

Ready to Die
II Corinthians 5:6-8

INTRODUCTION

Death is the unmentionable word in our generation. Our generation is as quiet about death as was the past generation about sex. We do our best to avoid any confrontation with the reality of death. It is not unusual to find young adults who have never been to a funeral in their lives. Our many methods of handling death nuke attempts to hide its reality. We do everything we can to the body of the deceased to make it appear that death has not really happened. We have changed our burial procedures to diminish the confrontation with death. Yet it is appointed unto man once to die and he does.

Much of this is an expression of a deep fear of death. We never openly discuss this fear, but it is there for so many. Those who dig deep into the psychological secrets of the human physic, tell us that it is behind so much that man does. He is afraid to die. The writer of Hebrews tells us that this is a tool that the devil uses to keep mankind in bondage to him.

The attitudes toward death expressed in our text reflect no fear. They are the expression of a personal faith in the living Christ. When you walk by faith, you have a changed attitude toward death. Twice in the passage, the Apostle declares, "We are confident." This particular word is the one used by our Lord in the Gospels when he said, "Be of good cheer." It means to be cheerful, be courageous, be confident. In the face of death, the Christian does not cringe in fear, but rather smiles with confidence and courage. Paul adds, "and willing rather". "Willing" translates a word that can mean "think it good" or "well pleased" or "prefer". Paul is affirming that the Christian who walks by faith has a definite preference for death. This is not to say that he sees death as the ultimate good for the Christian but rather that it is preferable to this present situation in which we find ourselves.

Many of you would draw back from these words. Even though, you profess to be a Christian, you are still frightened by the thought of death. We need to make sure we understand the basis for this preference for death.

I. DEATH IS PREFERABLE BECAUSE WE ARE PRESENTLY AWAY FROM HOME.

What is the present situation of the Christian? "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." As long as we are in our present condition, we will always be away from home. Let us explore some of the implications of this for a moment.

This indicates that as long as we are in the body, Jesus our Lord will never be as real as we would like. Once a person becomes a Christian, they have an inborn desire to know the Lord God in a better way. This prompts them to be faithful in worship, to be regular in the reading of the word of God and to find joy in prayer. It is a sure sign of new birth when they have a desire after the things of God, just as a new born baby has a desire after milk. However, it must be admitted that many Christians lose this desire somewhere along the way, at least, they lose some of the intensity of it. But for the Christian who is serious about his walk with the Lord, he wants to know the Lord better. But there will always be limits upon him as long as he is in this present body. We are away from home when we are away from the Lord.

This also indicates that as long as we are in this body, we will be in a world that hates our Lord. Many of us have misunderstood our world. We have concluded that the world is neutral about God. Actually, one of the few honest people in our society on this subject is the much maligned atheist, Mrs. O'hair. She is open with her hostility about the whole subject. The Bible clearly indicates that this is the basic attitude of the whole world system toward our God. This is the reason John admonishes us, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Paul explains in another place, "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: For it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." The world in which we now live in this body does not know God, does not want to know God and is hostile to the very purposes and intentions of God. Yet as long as we are in this body, we will have to live in this kind of place. It is not the home of the child of God and can never be His home. He senses and knows himself to be a foreign missionary in this kind of world.

Far too many of us have come to terms with the world. It is frightening to think, how much they may feel that we are really a part of them. I am afraid much of the world sees the church as just another human institution in the community. They have not seen anything in us or heard anything from us that would indicate that we are actually aliens in their-society. There is no indication that we are seriously considering going some place else and would actually prefer to be gone from this present situation.

Furthermore, as long as we are in this body, we will be surrounded by temporary things. Already, we have heard the Word declare that everything that you can see is temporary. We have been called the "throw-away society", but it has really always been that way. There is just nothing permanent in our world. You students need to be aware of this. The textbooks, that you are so diligently studying, will be ready to be thrown away in just a short time. Except the courses I had in the Bible, none of the textbooks I used in college are now in any school, any place in the world. Many of the things presented so dogmatically as being right, are no longer considered to be truthful and right. Many are always changing their theories. Do you ever long for a world in which things are permanent? Do you long for a world where things will abide?

