

The Better Land

by James Smith

James Smith's sermon, 'The Better Land,' encourages believers to trust in God's faithfulness as they approach the end of their earthly journey, looking forward to eternal life with Him.

Scripture: Psalm 71:17

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Heavenly Glory"

Description

James Smith preaches about the journey of the aged Christian nearing the end of life, on the border of the promised land, where they will soon depart to be with the Lord. Reflecting on past teachings and experiences, the preacher encourages believers to look forward to the eternal rest, inheritance, and glory awaiting them in Heaven. The sermon emphasizes the assurance of God's presence, the preparation for departure, and the anticipation of being with Christ in a better country, wearing white robes, receiving crowns of righteousness, and singing new songs of praise for eternity.

Transcript

The Border Land

"The time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day!" 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Aged Christian, your day is far spent, your journey is nearly ended! The greatest part of the wilderness is behind you! You have traveled many a weary mile, and have spent many a sorrowful day. But you have not much farther to go! You have not many more days to spend here in this bleak desert. You are just on the edge of the wilderness, on the borders of the promised land! Soon, very soon, your Lord will send his messenger, 'death', to call you home. The year of release is just at hand. Do not, therefore, give way to fear. Do not hang down your head like a bulrush-but look up, for your redemption draws near! Let us talk together a little of the past, the present, and the future; and let us try and comfort one another with God's own precious words.

We have not much time left-let us not waste it! We have not far to go-let us not loiter! We are in the border country-let us expect some glimpses of "The Better Land." We are hastening from danger and a country that is doomed; let us not look back! Every step now brings us sensibly nearer home! Every hour counts, and the last hour will soon be here!

Let us attend to the Apostle's admonition, "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away" I would like you to be free from concern." 1 Corinthians 7:29-32

Anxiety about temporal things does not befit us now. The world is to us like an inn, where we lodge tonight-but shall leave it tomorrow.

"The world passes away; but he who does the will of God abides forever." 1 John 2:17.

THE REVIEW

"Since my youth, O God, You have taught me; and to this day I declare Your marvelous deeds." Psalm 71:17

In early life, God began to instruct us. He taught us the rigid requirements of his holy law, our need of a better righteousness than our own, the importance of a saving interest in Christ, and the necessity of personal holiness. Under his teaching we . . .

left the world,

came to Jesus,

embraced the atonement,

found peace, and

commenced walking with God.

Many years have passed since that period, many times have we manifested the depravity of our hearts, through many trials and troubles we have been brought-but amidst all, our God has taught us!

Yes, he has taught us . . .

our own weakness,

the vanity of the world,

the insufficiency of earthly things, and

the necessity of something superior to what we find here, to satisfy the cravings of our immortal minds. Daily has he taught us our need of Christ, and how to make use of him. He has taught us . . .

by his Word,

by his servants,

by his providence,

and by his Spirit.

And it is in consequence of his teaching that we now . . .

cleave to Jesus,

prefer holiness to sin,

Heaven to earth, and

the presence of God to everything beside.

Blessed, forever blessed be God, for teaching us. For if he had not taught us-we would have still been . . .

ignorant of ourselves,

strangers to Jesus, and

alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the natural blindness of our minds.

My soul, look back at the many Ebenezers you have set up . . .

when helped in difficulty,

when supplied in necessity, and

when delivered out of trouble.

Especially notice this, how your God has taught you . . .

your need of his grace,

the preciousness of Christ, and

the value and veracity of his precious promises.

O blessed God and Savior, I praise, I bless you, that you have taught me from my youth!

"Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every Word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you."
Deuteronomy 8:2-5

THE PETITION

"Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone!" Psalm 71:9

Reader, do you not often put up the same petition to your good and gracious God? What could be so dreadful, as to be cast off of God? What should we deprecate so much, as to be forsaken when our strength fails? But, "The Lord is the One who will go before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you

or forsake you. Do not be afraid or discouraged." Deuteronomy 31:8

No, my aged brother, my aged sister-the Lord will never cast you off; he will never forsake you. Yet, you may relieve your mind by thus praying, and please your God by thus pleading with him, provided you do not suspect his veracity, or doubt his faithfulness. Again the psalmist breathes out his soul, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." Psalm 71:18. You see he is panting to be useful He wanted to bear witness for God, to testify to his power, faithfulness, and love.

