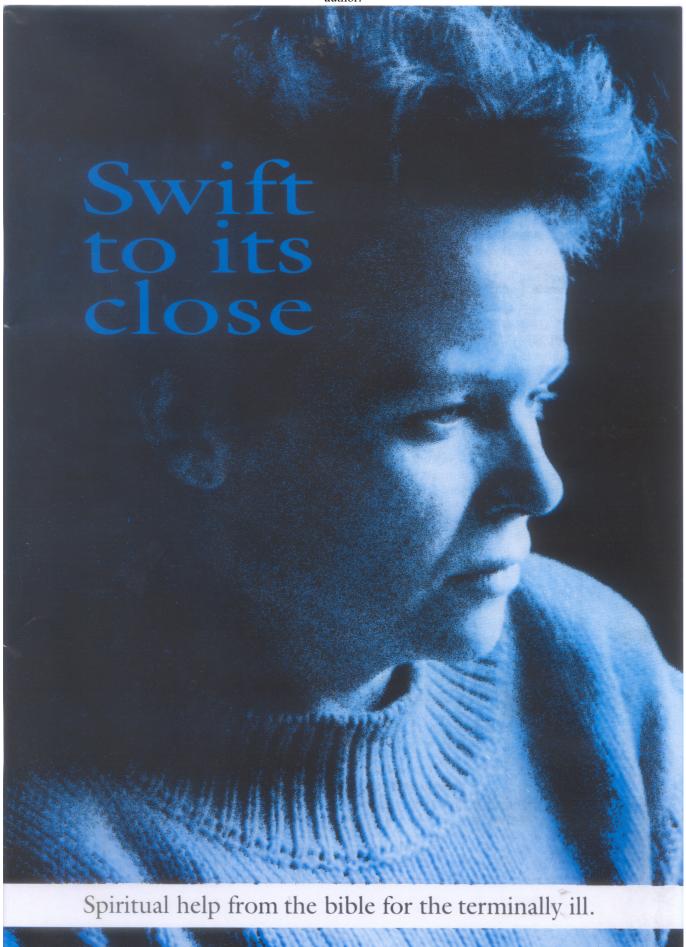
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TO THE READER

These pages have been written especially for you because you know you are ill. Not simply ill, but terminally ill, so far as human prognosis can ever be certain. They are written in the conviction that the Bible is the word of God, in which He has said all that He desires to say to us and all we need to hear. They are also written in the conviction that knowing we have not long to live wonderfully focuses the mind - to bring before us past misdeeds, to raise the question of what is to become of us and to forbid us trifling with such issues. We need help and direction to handle such things.

These pages contain selections from Scripture, chosen to bring help as rapidly as possible to those whose needs are urgent because time is running out. They are designed to be read, one each morning and one each evening, with prayer. Because God is holy, His word is to be read reverently. It is holy ground. Ponder carefully. To that end, the author would encourage you to pick up your Bible and read the passages before you, and, if time is on your side, to continue reading. Read, not as you would read any other book, but to hear God speaking His word to you. Draw near to Him by so doing, and speak to Him from you heart in response.

It can be very lonely to be terminally ill. Most well people do not know what to say to you because they do not know what you may be thinking. You may feel they have withdrawn a little from you when you really want them to be closer. Nurses may do everything in their power to make you physically comfortable, and loved ones bring affectionate touches, but only the Lord God knows how to reach your innermost being, your soul. And, dear friends, this is the help you need most of all. It is the author's prayer that, while reading these pages and meditating upon them, you will draw near to God, and that the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, will draw near to you.

Many of you will have been true, believing Christians, perhaps for many years, and this book is designed to bring before you those words which will hold you steady in your faith. The Lord God desires to 'do us good at our latter end'. Some of you may not be sure of your spiritual standing, and are almost afraid to investigate further. These pages are designed to point you to the Saviour Who will help you in your predicament. Others may know that they have never believed, or may think themselves beyond the pale. Not so. Do not say to yourself, 'It is too late for me. How can I come to Him now after ignoring Him all the days of my strength?' While you are well enough to think and repent, time has not quite run out. Those who are 'snatched from the burning,' or rescued from drowning when it is almost too late, are especially precious to the divine Rescuer, for they were almost gone for ever, but have been preserved unto everlasting life. God, our Saviour, does not see it in our despairing way.

Maybe you are thumbing through these pages even though you are not terminally ill: not even remotely ill. You may find them helpful, too. For they set out the way of salvation, unfolding it here a little, there a little. One day death will come and it would be well to be prepared. It is always possible that death will come, not lingeringly, but suddenly, and it will be supremely important for you to have been prepared beforehand. At all events, the Scriptures teach us how to live as well as how to die.

As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee (Joshua 1:5).

When faced with the challenge of new responsibility in our lives, we are apt to think that we cannot manage as well as those who have gone before us. It is no different when it is our turn to face the challenge of suffering, old age or even death. Those who have gone before us managed well, we think, but, as for us, how shall we cope?

God understands that first reaction. It was to meet this very need that He spoke these words to Joshua. Whatever the details of the experience ahead, all Joshua needed to know was that God would not forsake him. All we need to know is that He will assist us too. No matter if Joshua is not a Moses, nor if we are unlike either.

God's presence is the chief requirement. Shall we not approach Him to make these words a personal promise to ourselves? Let us believe that He will not fail to support us; that He will not fail to supply all our need; that He will not forsake us. With Him, we are certain to succeed whatever our circumstances.

Joshua was setting out on a new work and the future was all unknown. This promise was for the long years of living, and the days of dying. 'As I was with Moses' - in death, as in life, - 'so I will be with thee' - in life and in death.

Our last journey is no less uncharted to us; but our Saviour has gone before. His promise is to be with us whithersoever we go. Whenever and wherever it is, even there His hand shall lead us and His right hand shall hold us.

Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest (Joshua 1:9).

We shall manage as well as any other Christian if we are not dismayed. When we first hear the news that our illness is progressive or terminal, power may drain from body and mind. But the command to be strong and of a good courage is to be obeyed. By prayer, we can summon the Saviour's help to overcome the initial panic and obey Him in this matter. Then we shall experience His peace.

We can triumph over our fear as we think along these lines: Love is made perfect to give us boldness in the day of judgment. Our ultimate cause for fear is the judgment which follows death. The sting of death is sin.

So, if we once again confess all known sin, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness'. God helping us, we shall be courageous to dismiss all doubts and earthly vanities if they seek to turn us aside. We shall be strong, as Joshua was strong, to meditate in the Scriptures day and night and not to neglect them.

We are journeying to see King Jesus and we will soon be there. The Lord our God will be with us at this stage of the journey to comfort and reassure us with His words of love, brought to us by the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me (Psalm 23:4).

What an evocative picture this is! On the brightest of sunny days we can walk through a valley and be in shadow. We see the sun and the blue skies above, but we are in deep shadow and it grows chill.

Death casts such a shadow. While others seem to us to be in the warmth of sunlight, we feel the sombre chill of ultimate reality. Or, if it is our friends who have the sentence of death upon them, we walk in that shadow while we keep fellowship with them as sickness progresses. But we feel the chill most when it is ourselves who are terminally ill.

It can cast a foreboding fear. We are not quite sure what we are afraid of, but there is an awareness that we are in the presence of issues beyond our control. We know about death, but we have never been through it. We know how the world treats death, but we have not yet been the subject of it. And now it is our turn, how will we fare? Will the things that we must let go of, our affairs and our families, be in good hands?

It can cause a panic reaction. We may freeze. We may want to run away as fast as our minds will take us. But life's journey has to continue and only one thing can make it bearable: the presence of our Saviour!

Then our shadow will be transformed into the warmest sunlight. As a child holding hands with his father, we will go with Him oblivious of the things which have engaged us before; unaware, even, that we are passing by pitfalls which have frightened others beyond measure.

The presence of our Saviour is mighty to take control of us and ours. There is no better way of handing over our affairs than to hand them over to Him. They cannot be our concern much longer; those whom God appoints will be faithful to accomplish well the work we must lay down.

