a moment in comparison with the eternity of bliss awaiting him. How faith should feed upon and hope anticipate the same! With what contentment should such a prospect fill us! What little reason have we to envy the deluded worshippers of Mammon, even though such now be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day. How the contemplation of what God has prepared for them that love Him should wean their hearts from the perishing baubles of this world. How the certainty of being "with Christ" forever should make them desire to depart from this scene. How the knowledge that at death they will be forever done with sin and sorrow should make them willing to die. Why should any believer be reluctant to long to go unto the eternal Lover of his soul, especially when he learns from Scripture what full provision God has made for his passage to Him and that it is an easy and pleasant one? Oh, that all our ambitions and longings may be swallowed up in that of the Psalmist's: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD" (27:4).

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