Blessed be God, he never did forsake an old pilgrim yet! Blessed be God, he never did neglect an old servant yet! Many have deserved it; but he has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. He is faithful to his Word, and cannot lie. He is in one mind, and who can turn him? Let us . . .

abide at his throne,

hang on his Word,

plead for his presence, and

aim in some feeble way to glorify him; and then we may dismiss all our fears about his casting us off, or forsaking us. Then we may sing, if we have breath enough left, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging!" Psalm 46:1-3.

"This God is our God forever and ever! He will be our guide, even unto death!" Psalm 48:14

THE PROSPECT

"But I will see Your face in righteousness; when I awake, I will be satisfied with Your presence!" Psalm 17:15

Present circumstances may be trying. The Lord may hide his face, or withhold sensible comforts. Providence may appear to frown, and temporal things may run counter to our wishes. Corruption may work powerfully within, and innumerable sins may stare us in the face. Comparing ourselves with what God requires-we may be depressed; and comparing ourselves with what Jesus was-we may not be able to discover more than a very faint resemblance.

But let us look forward! It will not be always as it is now. There will be a change, and a glorious change, soon! Others may have easier circumstances, they may be strangers to the conflicts we endure-and we may wonder at their prosperity. But what pleases them-would not satisfy us. Nor must we expect full satisfaction in this present world.

If we are hungering and thirsting after righteousness;

if we are longing to be like Jesus;

if we are pining and praying for the presence of God;

there is a glorious prospect before us!

We shall soon see our God! We may now be vexed, wearied, and disappointed; but we shall awake in the likeness of Jesus! Our present privileges are great-but our future prospects are unspeakably glorious! "Yes, dear friends, we are already God's children, and we can't even imagine what we will be like when Christ returns. But we do know that when he comes-we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is!"

1 John 3:2

We shall be like him! O glorious privilege! We shall wake up in his likeness! O delightful prospect! My poor, afflicted, tried, tempted, and aged friend-lift up your downcast head! Look beyond your present circumstances, for your redemption draws near. "For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down-when we die and leave these bodies-we will have a home in Heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands!" 2 Corinthians 5:1.

"You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand!" Psalm 16:11.

THE PROMISE

"I will be your God throughout your lifetime-until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!" Isaiah 46:4

The friends of your youth are gone, death or distance has stripped you of them. But your God says, "I am he who formed you at first, as a creature; I am he who called you by my grace, into fellowship with my Son; I am he who gave you my Word, that I would never leave you nor forsake you; and I am in the same mind still. I am immutable-there is no change in me. You have changed, I have not. You will change-but I shall not."

"I will be your God throughout your lifetime-until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!"

Your God will not only carry your burdens-but he will carry YOU. He laid you like a lamb in his bosom, when he called you by his grace; and he will carry you now you are old; he will never turn away from doing of you good-but will rejoice over you to do you good, with his whole heart, and with his whole soul. He will bear with you-though you may sometimes feel fretful, peevish, and ungrateful. He will be with you amidst all your infirmities. He will carry you, not only to the Jordan-but over it! He has delivered you in six troubles-and in seven he will not forsake you!

You should look back to past deliverances, and then face your present difficulty, saying with David, "The Lord, who has delivered me out of the mouth of the lion, and out of the mouth of the bear-will yet deliver me also from this uncircumcised Philistine!" Or with Paul, "He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us!" God's promise-is your property. Take it, trust it, plead it, and expect it to be made good. Faithful is he who promised, who also will do it. Even though you believe not-yet he abides faithful; for he cannot deny himself

"God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?" Numbers 23:19

THE STRONG STAFF

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever!" Hebrews 13. 8.