Our Saviour's rod will ward off spiritual dangers and His staff smite our spiritual foes. All power is given to the Saviour in heaven and in earth. His control is mighty on our behalf to restrain the Evil One from mounting final assaults

which would overwhelm us. Satan may represent to us that we are sinners and should not be allowed into heaven, and we will quail at the thought! But the Saviour pleads His blood on behalf of the believer before the throne of the Father. and how feeble the Devil seems when dismissed by these great truths! We too shall have the victory because it is written, 'The accuser of the brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death' (Revelation 12:11).

...The Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself (Philippians 3:21).

The wasting away of our mortal frame is a massive shock to the system. We have known - in theory - that, since our twenties, physical corruption has been creeping on apace. Yet it hits us severely when we feel its mastery. The Saviour is going to reverse this trend. Death is not to be the final dissolution of this body

of ours. It is going to undergo a further great change.

Consider first how sin has abased the human race, and ourselves as members of that race. So the ancient command to Adam must be fulfilled in us, 'Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return'.

Our own bodies are crumbling now in accordance with that edict, and the vileness of corruption is all too apparent to us. How far away seem those headstrong days when the glamour of our bodily attraction was a source of vanity!

Nevertheless, the bodies of believers are to become spiritual bodies like our Saviour's glorious resurrection body. As our risen Saviour's body was recognisably Him, so our bodies will be recognisably us. But as our Saviour's resurrection body was manifestly free from physical constraints, being able to appear and disappear, to pass through doors and to rise into heaven, so shall our new spiritual bodies be free from the limitations of earth. Our bodies will be like His, though not equal to His.

The change which will cause this to happen will be a change worked personally on our behalf. It will resemble the power of the raising of the Lord Jesus; it will be as effective as the power put forth to roll up the heavens like a scroll; it will not be inferior to the power of the fire by which earth and heaven shall be destroyed; it will be as discriminating as the power which separates believer from unbeliever and reserves the latter unto the day of judgment to be punished. Yet it is a power exercised on our behalf and upon our bodies.

At death, the souls of believers go instantaneously to be with the Saviour. Our new bodies await that final day; all the Lord's people, from the first to the last, will receive them on the same day. It is good to reflect at this time not only on the prosperity of our souls but on the glory which shall engulf and transform these mortal frames.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God (Philippians 4:6).

There is an antidote for worry. It is prayer. If ever we have been inclined to worry before, surely we have more cause than ever now. But worry accomplishes nothing. It was not appropriate for living, as Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, nor is it appropriate in the presence of death.

So we must apply a strong discipline. We must ask ourselves what worries we have. We must separate them and list them. Whether they are worries about ourselves, or concerning our nearest and dearest; whether about the leaving of our affairs, or regrets for the past; make it today's spiritual pilgrimage to isolate

them and bring them, one by one, before the Saviour. Take that list and pray about each matter. Take each item specifically to the Lord. Bring it before Him. Some of the matters are so deep rooted and so near to our hearts that simple prayer will not suffice. Supplication will not only be more appropriate but will come most readily to hand.

To supplicate is to beg; to acknow-ledge that we cannot ask as of right, and that we are asking a favour. Jesus prayed with strong tears. Tears may flow, but not all tears are strong tears. Strong tears are the tears of faith. Tears flow from strength and not weakness when faith believes wholeheartedly in the promises of God and is overcome with gratitude; or when issues of great consequence are resolved in the presence of the living God by faith.

Thanksgiving shows appreciation. It indicates that we do not take our benefits lightly. It traverses all the goodness with which we have been endowed from our earliest days and brings a refreshing tone to our requests.

Of course, now is the time to let our requests be known and to ask for many other things. Unlike Joash, king of ancient Israel, we should not let the arrows of our prayers cease after two or three attempts.

We should not cease to ask spiritual blessings. We should not stop praying for the coming of the Lord's kingdom, as if it concerned us no longer. Our prayers must range as widely as ever, perhaps more so.

Now is the time to redouble our prayers for children and grandchildren whom we must leave behind, that they may soon be saved - for, in answer to our great concern, the Lord may be so gracious and make our very death to be a means to their conversion.

Now is also the time to intercede for the church which we have always supported and whose fellowship we have loved - for we have no need to desert that godly fellowship and its work until the day the Lord calls us home, if mind and memory are spared to us. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).

t was yesterday's pilgrimage to stir ourselves to continue diligently in prayer. Today's theme is God's guarding of the heart and mind with peace. It is a consequence of the kind of prayer which bears worry to the Lord - 'casting your burden on Him for He careth for you'; of that sort of prayer which brings every matter to Him; of earnest and beseeching prayer; of thankfulness of heart in prayer.

God will keep our hearts and minds in answer to prayer like that.

Our hearts and minds are guarded by peace. There is no peace to the wicked. At this time of our lives we need to shut out all the storms from the harbour of our souls where our affections and thoughts are at anchor. Peace (which comes by prayer) is that great harbour bar. On it are dashed all the riotous emotions, wild thoughts and fears which may assault our souls. And behind that wall of safety lie the tranquil waters where our souls rest undisturbed.

It is a peace which surpasses all understanding. It is a peace beyond the understanding of how it comes to us. It surprises us. It is bestowed upon us as a necessary consequence of such praying as we have been considering. How it steals upon us remains mysterious to the last, but its presence is undeniable. If it has been missing a long time how welcome it is!

It is a peace beyond understanding in that it penetrates beyond the mind and emotions into the very soul. It beggars description. It stills the throbbing breast. Every thought and every feeling are enriched and permeated by it and its contribution to our welfare is mighty in the subduing of our turbulent past.

It is beyond understanding too, in this, that, unlike the world which prizes peace

as freedom from the alarms of war in order to pursue personal advantage, it is present in the soul when the world's form of peace is notably absent and its advantages withdrawn.

Such peace is powerful in the midst of an alien world. It is a table in the presence of enemies. 'In me ye shall have peace,' said the Saviour. 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' It is an anointing of our souls. It is a cup which runneth over. To have it now will more than make up for its earlier lamentable absence.

Such peace is the Saviour's gift. 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'

Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure (2 Samuel 23:5).

These are David's last words. Not the very last words he spoke but almost so. Among the very last things of which he speaks, he makes reference to the regrets of his life. They had long since been dealt with. The Lord had blessed him greatly and restored him after sinning. The unrest in his household was a continuing sore punishment, but he is consoled by eternal membership of the household of his Master, Jesus, in which he was assured there would be no disharmony in the ages to come.

Nobody knows our regrets better than we do ourselves. But we do well to name them as we prepare for death. There are the ones which are like scars; they have long since been healed, causing no pain, but they leave their mark. There are others which still hurt; loves which were not to be; ideals which could not be attained; careers which could not be pursued - and the very thought reminds us that we have never yet fully come to terms with them. This is the time when we must. We must hand them over lock. stock and barrel to the Saviour and acknowledge that in what has happened to us He has been good, has done us nothing but good and that He knows better than we do what is good for our souls.

Even more importantly, if there are regrets for matters which have never been forgiven we must let the blood of Jesus cover these sins now. Perhaps there was something we should have put right with someone before they died and it became too late, and we didn't. Perhaps people are alive whom we have hurt but we cannot reach them now in our predicament. Bring them all before the Lord. If they are still alive plead one last blessing on their souls to serve in lieu of the contact we cannot now make. Let us ask that we might be finally forgiven despite our negligence and intransigence.

As with David, so with us. Though there is much that is not as we would have wished, yet God has accepted us unconditionally in His beloved Son, Jesus. In Him we have an everlasting covenant. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and obtains for us a righteousness as eternal as the life of our risen Saviour. 'If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.' He knows that the blood of Jesus was shed for every believer and has availed to remove that stain of sin. Our fears as believers in Jesus are groundless.

Nothing can change the purpose of God toward the believer. That covenant is in His blood. It is ordered - that is planned, executed and implemented by arrangement in the eternal, hidden counsels of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and it is sure. It cannot be overthrown. Though the mountains, hills and the very heavens be permanently banished, and Satan consigned to hell, yet that covenant stands sure. It is all our salvation, all our desire, as it was with David.

If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands (Job 14:14-15).

It is a vital question requiring an unwavering response. In Job's case, racked with the acute discomfort and loathsomeness of disease, he had just come to that place where he could answer, 'Of course he will live again!' In the believer's case it has been settled long before, but it is well worth going over again.

If it be true, as it is, it is worth waiting for. It is to be anticipated above all things. The days of our life are appointed by God. Much has been accomplished, but we were wise if we spent our days of labour in an earnest looking forward to glory. Work done in full awareness of an eternal significance was work made light.