Do you long for a world in which you can be sure that the relationships about you are not going to change? You will never know this in our kind of world. We are away from home. This explains the Christian preference for death. It is a way out of this world in which we are aliens.

II. DEATH IS PREFERABLE BECAUSE IT WILL MEAN COMING HOME TO THE LORD

No one can say for sure what the period between death and the resurrection involves for the child of God. This passage gives us about as much help as any in the New Testament. It assures us that there will be a time when we are at home with the Lord. The word translated "to be present with the Lord" is not warm enough. "To be present" means literally to come home. There is a clear witness to the child of God being at home at last. The preposition "with" the Lord is also helpful. It means literally to be face to face with, to be in communion with. It is the word used in John, when the Word is described as being With God". Do we dare even affirm it that in some way they will enter into the presence of the Lord in the same way the Son was in the presence of the Father in eternity past? There is mystery here, but what we can see is of great comfort. At home with the Lord!!

This would indicate that as a creature of God, we are entering into the purpose that God had for us from the beginning. We were created by God and for God. From the beginning, it was the purpose of the Creator that we be with Him. Only our personal sin prevented this purpose from being accomplished upon the earth. When sin entered in, the relationship with God was destroyed. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, the restoration of the relationship is established in salvation, but we never know fully the joy of the restoration until Christ comes or death comes. Death brings a special fulfillment for the creature.

This would indicate that as a child of God, we are entering into the privileges of sonship in a new way. Since the moment of the New Birth, God has been our heavenly Father and heaven has been our home. At times, the son of God experiences spiritual homesickness. Paul expresses some of this in our passage.

This explains the groans in part. The emphasis in this passage would be upon the enjoyment of the privilege of communion which belongs to the child of God.

Our communion with God in-this life is real but it is always limited. Our communion is always being bothered by interruptions and disturbed by the enemy. While there are some moments of supreme joy when we stand on the high mountains of the Christian life, there are more times in which everything tends to be rather mundane and methodic. Maybe I should, but I do not get "goose bumps" every time I pray. Much of the time I have to struggle to concentrate on the prayer and have to work at it not becoming just a religious routine through which I go. This statement indicates that in death we will experience an immediacy and a glory in our communion with God as sons.

This word of Paul matches the experience of many of the saints of God in their hour of death. One of the most vivid accounts I have read happened back in the 1940's. A small congregation at the Methodist Church, Old Orchard Beach, Maine, was startled at the services Tuesday evening, January 13, 1942, when Henry M. Atwater, addressing the congregation, suddenly switched from the address he was making and described a vision of his own death, after which, he fell dead on the platform.

"I see a light," he said. "The light is opening. I see the throne of God. There are angels on either side of the throne. I hear beautiful music. Jesus is coming down. I am dying." He fell to the platform and when they recovered from the shock, some of the congregation went to the platform, thinking that Mr. Atwater had collapsed. They tried to give first aid and then summoned Dr. Walter D. Mazzacane, who found that Mr. Atwater was dead.

Those present did not realize for some time that Mr. Atwater had had a vision of his death and had described it to them. They were quite awed when they realized what had taken place. An account of this incident was included in the newspaper with his obituary.

The inspired account of the death of Stephen matches this. When Stephen looked up in his moment of death, he too, saw the Lord Jesus welcoming him home. It was a moment of supreme and unspeakable glory. I can still recall one of my first encounters with death as a young pastor. The elderly Christian lady was obviously approaching death. Yet, all day long she would clap her little hands together, and talk about the angels being near. She had about her, such a look of peace and joy, even in the presence of death. She slipped away from us in this manner. There was no indication that she was reluctant to go.

Obviously, we have been discussing only the death of the saved. Those who die without the Lord spend eternity without the Lord. They have no home, no real resting place. Instead they spend eternity in the place that God prepared for Satan and his angels. Are you ready to die?

Conclusion:

This passage offers great comfort to those of us who have lost loved ones in the Lord. They are at home. Their present state is preferable to ours.

This passage offers encouragement to those who may face death, even our own death soon. There is no need for anxiety or fear. Be of good courage. Death is preferable to the best life that you could ever find on this earth.