The aged pilgrim, in going down the steep of time, often feels that he needs a strong staff on which to lean. Something that will . . .

support his weight,

rest his weary limbs,

help him along the road, and

never give way under him.

And what he needs-God has provided for him.

The immutability of Jesus is a strong staff indeed! Take it, my aged friend, look at it, lean on it, try it! Jesus, your Savior, the Messiah, anointed to save you-is ever the same!

Jesus Christ is the same now-as he was when you first went to him, full of guilt, full of fears, and expecting he would reject your prayer. You remember how he pitied you, how graciously he smiled upon you, how freely he pardoned you, and how he pledged himself to you by his Word.

He is the same today!

His pity is as tender.

His heart is as full of love.

His mercy is from everlasting to everlasting.

He has watched over you during the whole journey of life.

He has borne with you all through the wilderness.

He loves you at this moment-as much as he did when he died for you-or when he first called you by his grace!

There have been many changes in you-but there has been no change in him! Jesus, your Jesus, rests in his love. Having loved his own who were in the world-he loves them unto the very end. His eye is upon you at this moment, and his heart glows with infinite love to you!

He has some gracious purpose to answer by keeping you here on earth a little longer; it may be in weakness, in pain, or even in privation; but as soon as that purpose is accomplished, he will send for you, and receive you unto himself; that where he is-there you may be also!

Rejoice then in this, that amidst all the changes experienced within you, or witnessed around you, "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever!"

"I am the LORD, and I do not change! That is why you descendants of Jacob are not destroyed!" Malachi 3:6

THE EXPOSTULATION

"O you of little faith-why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:31

Many aged Christians give way to doubt . They yield to fear. They are more affected by their own feelings-than they are by God's Word. They judge more by what passes within them-than they do by what God has said to them. This casts them down, this disquiets them. Peter doubted, because he was on an unnatural element, and in new and trying circumstances. But Jesus reproves him for doubting, and he will reprove you. "O you of little faith-why did you doubt?"

Ah, you say, "My sins are so many and so aggravated!" But Jesus promises to pardon them.

"My imperfections and infirmities are so great!" But Jesus will clothe you in his righteousness.

"My prayers are so broken and so lifeless!" But Jesus pleads for you as your ever-living intercessor.

"But I seem to be everything I ought not to be-and nothing at all that I ought." But Jesus will completely save you.

You see your sins-because he has given you light.

You feel your imperfections-because he has given you life.

You are dissatisfied with yourself-because he has shown you his beauty.

You complain of your prayers-because his grace prompts you to desire perfection.

You loathe yourself-because he has partly sanctified you, and implanted within you the desire to be exactly like himself.

Why do you doubt? Has he not promised . . .

that he will never cast you out, ever;

that where sin abounds-his grace shall much more abound;

that whoever shall call on the name of the Lord-shall be saved?

Now, you know that you come to him daily in desire and simple prayer; you know you pant and plead that grace may reign in your heart; you know that you call upon his dear name. Doubt not, then.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!" Psalm 43:5

THE LESSON

"I have learned by experience." Genesis 30:27

We expect that our aged friends have learned some important lessons. Paul had "learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." And therefore he exhorted the Lord's people, "Having food and clothing-let us be content with that."

It is a sad sight to see an aged Christian discontented. If God has arranged our lot-if he has promised us all that is necessary for life and godliness-if he has loved us with an everlasting love-if he has united us to

Jesus-if he has redeemed us by the blood of his Son-if he has given us his Holy Spirit-if he has pledged his Word, never to leave us or forsake us-if he has assured us, that all things shall work together for our good-if he has promised us, that as our day, so shall our strength be-if we have proved him faithful so many years-if he has borne with our stubborn tempers, our many follies, and many provocations-and if he is about shortly to introduce us to his kingdom and glory-surely, surely we ought to be contented!