Now is the time to see death as an exciting change. Not a mournful river to cross nor an obstacle to be surmounted, but a change. When we shall no longer be subject to sin, moodiness, pain, wasting and corruption, then we shall be made like our glorious Saviour.

But the greatest desire of all will be to hear the welcoming voice of the Saviour Who has gone before. We were called into spiritual life once when we were dead in trespasses and sins. Now our souls shall be called home out of this mortal frame. The unmistakeable voice of the Son of Man shall be heard and recognised, and we shall wing our flight to glory.

That He shall desire us is bliss indeed! We are the work of His hands. He knew what He was taking on board when He took us into the number of His elect. He knew what our nature was and the deceit of which our hearts were capable. But it has been His work, such a glorious work, to prepare us for eternity, and He has a desire for us.

It is part of what our Saviour is doing for our souls now, that our faint desires for him - all too faint! - are being stirred increasingly under the Holy Spirit's direction to be utterly prepared to reciprocate His desires towards us. It is an increasing joy to our souls that our Saviour means more to us now than He ever did. But none of this gives more comfort than the sure and certain knowledge that He desires us! That He will see in us the effect of the travail of His soul and be satisfied! His people have been His portion, and He delights in us as those on whom He has lavished all His attentions.

'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.'

He always wanted us to be with Him in glory and soon we shall be! Now we are approaching the state of preparedness He desires before we see Him. Oh, let our souls acknowledge it, there is still much inward work to be done!

Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live (John 11:25).

artha believed, just as the Old Testament teaches, that there is to be a general resurrection at the last day, when everyone will be raised from the dead and judged according to their deeds during life on earth. Good people will be separated from bad people eternally. All that is very true.

But Jesus is here encouraging her to believe more than that. He desires her to understand that resurrection life is vested in Him. He is showing that it is their trust in Him for the forgiveness of their sins that makes people *good* in His sight; while the *badness* of the *bad* is charac-

terised by their clinging to a righteousness of their own, according to how many good things they think they have done. He desires her to understand that He alone confers spiritual life by pardoning the repentant sinner freely.

Taking Lazarus, dead these four days, as an example, Jesus says that a loved one who has died believing in Him shall never die, but remain wonderfully alive in spirit. He demonstrates that He personally has the power to confer such life by bringing Lazarus back from the dead. Though Lazarus subsequently died, as we all must, Jesus declares by this miracle that He has the keys of death and hell and has opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers, past and present. All who have died as believers, remain alive in spirit. All live unto Him.

And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe (John 11:26,27).

esus declares that a living believer, yet to pass through physical death, will never die. That is to say, at physical dissolution there will be no dying, but a glorious continuation of living awareness.

Believest thou this? Jesus put the question to Martha in the midst of her grief. He would not let her continue a moment longer in vagueness, but required some definite commitment, some 'homing in'

of her latent faith. If the things of which Jesus speaks are not true, and He knew that to be so, what a monstrous torment to perpetrate on such a dearly loved and confiding friend! It is so preposterous as to offend reason. We are drawn to confess that, surely, Jesus speaks truly.

If it is a great help to believe these things in the circumstances of the death of a brother, how much more is it so when we contemplate our own death.

Jesus tenderly, but as truly, puts this question to us individually today by His Spirit, 'Believest thou this?' Surely our souls cry out, 'With all our hearts we do!'

If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me'; even the night shall be light about me (Psalm 139:11).

t is not what we say, think or believe which matters most but what God intends.

A child may cover his eyes and say, 'You can't see me'; but despite what he says, and despite the darkness of his own shut eyes, we can see him. He is simply in error - it is a childish fancy. But we can go further than that. Because we have all met children who have affirmed the same thing, without collusion with each other, we may say that it is a

characteristic misunderstanding of a particular age of childhood.

So it is with us. If we have spent our lives under the illusion that, because we cannot see God, He cannot see us, can He not see us? Are we not simply in error? Or, if we have not believed it quite as blatantly as that, perhaps we have lived as if we did, by engaging in all manner of habits of injustice, wilfulness, selfishness and unkindness, not to say worse, as if there were no account to give. Because we were not immediately rebuked we took it as licence to continue, not knowing that we were heaping up wrath against the day of judgment.

There is another way in which we may think of those words. We may have given in to depression all too easily, saying, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,' when there was no good reason.

Jacob resolved to mourn until the day of his death because he felt the loss of his son Joseph. So acute was his feeling that he refused to be comforted, but the truth of the matter was quite otherwise, for Joseph was very much alive. God had sent him to prepare deliverance.

Because Jacob's disposition was constitutionally of that nature, he repeated his error in the matter of Benjamin. 'Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take

Benjamin away. All these things are against me.' Joseph and Simeon were both alive and God was actively, though invisibly, bringing deliverance. It was not a bit as Jacob thought. He was in error.

So it may be with us. Our sins have been blotted out by the blood of Christ and we have staked our souls on it. But the seas of life are rough and, like Peter walking on the water, we have taken our eyes off the Saviour.

We feel ourselves to be sinking, and the sensation is real enough, but God does not intend to allow us to sink. We would be mistaken to think so. Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins (Psalm 25:18).

The time of terminal illness is a time for urgent praying and real dealing with the eternal and holy God. It is not a time for distancing ourselves from the Saviour or carelessness in formulating our prayers. We must approach the Lord and come straight to the point.

The twenty-fifth Psalm is such a pattern. It begins with the language of dependence. 'Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O, my God, I trust in Thee: let me not be ashamed.'

It moves in a spirit of dependence to a declaration of teachableness. 'Shew me Thy ways, O Lord; teach me Thy paths. Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day.'

Finally, before making his requests, the psalmist pleads the promises of Scripture and the very nature of God Himself on his own behalf. 'Remember, O Lord, Thy tender mercies and Thy loving-kindnesses: for they have been ever of old.' Like the promise made to Abraham, 'In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee,' so the example before us pleads that those mercies and loving-kindnesses which have for ever characterised God should be shown to the psalmist; and then, in turn, to us, the latest in a long line of needy believers.

This is how we must pray!

Of the many things which may be on our hearts to be seech from God, the most pressing and immediate may be our pain and the discomforts of affliction. While an onlooker may be disposed to affirm that there could be more spiritually valuable things to request than freedom from pain, the one who is so suffering will see it quite otherwise. Even a few moments' release is bliss to us, and would be of great encouragement. It would remind us of the final bliss when there shall be no more pain.

The believer will still be glad to cry out and forgive all my sins. We still feel

the defilement of sin. Even on our beds we can think sinfully, and our reactions to our sufferings have not been altogether perfect.

So we are glad, as believers, still to have access to the throne of grace for for-giveness. We are glad to be able to appear - even at this moment - however briefly, before our holy God without sin; not that we have not sinned, but that our sins have all been blotted out in response to our cry. We value now, more than ever, the application of the blood of our Saviour to cleanse us from our sins.

Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live. Then Hezekiah turned his face unto the wall, and prayed unto the Lord (Isaiah 38:1,2).

There seems to be no tact about this abrupt declaration of the prophet Isaiah to the king. But then time was not on Hezekiah's side. He needed to know the facts so that he might put himself right before God. Our families do us no kindness at all if they hide from us such knowledge. They may deprive us of the opportunity to prepare our hearts to face God and thus to come to terms with death.

Hezekiah's reaction was immediate and overwhelming. He turned his face to the wall. He wanted to hide. So far from setting his house in order he was rendered quite powerless. If we have had similar news, however tactfully it was delivered, we may well have reacted in a similar way.

Once Hezekiah was alone, he prayed. He asked, by implication, to be spared. He was, in fact, granted another fifteen years of life, spent not entirely in a Godhonouring manner. It is a moot point whether he was better prepared to face God fifteen years later. If he was not, what did those extra years avail him? However, every believer under sentence of terminal illness is entitled to come before the Lord in prayer and plead for his life. But the Lord, in His infinite wisdom. Who knows what is good for us, does not permit us all to be suddenly healed by a remission, though it is granted to some. For the majority, news of terminal illness means time to set our house in order and prepare ourselves to be called to meet God.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints (Psalm 116:15).

