

"AT HOME WITH THE LORD"

II Corinthians 5:1-9

This letter was addressed to the believers in Christ at Corinth. Its message does not apply to the unsaved.

Paul was feeling the inroads of mortality and was expecting death. But, the fact that Satan and men might do their best to destroy the body in which he lived did not trouble him. He knew that the grave was not his destiny, but that after death a building of God was waiting for him.

In this chapter Paul gives us a striking contrast between our old and our new habitations. He tells us the difference between the body of dissolution and the one of glory. He refers to our present existence as an earthly tent, a temporary abiding-place of the soul, that which may be dissolved or destroyed, while the soul lives on. A tent is for a pilgrimage. It can be taken down and moved away. Those who live in tents know what it means to be ready to move without any disturbance about it. This body is the one in which we are making our pilgrimage from earth to heaven. Some day it will be taken down and laid away and covered up. At that time dissolution will take place. It will be loosed from its present form and shape and will return to the elements from whence it came at creation.

Death intervenes between the present state of affliction and the glory of heaven, but it only destroys the body now existing. It is not an end to bodily form and life. This is no speculation of the Apostle, but a blessed assurance. Socrates and Plato speculated as to what came after death, but Paul knew. What calm and confident knowledge Paul here predicates of Christians as such! And what a contrast with the dark uncertainty of unbelief, or with its impious audacity! We know that, if death destroy the earthly tent we live in, we have a building of God.

Let us note the nature of this new habitation. It is in striking contrast with the old one. The first one was temporal. This one is eternal. The first one was seen. This is unseen. The first was a tent. This is a building. The first was corruptible. This is incorruptible. The first was mortal. This is immortal. The first was weak. This one is strong. The exchange, in which Paul rejoices, is that of a temporary tabernacle or tent for an eternal home.

Here we are strangers and pilgrims. Earth is not our permanent home. Meanwhile we are dwelling in a tent with the title-deed to our permanent home. However, the body, as a tent, is not to be despised or mistreated. Paul knew that he already had, while here in the body, the title to a heavenly home. He said, "We have a building of God." We possess the title to it now by faith. This blessed fact is made plain by Hebrews 11:1, where the word title-deed is used of faith: "Now faith is the title-deed of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen." Here and now Christians have a title-deed to a home in heaven. By and by we shall enter this wonderful home and present our title-deed for occupancy, even the word of Jesus Christ, Who purchased it for us with His own precious blood. He said, "In My Father's house are many mansions." This will be a far better and more suitable habitation.

It is good to know that the separation of the soul and body is only temporary. It is not for unclothing, but for a better clothing, one suited to the higher sphere. The present body is fitted for the earthly sphere. The future body, which will be free from the elements of decay, will be eternal and appropriate for the heavenly realm. How wonderful that we shall leave a tent and journey to a building of God, and there be at home with the Lord! That will be far more enjoyable than anything this world has to offer.

"For in this we groan." That is a statement which I do not have to explain to you. It refers to the burdens, sicknesses and diseases of the body—all of those ills to which those in the flesh are heirs. There are so many aches, pains, sufferings and sorrows. But when the time comes for us to receive our new bodies there will not be any frustrations, weaknesses, groaning or dying.

A tent is frail. Even if Paul had made it carefully with his own hands, it could last only a few years at most, and those who lived in it were subjected to many discomforts and trials. On the other hand, the house not made with hands is strong, enduring, incorruptible, unfading and ever bestowing great blessing upon those who live in it.

Paul likens the change from this mortal body to the heavenly body to putting off an old garment and being clothed with a new one. We ought not to mind this change.

Each Christian has the blessed assurance of a time when mortality will be swallowed up of life. This assurance is not postdated, but predated. The child of God has the assurance of this hope now. It is something in which he lives. He lives by it and for it. It is not something far off in a mystic future, but it is something within.

It is a settled thing with God that some day we are going to have glorified bodies. As proof of this He has already given us the blessed Holy Spirit to dwell within us, and He is the earnest of the joy that shall be ours by and by when we gather in the Father's house. This word "earnest" means surety or pledge. A surety is the security which one gives for the performance of a promise. It is a pledge to consummate what one has begun. The earnest money of any agreement or transaction is a part of the whole sum promised. And note that this pledge is a Person. It is the Holy Spirit Who has been given to us as the pledge.

When Paul spoke of being "at home in the body" he made an important distinction between himself and his body. His body was not Paul any more than your house is you. Paul was a spiritual personality who lived in a physical body just as you live in your house. The body is the vehicle of the soul, which makes it possible for the person to act, speak and live a normal life on this earth. Some day he will not have any more use for the body. He will leave it and go on and it will go back to the soil.

At home means to be among one's own people, and not to travel abroad. We all know what it is to feel at home. Everyone has a spot where he feels at home, with no restraint, no keeping up of appearances, just being in perfect ease. "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." In the body we are absent from the bodily presence of the Lord, and from our heavenly home. When a Christian dies, he simply goes home to be with the Lord. He goes abroad from the body, takes leave from his people and from his dwelling place. He leaves the familiar and the known. He goes away from his earthly home, loved ones and friends. James Whitcomb Riley expressed this idea in his poem entitled:

A W A Y

"I can not say, and I will not say,
That he is dead! He is just away!

"With a cheery smile, and a wave of the hand,
He has wandered into an unknown land.

"And left us dreaming how very fair
It must be, since he lingers there.

"And you,—oh you, who the wildest yearn
For the old time step and the glad return,—

"Think of him faring on, as dear
In the love of There as the love of Here;

"Mild and gentle as he was brave,--
When the sweetest love of his life he gave

"To simple things:--where the violets grew
Pure as the eyes they were likened to.

"The touches of his hands have strayed
As reverently as his lips have prayed.

"Think of him still as the same, I say;
He is not dead--he is just away!"

Dwight L. Moody was right when he said: "Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that's all--out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever."

Until we go on, and while we are awaiting that summons which will cause us to vacate the body, we walk by faith. Sight is the common way. Faith is the uncommon way. Sight is the way of the flesh. Faith is the way of the Spirit. Whatever is common to sight is uncommon to faith. Sight relates to the temporal, and faith to the eternal. To walk by faith does not mean to walk in blindness. It is not walking in the dark, but in the light. It is exchanging eyesight for God-sight.

When the Christian is absent from the body he is at home with the Lord. It is this fact which gives us the courage and ability to face the sufferings which precede death and to undergo the experience itself, for it is only a portal that admits us into the presence of the Lord and of the redeemed. Hence, all fear of death should be removed from the Christian. Death is gain and glory for the soul. Why should we fear it for ourselves, or why should we grieve unduly over it for a loved one, when it is better for that one to go to be with the Lord? Unchristian grief over the loss of a loved one is selfish. Who is there that truly understanding death would bring back his loved one to this world of suffering and woe? Think of it, he has gone to be with the Lord. Is that not enough?

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

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

"Then let it fade, this dream of earth,
When I have done my life work here,
Or long, or short, as seemeth best,--
What matters so God's will appears.

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

Whether it meant prosperity or adversity, health or sickness, life or death, Paul labored to be well-pleasing to the Lord. He knew that if he could please the Lord while he was here in this life he would be acceptable to Him when he would be called home.

How can we please our Lord? We must believe what He says. We must do what He commands.