"But our pains!" What are they-compared to the pains of Jesus? What are they-compared to what you deserve?

"Yes-but our increasing infirmities!" The grace of Jesus will still be sufficient for you.

"Yes-but the road is so rough!" Never mind, the remaining journey is but short.

"Yes-but you do not know what the trials of old age are!" Yes, but Jesus knows, and he has made full provision for all the trials of old age, as well as for the trials of youth.

"Yes-but" Yes, yes! Your problem is, that you have not learned to submit to God's wisdom, and to acquiesce in his will. You have not been thoroughly stripped and humbled. You do not realize that your desert is Hell, and that everything short of everlasting burnings is a mercy. You have not learned to count up your mercies, and to compare them against your troubles and trials.

"Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said: Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you!" Hebrews 13:5

THE TESTIMONY

"I was young and now I am old-yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken, or their children begging bread!" Psalm 37:25

The aged are often tempted to believe that God will forsake them. Their sins of omission stare them in the face; their lack of conformity to God's preceptive will rises up before them; and their many sins of commission appear set in array against them. In consequence of this, they have feared that God would withdraw, and leave them entirely to themselves! And at times they have been ready to conclude that he has, so that they have cried, "Will the Lord reject forever? Will he never show his favor again? Has his unfailing love vanished forever? Has his promise failed for all time? Has God forgotten to be merciful? Has he in anger withheld his compassion?" Psalm 77:7-9

Did you ever, my aged friend, feel inclined to make use of such language as this? Did your unbelief ever lead you to fear? If you are a Christian, I know it has.

But you have lived long enough to see the fallacy of all this. You have never yet been forsaken! No, nor will you ever be! You have known many believers, you have seen them in deep trials, in strange conflicts, in peculiar difficulties; but did you ever see them forsaken? You have perhaps thought at times, on account of the inconsistencies you have witnessed in them, that you would not wonder if they were. But what Jeremiah testified of Israel has been true of them; it is a most blessed, a most encouraging passage. "For the LORD Almighty has not forsaken Israel and Judah. He is still their God-even though their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel." Jeremiah 51:5

As you have never been forsaken yourself, and as you have never seen any of the Lord's true people forsaken, however tried and tempted-it is for you to bear your testimony, in order that God may be glorified, and poor tried believers comforted.

"For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own!" 1 Samuel 12:22

THE PERSUASION

"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day!" 2 Timothy 1:12

Paul knew Jesus, and so knew him-that he had no doubt of both his ability and willingness to take care of him. It is a great thing to know Christ. To know . . .

who he is-the Son of God;

what he is-the only Savior;

where he is- at the right hand of God;

what he has done-provided a full salvation;

what he is doing-making intercession for his people.

If we know Jesus, we shall commit our souls to him. We shall put ourselves into his hands, to be . . .

washed in his blood,

clothed in his righteousness,

sanctified by his Spirit, and

to be kept by his power, through faith, unto perfect salvation.

My friend-you sincerely know Jesus-do you not? His name has been music in your ears, and his glorious work the only foundation of your hope. You have committed your soul into the hands of Jesus-have you not? Then you are safe-and you should be at peace. Jesus never refuses to receive a soul that hastens to him, and he never fails to keep one whom he receives. He has kept you in time past, you are a proof of his faithfulness at present, and he will keep you to the very end! He is able to keep you: however weak you are, whatever you suffer, though the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking to devour you!

Jesus will keep you . . .

if your eye is fixed on him,

if your heart rests on his Word, and

if you plead with him in simple prayer to do so.

Though you are weak-Jesus is strong!

Though you are shaken with the wind-Jesus is as stable as the solid rock!

Though you have fears-Jesus is faithful!

He will perfect that which concerns you; his mercy endures forever, nor will he forsake the work of his own hands. Place your confidence in him, though you are a poor, sinful, unworthy creature-and he will keep you in perfect peace.