It is not good to spend too long pleading for an extension of our days. That may preclude a more valuable work being done in our souls. If we are, in fact, going to meet with the Lord soon there may be many things to be done. We do need to set our earthly affairs in order but there is also much to be done in the realm of the soul. We need to set in order the affairs of our lifetime. There are sins to recall one by one and to repent of. There are fears of meeting with our holy God to be dispelled. There are the Scriptures to be meditated upon.

Not the least of these is our text above. The Psalmist has, like Hezekiah, been reprieved. He is very grateful for that. He has come so near to death, without dying, that he has fully realised that no one dies before God's time. There is a proper time, a precious time for each one of us to go home, which he had not yet been allowed to reach.

The Lord has chosen His people from eternity. The Saviour came two thousand years ago to accomplish their redemption. And now, when the time comes for the individual believer to be brought into His presence, with what loving care He prepares us for that great introduction, the completion of the work of eternity on our behalf! Because we are precious, the death which ushers us into the Saviour's presence is precious to Him. With what care He supervises every precious occurrence in our dying!

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation 21:4).

If we have turned our faces to the wall, like Hezekiah, and wept, it is good to know that God shall wipe away all tears. It is a precious mark of favour to have some experience of it now in this vale of tears. To have known the overwhelming peace of the Lord soothing our hearts as the Spirit applies the comforting Scriptures, is to have had a sweet foretaste of the joy to come.

It is a great help to us now, also, to know that the things which beleaguer us so incessantly shall finally cease to trouble us. We can manage victoriously a little longer, for we are taught by the Holy Spirit that these things can never again be repeated in that world which is to come. Then there will be no more possibility of sinning or of suffering its consequences.

Let us think of each thing which causes tears; especially those which are distressing us now. Let us set our hearts on that great personal moment when God shall wipe away those tears with such compassionate approval.

He has counted up our tears; He knows what caused every one. In that day all those things will be banished for ever.

Death causes tears. The human parting from loved ones is very grievous. We miss their touch, their voice, their love, their care, their reassurance, their protection, their companionship. The prospect of our own death causes tears, for we find it hard to part initially with the familiar ties of this life. The associations of death cause tears - the accidents, pains, operations, losses of mind and movement. No more death is balm to weary souls.

Sorrow causes tears. As well as the sorrows associated with death there are sorrows of a godly nature over our sins. How we have grieved our God and Saviour in so many ways! There may be sorrows over the direction our lives have taken, allied with real regrets. No more

sorrow is encouragement to repent of what has been accumulated so far.

The crying out and groaning in anguish causes tears. It may be that the physical pain is too hard to bear and we must give some vent to it; or the inner conflicts of mind or soul are still acute, though our faith in the Saviour is still strong. At all events, pain, anguish, groaning, crying out and tears are all inextricably intertwined in our experience. No more crying means the end is in sight and we can endure to the end.

The pain of our life's work has caused us enough tears. It has helped us to long for Heaven where we know that there will be no pain but endless joy. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory: while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

We get things into their proper perspective and proportion only so long as we fix our gaze upon eternity. This is the way to overcome if the last steep climb to the summit is very rough going. Now that we are reaching the peak of life's journey, we can have a better 'view' of the things which are unseen. We can appreciate the invisible values of eternity better from this perspective. Like Moses who 'endured as seeing Him Who is invisible', so long as we look at the things which are not seen, we shall overcome.

We see that there is a relation between our experience now and our reward. The weight of glory is out of all proportion to the load - it is a far more exceeding weight of glory than any weight we ever knew. It is a weight which, far from weighing heavily upon us, will elevate us. Let us endure what still has to be endured joyfully knowing that it can only enlarge the glory which will be given us. Still more wonderfully, the perspective of eternity is out of all proportion to the time of our trouble. The little time which remains to us can be

These things are the raw materials out of which our far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory is formed. Just as

faced the more faithfully since we know that the timelessness of eternity is near. At this elevation we see how light the heaviest weight is. We have laboured all our lives long and have borne many responsibilities, carried many loads, endured innumerable reverses, retraced our steps oftentimes. Some of the burdens were of our own making; some, the malice of others; some, simply what accrued by being human. But most of those weights are no longer with us; the ones that are can be handled faithfully till the time comes to lay them down.

At this elevation, also, we see how short the requirement of endurance is. There were times when the tasks seemed never ceasing. In our prime they cascaded upon us in our daily labours, at home, and in the Lord's work. Sometimes we felt quite sure they were too much to be borne, but always the Lord gave strength to endure and pick ourselves up again. Now we have almost crossed the finishing line we can endure to the end.

in Hebrews 11 we see the wide variety of situations in which faith may be exercised to please God - the making of an ark, the offering of a sacrifice, the uttering of a prophecy, the choice of suffering affliction with the people of God rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin, the enduring of torture without accepting deliverance, being stoned, sawn asunder, tempted, wandering on mountains and in caves - so each of us in our own positions, jobs, countries and centuries may turn each situation to account by faith and patient endurance.

As we lie in hospital or hospice, far from scenes of public worship and apparent fruitfulness, our weight of glory is forged. Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 24-25).

There are many aspects of our Saviour's ministry for which we desire to give Him all the glory. We ascribe all majesty to Him in that He has overcome the power of the evil one in making an atonement for our sins. We delight that His dominion is as extensive as the universe, because it means that no alien power shall ever intrude to abort His victory. We admire His power - that He has the keys of death and of hell. We rejoice that He has all authority in heaven and in earth; an authority which will never wane.

But the things which Jude alights upon here are matters of personal encouragement in respect of our individual pilgrimages. Let us worship Him with pleasure in these days of our preparation, for the certainties set before us in our text.

Jesus is able to keep us from falling. We have often stumbled but always we have been enabled to get up again. Sometimes our lives have seemed to us to be like the staggering of a drunken man lurching from one situation to another. But we are still on the Christian journey and we have, in our turn, come to the final summit. We will not fall, never to get up again, just yards short of our destination - Jesus pledges it.

He will keep us, assist us, support and encourage us to the very end.

has the power to change us so that we will appear before God without fault. We have never been faultless before except in that briefest of instants after we had sought the Lord for pardon - but, when it matters most, He will present us faultless. We shall not be as we have sometimes been in this life. We have thought long, studied hard, planned meticulously, only to feel the power go from us when it mattered; consequently, we failed. But in that great graduation, when our Saviour formally presents us to His Father as the fruit of His toil on Calvary, there will be no fault upon us.

God-haters will long for the mountains

and rocks to fall on them, to hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, when the great day of His anger comes. But at that very time it is promised to believers that they will be presented faultless before the presence of His glory. When God's holiness is revealed in all its splendour, then will the righteousness of our Saviour be found to be holiness enough for us.

It will give the Saviour exceeding joy to see the travail of His soul made perfect in us. The Father will be delighted in His Son's work. All heaven will be thrilled and we shall know great joy. What a prospect!

The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes being in torments (Luke 16:22-23).

lesus tells a parable about two menhow they lived, how they died, and what happened to them after death. Though it is a parable, it is told to make the truth come home vividly and urgently. The rich man had lived heedless of the requirements of God. He was not punished for being rich, but because, in his luxury, he had not given God the glory, nor humbled himself, nor been sympathetic to those in need. The poor man had remained a believer throughout his poverty. He was not saved because he was poor, but because, in his poverty he had kept the faith which had prevented

him from growing bitter, perverted or jealous.

According to the parable each dies rather suddenly. Jesus creates the illustration to authenticate His teaching on what happens after a person dies. One of the two things illustrated in the story must happen. The poor man died and was welcomed into a glorious state. The rich man died and was buried. The next thing he knew, he was tormented in hell. He was also aware of the blessing which had fallen to the poor man. Immediately after death we go either to heaven or hell according to whether we died believing in the Saviour or whether we died in our sins.

His story. In it, the rich man is portrayed in hell as asking that the poor man might bring him relief. It is forbidden, on the ground that there is a great gulf fixed - no one can pass from hell to heaven after death, or from heaven to hell. The state in which we die, Jesus teaches, is unalterable. No masses, no prayers, can alter our eternal condition; it is too late. Prayers may be offered for us when we are dead, but it will be to no avail; they cannot alter anything. Jesus Himself says so.

Have we been deluding ourselves all these years that the sins of our lives will be put right after we are dead? Only those things which have been repented of before God in this life are pardoned, through the merit of Jesus' redeeming death. Such sins are permanently blotted out.

That being the case, the rich man is suddenly, urgently concerned about the

eternal state of his five brothers. He was not concerned before, but now that (too late!) he knows the true state of affairs. he is very concerned for them. He asks if the poor man can bring a message from heaven to warn them urgently. The answer is no, he may not. There is a Man, the Man Christ Jesus, Who came from heaven to warn men. The Bible has been written to bear God's urgent message to men and women to repent. In it, Jesus pleads, 'Come unto me'. If people do not read it; if their lives are too frenetic, too careless of God to respond, then there is no other way open which God allows for people to enter heaven rather than hell.

Dear reader, pay earnest heed now. While we have life it is not too late to turn to the Saviour. But once that life has fled it becomes too late. Should we lapse into coma or unconsciousness, it will perhaps become too late even before we die.

Make no delay, dear reader!

Ye believe in God, believe also in Me (John 14:1).

The Bible tells us that the devils believe and tremble. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble. The amazing thing is that, though they have no difficulty believing in God, for they know He exists, and, though such knowledge makes their wicked spirits very afraid, it does nothing to alter their wicked nature to reform and save them. Believing in God, of itself, does not save. It may only serve to heighten the lostness of our condition. It is amazing that we can believe and not tremble.

Jesus knew that His disciples believed in God from the beginning. Now He gives attention to teaching them that He, Himself, (though manifest in the flesh) is all that God is. By entrusting themselves to Him they are, in fact, entrusting themselves to the Son of God's love, the very image of God Himself. The Father authenticates all that the Son teaches, for Father and Son are of one mind. Do we believe that also?

Jesus was born to take away sin. 'Thou shalt call His name Jesus for He shall save His people from their sins.' Jesus means Saviour. It was, however, not His birth by which He was identified with fallen humankind, but His death. 'With Him they crucify two thieves.....and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, "And He was numbered with the transgressors."' But, shortly before His death, just before Peter denied Him, He Himself said, 'I say unto you, this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, "And He was reckoned among the transgressors."'

We may be sure, therefore, that the eternal Son of God identified Himself with us, not primarily by being born into the world, but by becoming obedient unto death.

Believing in God means that we believe in a Creator who has certain attributes of which we may be frightened. Believing in Jesus as the way to God means that we acknowledge our sinfulness and believe that, in His love, He has paid the price for, and taken away, our sinfulness and guilt. It means, further, that we acknowledge that His total sinlessness has been credited to our account. It means that we can come into the presence of God, in all His holiness, with joy. We have no righteousness of our own - it is bestowed upon us by Jesus.

Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh to the Father

but by Me.' The Father has appointed that we may approach His holy presence only when our sins have been atoned for by the Saviour, Jesus, whom He has appointed for that very purpose.

The Father has appointed that we may know and love Him personally only by receiving the truth as it is in Jesus. The Father has appointed that Jesus alone may bestow spiritual life to our souls now, and resurrection hereafter, and has given proof of that by raising Him from the dead.

Many say they believe in God. But the only way to approach Him is through Jesus.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you (John 14:1,2).

Because the Father has appointed His Son, Jesus, to be the Saviour of His people wherever they dwell and at whatever time of history they have lived, all that He says has the full support of the Father. 'For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that His commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto Me, so I speak.'

The words of our text come to us with all the authority of God the Father and God the Son. Let not your heart be troubled. Jesus was concerned for the upset there would be in those first disciples' hearts when He left them and went to heaven; as He was about to do.

That same concern is shown towards us in our individual predicament. Each of us faces death for the first time. Nobody is able to counsel us from personal experience as to what it is like. Jesus alone has been through it.

On His authority He says there is nothing for believers to trouble their hearts about.

e particularly stresses three things. Firstly, that there are many mansions in his Father's house. The word does not mean a luxury country house, or a less luxurious town apartment, according to our modern English usage; but a permanent place to stay. In our Father's house there is a permanent place for us, a place of our own. It conveys more than just a niche; it means the ultimate, desired rest for the individuality of our own souls. It cannot be fully described yet, 'for eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him'; but just enough is revealed here to allay fear and create a longing within us.

Secondly, lest the heart in leaping for joy asks if these things can really be true, Jesus assures us that He would have told us if it were otherwise. The half has not been revealed of the wonderful things in glory which await the believer, but Jesus pledges Himself that if these things did

not await us, if there were no future reward nor rest, He would have told us so.

Thirdly, He tells those early disciples (and, through them, all of us who trust Him), 'I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'

While we have been labouring here, not least among the Saviour's tasks has been to prepare our individual place. Whether we think of it as a place of abode; a place at that great heavenly banquet; or a place in the heavenly audience chamber; it has been His eternal delight to set it for us. He will personally conduct us to our seat. That the Saviour should wait upon us! That He should reward us! That we should see His everlasting glory! These things are not far away now, so let us fix our hearts upon them today.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

There is nothing dignified about dying. It is the final indignity. Nothing can disguise it. God appointed it so. Efforts by humanists to die with dignity and to teach others to do so are but a feeble resistance to the inevitable command of God. We may die without pain, but scarcely with dignity.

'Dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return.' This is the penalty of the curse. This was the reward of Adam's sin. When God created Adam, the Bible tells us 'The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nos-

tills the breath of life; and man became a living soul'. The punishment for his sin was declared thus: 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return'. We all inherit his fallen nature and his curse.

We do not like to think of our earthiness which we share with all creation. 'Surely we are more than dust,' we say. Though our bodies are fearfully and wonderfully made, they do revert to dust without question. So we are left to ponder if there is anything about us which makes us special enough to distinguish us from the rest of creation. It is the second part of our text which comes to our aid.

We are different because of our eternal soul, here described as our spirit. It was this which was breathed into man, which makes him essentially different. Of this spirit we read that, while our body returns to the dust, it returns to God who gave it.

This may, with good reason, give us cause for alarm. If we have neglected our spiritual life, we have neglected that which distinguished us from the beasts, and maybe we have (to that extent) become, in modern parlance, beastly. Perhaps we have been refined, but neglected our souls none the less. We do not thereby cease to have a soul to return to its Maker. Jesus said, 'What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'

Immediately we die, our soul ceases to be under our own care. It is under God's direct jurisdiction.

The believer's soul will be with Christ. That of the unbeliever will be tormented until the day of judgment when, in the day of God's wrath, a final account must be given.

Is it well with our souls? Do our souls prosper though we are bodily weak? Soon they will return to God who made them. And what then? Let us resolve to use the time wisely to put our souls right.

As to the bodies of dust - those of believers will be raised to a glorious, permanent, incorruptible state in that great day when Christ returns.

Then come unto Him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection...and Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God? (Mark 12:18,24).

When the Sadducees approached Jesus with a long and complicated tale they had invented in an effort to discredit the whole concept of resurrection, He spoke of two other matters before replying to their particular, contentious point.

He declared their ignorance, both of the Scriptures and of the power of God. As a direct result of such ignorance they were wrong about many things. This was very serious, but they added to their confusion by steadfastly refusing to believe in the resurrection. Tonight, we shall turn our thoughts once again to resurrection. But before we do that, it is necessary to ask if we might have misconceptions about that (and other matters) because of the same, twofold, wilful ignorance.

It was, at the very least, wilful laziness, and, more likely, deliberate rejection of the truth that caused these Jews to be ignorant of the Scriptures which were their precious heritage from the Lord. That Jewish leaders should be ignorant, not only of the Scriptures but also of God Himself, was sinful in the extreme and ded them into gross errors.

We may have more excuse than they, but we are going to be in similar great error if we know neither the Scriptures, nor the power of God. Let us use the time which remains to read the Scriptures and, through them, to meet with the living God.

As touching the dead, that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err (Mark 12:26-27).

We might well ask who, besides Jesus, would ever have thought of such an argument to demonstrate the truth of the resurrection; or who else could speak with such authority about the being of God, the *I AM*. Let us be persuaded by such unanswerable reasoning.

It turns upon Christ's perfect understanding of what God was conveying to Moses when he said, 'I am the God of Abraham'. It could be understood simply to mean that the ever-living God was God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while they were alive. But Christ declares that God meant more than that, and that Moses knew He meant more than that: and, further, that anyone helped by the Holy Spirit could see from the Scriptures that He meant more than that.