"You will keep in perfect peace-all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the LORD always, for the LORD GOD is the eternal Rock!" Isaiah 26:3-4

THE AUTUMN

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming: The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him!" Psalms 92:12-15

Look at the aged disciple-the devout, the sincere, the humble follower of Jesus; he has entered life's autumn, and, like the aged palm tree in the east, with its coronet of rich ripe fruit-he stands a witness of God's faithfulness, a proof of the power of grace, and an evidence of the excellency of real religion. The Spirit of God has long dwelt in his heart, the Word has wrought effectually in him-and now the ripe fruits of the Spirit appear. There is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

But the Christian, when in an advanced state of grace, never admires his own fruit; he sees his defects and mourns over them, and like the full ears of ripe corn-his head is bowed down in humility and self-renunciation before God.

The young professor may rejoice . . .

in what he is,

in what he has, or

in what he has done.

Not so the aged saint! Though laden with fruit-he rejoices in Christ Jesus alone! If he boasts, it is only in the Lord. In his life, he has been useful to others, he has fruit in souls converted to God through his instrumentality, perhaps in children educated in the truth of God, in saints comforted, and backsliders restored. He has not lived in vain. He has left traces of usefulness behind him.

But all is renounced when he looks into eternity! He says, "I am only a sinner saved by grace! I owe everything to divine mercy! I ascribe everything to Jesus! This is my rejoicing, that my God is my Savior, and my Savior is my God!

Christ in his person,

Christ in his work,

Christ in his glory-

is the object of my faith,
the subject of my meditation,
and the theme of my song!

In the mellow autumn of grace, Christ is all in all-and the creature is nothing at all!"

"Being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-to the glory and praise of God!" Philippians 1:11

THE ORNAMENT

"Gray hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained by a righteous life!" Proverbs 16:31

Do not try to hide your gray hair, my venerable friend! It is no shame to you-it is rather your glory-if found in the way of righteousness. If we are found in that way, in which God justifies poor sinners by his grace-it is a choice mercy! If we are in God's way-then he has brought us into it by his grace; and if we have been kept in that way-then we have been kept in it by his grace. If we have grown gray in God's service-then it is an honor to us. Our holy conduct and constancy reflects glory on him. An aged saint, who sought the Lord in youth, who began to serve God almost before he began to serve the world, and who has persevered for forty or fifty years-is an honorable character.

"The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is gray hair!" said Solomon. And it is a beautiful sight to see the gray-headed Christian . . .

happy in God;

walking closely with God;

leaning on the faithful promises which have supported him so many years;

daily endeavoring to lead sinners to Jesus;

encouraging those who are seeking;

comforting those who are cast down;

and bringing forth from the stores of his own experience, matter to stimulate and strengthen those who are ready to halt.

Reader, is your head gray? Has it acquired that color in the service of my Master, Jesus? By some, the gray head may be called the flag of death! By others, it may be said to be frosted by age. But God styles it, "a crown of glory!"

The gray head-and the sanctified heart;

the gray head-and the useful life,

are beautiful companions.

But the gray head-and the black heart;

the gray head-and a life spent in sin,

are woeful associates.

"Praise the LORD, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits-who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's!" Psalm 103:1-5

THE ANTICIPATION

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!" Psalm 23:6

In looking back, we see that God has been true to his Word-and faithful to his promise. Not one good thing has failed-of all that the Lord our God has promised! All has come to pass. His grace has been sufficient for us. His strength has been made perfect in our weakness. As our days-and we have had long days, dark days, sharp days, days that have made flesh and blood shake and tremble; but as our days-so has our strength been!

Surely 'goodness and mercy' began with us,

they have always accompanied us on our journey,

and they will never forsake us all the days of our life!

We can testify, with the psalmist, that "the Lord is good, ready to forgive, and plenteous in mercy unto all who call upon him."

Can God's goodness fail? Impossible! For he is "abundant in goodness and truth!"

Can God's goodness fail? Impossible! For "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear him!"