God is still the living God. He is still the God of Abraham. Therefore He, and all whose God is the Lord, are alive. If they were dead, and are now alive with Him, they must have been raised. What more compelling logic could we desire on which to establish our hope of resurrection? Jesus answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

During the time when Jesus was tempted by the devil, He was very hungry after fasting forty days and nights. The devil came to Him and said, 'If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread'. At a time of great need Jesus was tempted, not just to satisfy His physical appetite, but also to prove His physical power.

The words of our text are Jesus' reply. The point of it is that His real and inward satisfaction came from obeying God. Other things were of little significance and could certainly be endured for the joy of being faithful.

Jesus quoted from the Old Testament. We now have it in the Old and the New. It was written in the Old Testament as a demonstration of the truth that, though the children of Israel were forty years in the wilderness, God had always fed them with manna (though there were so many of them) and the supply had not failed.

Further, it demonstrated that if God had promised to keep them in that specific way, even though the normal, regular earthly provision was withdrawn, then His promised provision will not fail in other, different circumstances. Whatever He promises, God will fulfil. Never is it more important to grasp this than when our earthly supply is failing.

f our earthly life is ebbing away, then our life does not depend on our food, for which we may have no stomach, but on God's promises.

Is it not written, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life'? That is food for the soul, though the body be dying. We digest such a word by thinking 'I am a believer. I should have perished. But on the authority of God's word, the believer does not perish but have everlasting life. Therefore I will inherit such life.'

Perhaps there is a prior question. How do I know I am a believer? What constitutes saving faith? The Scripture says, 'Jesus is able to save them to the uttermost that come to God by Him.' Have I approached God in such a way? Other Scriptures speak of the nature of Christ's work to make atonement for the guilty sinner, explaining the need to come to God by Him. Such is the way in which Scripture becomes our food. In searching the Scriptures we are pointed to Christ as the Saviour of our souls.

Our text assures us that we live by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. Not just those portions of Scripture which are promises; but commands, statements and narratives all provide food for the soul. Every word presupposes that, as far as in us lies, we must labour to lay hold of the fullest understanding of the whole of Scripture time will allow.

I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you (Philippians 1:23,24).

The Straits of Dover compress the mighty waters of the North Sea and the English Channel at the very point where they join into a narrow confine which causes all manner of turbulence. Our souls may suffer unrest, pressed at one and the same time by the straits of our old and new natures. We want to abide in the flesh and we have a desire to depart. We scarcely know which presses us harder.

Now it was not on his own account that Paul was so exercised. It was because he could see that there was a great need for his presence and guidance in the infant church. Perhaps we, too, have loved ones who are very dependent upon us, or a work situation which, we feel, cannot be abandoned. Maybe our local church, as far as we can see, has no one to replace us.

We must, before the Lord, come to terms with these thoughts. If we have asked the Lord to spare us, as we are entitled to do, and have been brought into peace of mind that our souls are safe with our Saviour, and that this is our time for preparing to meet Him; then we must likewise commit our loved ones and our situations to our Saviour too. So long as the Lord graciously provided us to care, earn or lead, then there was, of course, no other. But if He is taking us away, will not the same gracious hand provide, albeit differently? Should we not commit the responsibilities we are laying down into His care?

Perhaps we are straitened in our souls, not on account of others but on account of ourselves. We do not really want to leave this world. We want to abide in the flesh. Consider, dear friend, what it entails. Pain, suffering, tears and decay - is this what we desire to hang on to? No, of course not, unless it could be as it used to be.

Now perhaps we have not yet fully come to terms with the fact that we are going to die; but even so, was it really all that wonderful in the days of youth? Are we entertaining romantic memories of a golden bygone age which do not, in fact, match up with its tempers, pride, vanity, wilfulness and wasted opportunities - to speak of nothing else?

Let our minds dwell consistently on this from now on - that to depart and be with Christ is far better. It was all very well for Paul, we say, to write such things, for he had led a fulfilling life of preaching the gospel and had a great reward to look forward to. So he had. But, describing himself as the chief of sinners (not an exaggeration, for had he not been implicated in the death of the martyr Stephen?) he went on to say, 'howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting'. A pattern to us! We have received mercy for our sins, whatever they were. We also may long to be with Christ, as did Paul.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies (Psalm 23:5).

A conquering army will often display its supremacy by taking some public action which the vanquished ones are powerless to prevent, dearly though they would love to. They will destroy a home, perhaps, while distraught owners look on.

God displays His supremacy over the powers of Satan to His loved ones by supplying their needs while His enemies, and the haters of the church, look on defeated. They cannot prevent us receiving spiritual blessing in Satan's territory, as when the inhabitants of a city flaunt their secret supply of food while the enemy besieges them.

It is a picture of the power of God to keep us in the midst of troubles. So often we think we must be utterly delivered from them in order to taste joy or peace or rest. The sight of them puts us off even the best provision. But has it not been the lesson of our Christian experience that our deliverance has not been out of the world but in the midst of it? And should we not boast of it?

Of His deliverance I will boast Till all who are distressed From my example comfort take And charm their griefs to rest.

The last enemy to be destroyed is death. Here, more than anywhere, He protects His loved ones. However Satan may chafe, he cannot prevent the believer feeding on the Scriptures and enjoying fellowship with the living God, meanwhile paying scant heed to bodily sickness and the passing of this world's enticing allurements.

Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over (Psalm 23:5).

ere are two pictures of abundance and generosity. When Aaron was anointed the ointment ran down to his feet.

'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments.' In Psalm 133 unity is likened to anointing with oil. God has appointed it to be pleasant and abundant.

In Psalm 23 it is our very beings which are so dear to God as to be the object of His choice gifts and of such spiritual provision as makes us attractive to God and others.

Some old-fashioned grocers used to weigh out supplies to their customers by filling the packet, shaking it down to make room for more, and then so filling it to the brim that it ran over the top. It was a generous supply; more than was paid for; a token of goodwill and kindness.

God does not skimp His supplies. The Spirit bestows in abundance the fruit of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. They are a pleasure to ourselves and to all who surround us. May we experience such things in these days! Such goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives and, though confined to bed perhaps, we shall gain abundant entrance thus arrayed into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

For I know that My Redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God (Job 19:25,26).

any people, sadly, cannot say more than 'I hope I have a hope'. Job said, 'I know'. What did he know? Even though he lived many centuries before Christ, he knew that the Lord was the Redeemer - the One appointed by God to obtain, by purchase, the lost souls of all his people. And shall we, who live after Christ's advent and have such a faithful record of His life in the four Gospels, not believe as Job did?

Job calls him my Redeemer. Those words imply that Job saw himself as a sinner who needed, upon repentance, to be bought back from the power of sin and set free. Additionally, they imply that he had repented, and had been delivered and

pardoned. The Bible sanctions and encourages us to exercise such faith as can speak personally of *my Redeemer*. Can you say so? Job proceeded to affirm that the Lord Jesus will return. He spoke of a final day for the earth when the Saviour shall be seen to be dominant, and will reverse every injustice and unmask every wickedness of all time.

Job made another affirmation which is part of the package of faith. He knew that he would enjoy resurrection to see God, and that it will be a full, bodily resurrection. What can be so scathing of the mortality of the natural body than to refer to it as mere skin! To reduce it to its dust and mention the final indignity of its being devoured by the worms! Yet though such indignity is undeniably true even when their total destruction is admitted, our bodies shall be raised and restored, and our perfected (though distinctive) personalities shall shine forth.

... in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another (Job 19:26,27).

There was nothing vague about Job's understanding of resurrection and there should be nothing vague about ours either. If the best we can manage is to say, 'Some people say that there is a future existence,' what help will that be to us? Some shadowy future does not encourage us to leave this earth for a better. 'I hope I have a hope' nowhere approaches the certainty which the Bible encourages in the words: I know.

The Psalmist speaks of those whose inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling

places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names'. He also says, 'This their way is their folly; yet their posterity approve their sayings'. What use is it to us if our grandchildren see the road which civic dignitaries named after us? It does not give us life!

There was nothing vague about Job's beliefs. 'I shall see God for myself,' he said; 'I will be there!'

Every believer will be there. Not by proxy with someone standing in for us, but a personal attendance to behold the glory of our Saviour, when all our sin has been wiped away, is what we are surely longing for. How wonderful to be there when the kingdoms are taken from wicked nations and given to our Saviour!

I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life.....nor things present, nor things to come...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38,39).

There was a time when life separated us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Before we were converted we were so wrapped up in, and dominated by, the things of this world that we were separated by a barrier which, we now admit, we had no power to break. Then the Holy Spirit convicted us of our sin and enabled us to repent by giving us new desires towards God. Looking back, we know that it is certainly possible to be separated from God.

But since we have been converted we have experienced the saving and

preserving care of the Lord Jesus. Things present have not come between us and the Saviour. We find the logic of Christ's words unassailable: 'My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand'.

Death will not cause a rift. We may say to ourselves 'If He has saved me at so great a price and won my heart; if He has conquered death and preserved me all these years; shall the Saviour now abandon me when the end of all He aimed to do for me is in sight?' Paul was persuaded by such considerations. Shall we not be fully persuaded in our minds, too?

Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day (2 Corinthians 4:16).

We have been well aware for many years that our bodily life has reached its peak and begun to decline. First it was some physical prowess; then, perhaps years later, some mental processes began to be impaired. We do not, therefore, find it difficult to understand what Paul means when he says that the outward man perishes.

But he also affirms that, side by side with that decline, there is a growth in the soul of the believer. While it is a characteristic of natural things to decline and finally perish, it is the hallmark of that which is spiritual to shine more and more unto the perfect day. It is well with that believer who has watched carefully over

such spiritual increase all life long. He has been enabled not to be too concerned with bodily weakness and learned well the Scripture, 'bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come'.

Perhaps you have not known these things because you have never been converted. Were you to be, they would soon be your experience, for never is there such rapid renewal as at the time of conversion. These things could be yours for ever.

There is also a daily renewal. We make a personal daily application to the Saviour for His blessings and receive a daily portion in return. By such things the soul lives and is daily nourished.

... so is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory (1 Corinthians 15:42,43).

The apostle Paul has prepared the way for his explanation of resurrection by illustrating three things. First he has shown that when we plant a seed it does not resemble the final flower. He has shown also that there are different kinds of bodies - for example the flesh of men, beasts and fish. Furthermore, he illustrates the principle that bodies have differing degrees of splendour, mentioning particularly the heavenly bodies. The sun outshines the moon; the stars differ from one another.

So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What we are now does not resemble what we shall be. The natural body we have now will become a

spiritual body, and this is not to cause amazement for there are different kinds of bodies. The glory, also, that shall be revealed in us is not to be a matter of surprise, for there are degrees of splendour too.

As we die, believers are like a seed sown. We are sown in corruption. That is to say we are decaying humanity. Perhaps we are diseased. We are corrupted by sin. Subsequently our bodies shall be raised without possibility of ever sinning again, ever suffering pain, ever being hurt or hurting another.

We are sown in dishonour. There are many things which have stained our lives. Let us confess the things we have done of which we are ashamed, and let the blood of our Saviour Jesus wash us thoroughly from our iniquity. Then we shall be raised without defilement.

It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:43,44).

We are sown in weakness. We are never so weak as at the moment of dying. Once we felt we had boundless physical energy with apparently endless emotional resources. Now it is not so. Even if it were inherently possible, which it is not, we could not make our way unaided to heaven, winging our flight to realms of day. But in glory we shall have powers of intellect to participate fully in unceasing eternal worship and to accom-

plish things not dreamed of before. The things God has in store for us would beggar description even if we knew them now. Our bodies will be raised compatible with such endless glories, for they will endlessly view the glories of our Saviour and the Father.

We are sown natural bodies. We depend on natural laws of gravity, function, and sustenance. It shall not be so then 'for there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever'. Our bodies will be raised to receive direct sustaining power from God Himself.

As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many (Hebrews 9:26,27).

It is a matter to take seriously that we must die. It is a matter to stab our consciences awake that God has appointed the time of our death. He has appointed that we shall die, and when we shall die. We die once, at the particular time he has appointed.

There is a further appointment. We have been appointed to face the judgment of God upon the affairs of our life. It follows that we must be given a resurrection to face the final judgment; the judgment is not after death so that it may

be avoided by dying, but so that the accounts may be finalised. It is a thought to catch our breath that God is going to all the bother to raise everyone from the dead to face His judgment. Even if we are guilty of unbelief and unforgiven sin, and are, therefore, to be cast into eternal fire, yet God decrees we shall be raised to face judgment. If God is so serious about our rendering account to Him, should not we be also?

These words are so searching that they may cause us to panic. To add to our distress we may think that the time is so short there is nothing we can do to put matters right. The time is certainly short, but if the desire is there to put matters right it can be done.

As certainly as God has appointed a time of death for each one of us; as definitely as he has fixed a judgment that cannot be avoided; so God has made a provision for the removal of sin. Because of the terrible appointments with death and judgment which no soul can face unaided, precisely to prepare us for that time of all times, Christ has been once offered to bear the sins of many.

'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.' He freely offered Himself on Calvary, but He was made an offering for sin by God. 'He hath put him to grief.' For that reason Christ came into the world. God cannot pretend that there is any sin which can be left unpunished. Every last punishment due to us for our sins was borne by the Saviour in our place as, once for all time, He hung on that cross.

All our redemption was accomplished there. God sets His approval upon our persons as not guilty, not because we have not sinned, but because He has paid the price for us. He has taken our awful load. He has made atonement for our sins.

Notice, he has borne the sins of many. Many may be a vast multitude that no man can number, running into millions upon millions, but it most certainly means not all. Not all will be saved. It is believers in Christ who are saved. We will soon find in our extremity that it will not do to mutter, 'I believe,' for, without content, our hearts will know such utterance to be meaningless to us and to Christ, the Sinbearer. No, those who, more than everything else desire to be done with sin and would repent of it, may come to the living Christ. His saving power is applied only to those guilty sinners who repent and trust before it is too late.

Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:17,18).

ere is a verse which tells us something about the present time, and about that future judgment time also. It speaks of boldness then and freedom from torment now. It speaks of imputed righteousness now and completed salvation then.

The love here spoken of is the Christian's love to the Saviour (which needs to be perfected) in response to His perfect love towards us. Greater love hath no man than this than a man lay down his life for his friends. Christ's love for His people, expressed supremely in

His death, is designed to accomplish for them a real and actual redemption. Sins are really removed, and that forms the basis of boldness in the day of judgment.

Jesus is alive, having risen from the dead, and is at the right hand of God. He is sinless now, and has always been so. He was without sin before He came to earth. While He was upon earth He had no sin of His own, but was made sin with the sin of sinners, to bear it away. When that was accomplished He returned to heaven, victorious over sin, as the Captain of our salvation. His merits in heaven are ours now. His righteousness is counted as ours, because of our solidarity with Him and His identification with us. We are in Him, and He in us. So we are as He is.

Love makes us to be now, what Jesus is eternally.

There is not space to think of all the torment which afflicts the children of men. But think of the particular torment of a troubled young love. Does my fiancé really love me? Would he desert me? With such fears many torment themselves; in some cases, perhaps, with justification. But all such fears about our Saviour are groundless.

His love is designed to take away the believer's present fears about the judgment day. It is no longer to be feared, because Jesus has merited our full pardon, and God is not angry with the believer any more. Indeed, He rejoices in the Beloved's completed work and in the believing response of those who put their faith in His dear Son, Jesus.

Now, freedom from fear of death and the judgment which follows is a totally acceptable attitude with which to face life. It is not arrogant, insufferable or unjustified; but is precisely what Jesus accomplished for believers on Calvary.

Come, savour these words. There is no fear in love. And are we so timid? When a young child, after toddier stage, goes through that time of coyness, do we not feel it to be mildly irritating rather than sweet? Shall we be coy about the Saviour's proffered love? Many 'spend all their lifetime in bondage through fear of death'; but it is a glorious thing to be brought into the perfect freedom of the believer. If we have fears, even little misgivings perhaps, there is still work to do. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Spend these days treasuring Calvary love; let the redeeming love, which prompted the Saviour's work, captivate our souls.

Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23).

t is not too late to heed the injunction of this command.

The Lord Jesus elaborated on it when He said 'That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man'.