God's mercy found a 'channel' in which to flow to poor sinners-in the person and work of Jesus. God's mercy flowed to us-when we never sought it, nor even thought of it! And shall it fail us now? Oh no! From day to day, even until our dying day-we shall have to say, "Because of the LORD's great love-we are not consumed; for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!" Lamentations 3:22-23

Sooner may the water in the ocean fail, or light in the sun fail-than that the mercy of God toward his poor people should fail! His faithful Word is, "I will be with you, and I will protect you wherever you go. I will be with you constantly until I have finished giving you everything I have promised."

And what is that? "For the LORD God is our light and protector. He gives us grace and glory. No good thing will the LORD withhold from those whose walk is blameless!" Psalm 84:11

"No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you!" Joshua 1:5

"You guide me with your counsel, and afterwards you will take me up in glory!" Psalm 73:24

THE CONFIDENCE

"Yes, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil-for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me!" Psalm 23:4

Three things conspire to give the aged Christian confidence:

the Word of God,

the Spirit of God, and

his past experience of God's faithfulness and love.

He has traveled with the Lord so long and so far; the Word of God is so plain and so positive, and he has always proved it so true-that he feels there is no ground for fear. Death itself is but the shadow of what it was, since Jesus died; for he has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light by the gospel.

The valley may be long, and dark, and damp for us! But Jesus has passed through it, and driven everything injurious from it. Besides which, he will be WITH us in the valley of the shadow of death. He said to his servant John, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of Hell and of death!" Revelation 1:17-18

No one can open the 'door of death' to a believer-but Jesus! And he always does it at the best moment, and in the best manner, for "precious in the sight of the Lord-is the death of his saints!"

Human nature always shrinks from death-but faith will look to Jesus as the resurrection and the life, and welcome it! And even when faith is not strong enough to welcome it-it will look to the great Shepherd and expect that his rod will drive away all evil beasts-and that his staff will be lent to the soul to lean upon!

My aged friend, do not be frightened at a mere shadow! Do not be afraid to go where Jesus has gone before you.

Look out for his foot-prints,

listen to hear his voice,

believe his promises-and you shall find his grace made perfect in your weakness.

Take the promise, look at it, place confidence in it, "I will never leave you, I will never, no never, no never forsake you!" And then stand at the entrance of the valley and sing, "Yes, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil-for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me!"

"We are more than conquerors-through him who loved us!" Romans 8:37

CROSSING THE JORDAN

"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with My righteous right hand!" Isaiah 41:10

Canaan was a very faint and imperfect type of Heaven. It was better than the wilderness, yes, better than Egypt. But imperfect as it was, it was the object of desire and anticipation; how passionately Moses longed to go over the Jordan River and see it-but was denied. Jordan rolled between the desert and the promised land; and it must be crossed, before the promised land could be enjoyed. And death, like the Jordan-lies between us and Heaven!

We must die. To die is unnatural. It is unpleasant. Yet the Christian has no reason to fear death. No Israelite was ever drowned in this Jordan. Jesus crossed it, and, like Joshua, placed twelve stones in the midst of it, on which the feet of his saints may rest. The precious promises are these stones.

Reader, are you afraid of death? As a believer in Jesus, it cannot hurt you. He has taken away its sting. He has deprived it of all power to injure. The waters may be cold, and deep, and broad; but what then? He says, "I will be with you-when you pass through the waters; and when you pass through the rivers-they will not overwhelm you!" Isaiah 43:2

On the other side . . .

the sun always shines,

the plants are always in bloom,

the atmosphere is always pure,

the inhabitants are all happy and holy!

Do not fear death, it is a stingless serpent! The substance is gone-and only the shadow is left!

He who believes in Jesus-shall never die!

Are you afraid of dying? What! Afraid of falling asleep-after the toils, troubles, and sorrows of life's long day!

Afraid of dying! What! When Jesus will stand by your dying pillow, and his angels are waiting to conduct you to glory!