Thus graphically does Jesus describe the issues of life. Of course, what arises out of these may be more devastating still and have ever-widening consequences. It may be that there are many unsoothed hurts, to put it at its mildest, because we have allowed untold evils to issue from our hearts.

The heart must receive attention and be kept under control like a garden. Fair flowers will grow, but not if the garden is overrun with weeds. Weed-pulling is backbreaking work. If weeds are clogging your heart; if the issues of life have been the cause of much sorrow and regret it is a task we must now address: the task of repentance before God; and, if it is feasible, even of making redress to those we have offended.

Above all, we must control and discipline our thoughts in the days which remain. The extremity of bodily weakness, and perhaps of pain, will readily produce evil thoughts, blasphemy, pride and foolishness. But we can produce, even in a short time, such issues as love, joy and peace as will delight those who gather round us.

Unto the Lord belong the issues from death (Psalm 68:20).

Awhole new experience begins at death, of which the most significant thing is that God is in complete and immediate control. We will no longer be our own masters, as we once rashly thought ourselves to be. It will become immediately and awesomely apparent that He is so holy that, before long, heaven and earth will flee from before His face.

Things issue out of death as a God-directed consequence. Firstly, God separates the souls of all men from their bodies. In an instant there is a further separation; the believers in Jesus are transported to the beginnings of the bliss which awaits them; unbelievers are removed to the appointed place where

torments commence. God makes no mistakes in this infallible work from which there is no appeal.

Both groups remain disembodied for a while, until the last believer upon earth has been saved. Then there is judgment day. Heaven and earth will flee away before the great white throne of God. Bodies will be resurrected and reunited with souls. The books will be opened. Judgment will be pronounced. Unbelievers will be cast into an eternal, abiding hell. Believers will enter into the joy of their Lord, to be with Him unceasingly. The new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells shall appear and be permanently established. These are some of the issues from death. Many others have not been revealed. Let us not go hence into death unprepared for the issues which await us.

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18).

Just how many sufferings have been our lot hitherto, we have almost certainly forgotten. There were small sufferings, which may be called simply inconveniences. There were injustices, but we got over them and learned to endure. There were nauseas, aches and pains; heartaches and headaches - upsets of mind and heart. There were insults because of our background; our colour; our faith. The Lord knows them all. 'Put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book?'

Life puts suffering in proportion. If it is true that we have already forgotten many of the things we have been through, then it is still more certain that the transition to glory will cause us to forget even the most traumatic.

Perhaps we thought we had forgotten many incidents, but this text has provoked our minds to recall them. Deal with them in this way. Placed alongside the glory which shall be revealed in us, do they not pale into insignificance? Of course, we can only imagine those glories now. When we actually experience them, especially that experience of being glorified together with Christ, shall we not then be all taken up with what is being revealed and forget what is behind?

Let us put away, then, all bitterness. The best is yet to come; indeed, about to come. If there be an unforgiving spirit, any lurking hatred, let us make our peace with all, that our trespasses may be forgiven and glory entered upon.

Let us not succumb to the present feeling of our infirmities but rejoice in the transformation that is soon to happen, when God shall wipe away all tears and there shall be no more sorrow, crying nor pain. 'He that overcometh shall inherit all things.'

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee (Isaiah 43:2).

We must pass through them - we cannot be excused - but we shall pass through them. It may be there are severe times ahead but in the midst of them all we have the promised attendance of the Saviour. Let us resolve here and now to claim this promise for every future situation which might otherwise overwhelm us.

Let us meditate on how vital a battle it is that His dearest servants cannot be excused such ordeals. Let us remember how God 'spared not His Son but gave Him up for us all'. There was no other way to achieve salvation for us, so He went through with it, setting His face steadfastly to go up to Jerusalem. He knows what we are going through, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. But we must hold our part firm and believe to the end. 'He that endures to the end shall be saved.'

Some experiences may buffet us, whirl us about and frighten us like torrents of water. Some may choke and stifle us but we shall not drown. Some pains may be like fires. None of these things can destroy our souls. None of them can make us give up our faith. They will not prove too much because the Saviour's hands are there to lift us over, onward, and through.

There shall be no more curse (Revelation 22:3)

The curse has been known since Adam's fall. Unto Adam, God said 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee...in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art and unto dust thou shalt return'.

It has dogged the steps of every human being ever since. Day by day, in unremitting labour, have the effects of the curse homed in upon us all. The labour of childbirth; of learning; of working; of sickness; of danger - all its ramifications have multiplied upon us.

So, the relief of knowing that the new, heavenly state will be utterly free from the curse and its effects brings liberation and anticipation to our souls. To be without the trammels of the curse will be rest beyond measure.

If there is to be no more curse there will be no more curse of any sort. No more old curse, certainly; but no new curse either. And if no possibility of future curse, then heaven must be forever free from any further sin which would of necessity cause it to be pronounced once again. Let us praise God for such freedom; and worship Him who has the power to undo the damage, which our forefather wrought, through the last Adam, the second Man, the Lord from Heaven, Jesus Christ.

There shall be no night there (Revelation 22:5).

There will be no darkness in heaven. Our verse continues, 'They need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light.' And in another place, 'The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof'.

Some have ignorantly supposed that the sun is to be worshipped. Certainly its light and warmth support life, but it is itself a created object. By it God indirectly sustains life. In glory it will no longer be required, for God who created the sun will Himself directly sustain the eternal state. 'Reflected' light will no longer be appropriate where access to God is immediate; God Himself will be all in all.

There will be no darkness in the soul or the mind. When Jesus healed the blind, He did it as a demonstration of His power to deliver the mind also from spiritual darkness. On one such occasion, Pharisees, who were certainly not physically blind, said to Him, 'Are we blind also?' Jesus replied, 'If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, "We see," therefore your sin remaineth'.

On another occasion He said, 'The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!' How wonderful it will be to know as we are known for all time, when sin has been utterly eradicated!

This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53).

By this corruptible Paul meant himself. By this mortal Paul likewise meant himself. He intended that we should substitute our own names there whenever we read his words. Far from being impersonal, he was being very personal. I am corruptible. I am decaying in body; my behaviour all my life long has been decadent in the sight of God. However viewed, corruptible is my name. I am likewise mortal. Due to die and of limited lifespan. Mortal is my name.

There is to be a mighty change. We have all had the experience of coming home drenched through. We dry off and change our clothes. How differently we feel! In a similar but much more wonderful way we are to put on two new heavenly uniforms. The one is the uni-

form of incorruption. Every aspect of being that could be said to be corruptible is to be changed and become incorruptible. That is, to put on such a form as will never be capable of decaying in any part. The other is the uniform of immortality. Instead of a limited lifespan, our new bodies will be clothed in such a way as never will be capable of dying any more.

There is a necessity about it. It is a must. God has commanded it. To dwell with God for ever, such a change must of necessity occur. It is not an experience to be dreaded however, but a change to look forward to. It is also very personal. This corruptible; this mortal. We are not to be second-class citizens in heaven in the sense that such a grand thing will have happened to everybody except us. It will happen to us as certainly as it has happened to any other citizen of heaven.

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60).

Though Stephen's was a martyr's death, it was an exemplary death. It may not be required of us to be put to death like Stephen and the Saviour; nor may ours be a public spectacle. We may just have a friend or two with us; or be, humanly speaking, totally alone.

It is an **example** to us because Stephen called upon Jesus the Saviour as God to receive his spirit. His last words were directed to the Saviour; not to friend or foe, but to Him. His last words were, firstly, a prayer for himself; in final

acknowledgment of what, for many years past, he had not ceased to believe and act upon, that Jesus is God and, as Saviour, is the One in Whose hands finally our whole life's endeavours should be placed. It was a prayer, calling upon the Saviour to fulfil His promise, 'I will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also'.

Secondly, he called upon the Saviour to forgive those who, at that very time, had been responsible for bringing him from being a fit and healthy man to a dying state in the space of a few, brief minutes. Do be sure, dear friends, that we have pardoned all who have offended us. We have had more time than Stephen to desire God's pardon for all who have given us offence. There is still time. Let us forgive, that we might be forgiven.

"My worldly faculties are slipping away day by day. Happy it is for all of us that the true good does not lie in them. As they ebb, may they leave us as little children trusting in the Father of mercies and accepting His unspeakable gift. I bow before Him who is Lord of all."

Michael Faraday

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Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day,
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories fade away
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.