Place the hand of your faith-on the shoulder of the faithful Jesus, and hang your whole weight on him! Go across the Jordan, as the spouse out of the wilderness, leaning on your beloved!

"If we live-we live to the Lord; and if we die-we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die-we belong to the Lord!" Romans 14:8

THE PREPARATION

"You also must be ready all the time. For the Son of Man will come when least expected!" Matthew 24:44

Be ready! Let all your worldly affairs be so settled-that you may comfortably leave them at any moment; and let your spiritual concerns be in such a state-that you may have nothing to do but bid friends farewell-and depart to be with Christ, which is better by far!

Daily confess sin over the blood of Christ-that it may be pardoned.

Daily renounce your own righteousness-and appropriate afresh the righteousness of Jesus.

Daily seek the renewings of the Holy Spirit-that they may be shed on you abundantly.

Daily commit body, soul, and spirit into the hands of Christ-to be saved by his grace, and to be used for his glory. Surrender everything to Jesus daily, without the least reserve!

Endeavor to detach yourself as much as possible from everything here below.

Make the Bible your constant companion.

Make Jesus . . .

the constant object of your faith,

his perfect work the grand subject of your meditation,

and his presence and glory your chief desire.

View God as your Father.

Worship God as your Father.

Constantly think of God as your Father.

Dwell upon . . .

his love to you,

his pity for you,

his promises to you, and

his conferring the kingdom upon you!

Hold communion with the Holy Spirit.

Pray for His empowering.

Pray to Him.

Think of Him.

Expect from Him.

Look to Heaven as God's holy home-and as your eternal home!

So live and walk with God, that you may feel that though by death, you will change your place-that you will not change your company.

You are leaving the world-therefore withdraw your thoughts, desires, and affections from it-as much as you can!

You are going to Heaven-therefore direct your thoughts, desires, and affections to it as much as possible. By so doing-you will be ready to depart, whenever God calls you home.

"Therefore keep watch-because you do not know on what day your Lord will come!" Matthew 24:42

THE DESIRE

"For to me, to live is Christ-and to die is gain! If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far!" Philippians 1:21-23

Reader, do you at all sympathize with Paul? Do you desire to leave the present scene of conflict, sorrow, and sin? Do you desire to depart from all that gratifies the flesh, and all that perplexes the soul-that you may be with Christ?

What a delightful assurance it is to the believer, that, "absent from the body-he will be present with the Lord!"

To be with Christ, what happiness does this comprise! Surely one may say, "It is all my salvation and all my desire!"

To be with Christ, what evils does this exclude! All sin, all sadness, all foes, all fears, all labors.

Well may Paul say, "it is better by far!"

Ah, how much better to be with Christ-than to be with the kindest relatives, the wisest friends, or in the most comfortable circumstances this world can furnish!

To be with Christ-how far preferable to our present lot, where we are . . .

surrounded by foes,

annoyed by temptations,

perplexed with disappointments,

and made wretched by our sins!

To be with Christ, that is to be . . .

perfectly holy,

perfectly happy, and

perfectly satisfied-forever!

Now-we mourn his absence, sigh for his presence, and would give all we possess at times-for one hour's heart-melting communion with him!

Then-we shall be . . .

always with him,

exactly like him,

and forever praising him!

Better, surely it is, infinitely better-to be where Jesus is, to be with Jesus-than to be here in this howling wilderness, where there is . . .

so much sin,

so many dangers,

such briars and thorns,

such disease and death!

My soul, seek such large communications of grace from God, seek such fellowship with the Holy Spirit-that you may rise above all your doubts, fears, carnality, and fleshly attachments; and say right heartily with the Apostle, "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far!" Yes, which is best of all!

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body-and at home with the Lord!" 2 Corinthians 5:8

THE BETTER COUNTRY

"They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own!" Hebrews 11:13, 14, 16

Canaan was the better country to the Jew-but Heaven is the better country to the Christian. And truly it must be better than this poor world:

there are no thorns or pests there;

there is no sorrow or crying there;

there are no plagues or famines there;

there are no wants or woes there;

there is no sin, disease, or death there.

In that heavenly country . . .

the atmosphere is serene and healthy,

the views are clear and enchanting,

the sun never goes down-for there is no night there.

Ah, it is a better country, if we think of . . .

the holiness and happiness of its inhabitants,

the plenitude of its stores, and
the immutable security thrown around it.

There is . . .

permanent joy,

untiring activity, and

the perpetual presence of God.

There are no winds of error there!

There are no storms of persecution there!

There are no sighs, groans, or sorrows there!

Aged Christian, this is the country you have been seeking-and you have now come to the border of it. Soon, very soon, you will be called to take possession of it-and then you will leave all that is painful behind you! There are . . .

no weary limbs,

no aching bones,

no unstrung nerves,

no long tedious nights there.

No, no! All is health, ease, light, peace, and pleasure there!

It is, indeed, the better land, the land which the Lord our God has prepared for us-and which we shall soon pass over Jordan to possess it!

Millions of our brethren, and some of our dear relatives-are there before us! Others are on the road, and will follow us-if they do not overtake us!

Best of all, Jesus is there! It is his country! It is called Emmanuel's Land. Home of Jesus! My heart sighs for you. O to enter into that better country!

"If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country-a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them!" Hebrews 11:15-16

THE DEPARTURE

"The time has come for my departure! I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day!" 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Aged believer, the time of your departure will soon come! Do not let your mind be troubled as to . . .

where you shall die,
when you shall die, or
how you shall die!

These are all minor matters-and ought not to affect you.

Simply look at death as Jesus did: "Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world-and go to the Father!" John 13:1

Why should you regret to leave a poor world like this-where sin, sorrow, pain, grief, disappointment, and anxiety meet you at every turn? Why should you be reluctant to go HOME-to go to your Father?

Do you not want to see his face?

Do you not want to enjoy his company?

Do you not want to be perfectly happy in his presence?

Did I hear you say, "But what if I should be mistaken?"

Mistaken! How can you be mistaken? Do you not renounce all hope in yourself-and all dependence on your duties? And do you not trust on Christ alone? Have you not sought his face, relied on his Word, trusted in his blood? Mistaken! Why, if you are not right with God-then what else could possibly make you so?

Do you say, "But my sins, my follies and my infirmities are so great!"

Don't you know-that sins confessed, imperfections deplored, infirmities mourned over, if accompanied with faith in Jesus-have never kept a soul out of Heaven yet! And they never will!

Do you say, "But my hopes may be all a false presumption!"

What, is it presumption to believe your Savior? Is it presumption to take God at his Word, and give him credit for speaking truth?

"Presumption!" It is presumption to doubt-when God has spoken so plainly! It is presumption to fear-when God has spoken so positively! It is presumption to want something else to assure you-when God has said:

"He who believes HAS everlasting life!"

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ-and you SHALL be saved!"

"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised-you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation!" Luke 2:29-30

THE REST

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will REST from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Revelation 14:13

The better land is the land. . .

of rest for the weary, and

of sweet repose to the troubled.

Here in this poor world-we are often tossed with tempests, and are not comforted; or we toil on in weariness, discouragement, and sadness. But "there remains a rest for the people of God!" And a glorious rest it is! For a short time, the poor body will rest in the grave-and the disembodied spirit will rest in the presence of Jesus!

My aged friend, your labor in carrying your cross has been wearying; your labor for the cause of Jesus has been exhausting; and the inward conflict has added greatly to the trouble of your soul; but now you shall rest!

You shall rest from all temptation. You shall have no more solicitations to sin against God, grieve the Holy Spirit, and dishonor the cause dear to your heart.

You shall have no more trials of faith, patience, and perseverance.

You shall have no more painful afflictions, either personal or relative; of either mind or body.

You shall have no more self-denying duties, nor crucifying of the old man, or mortifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts.

All strenuous labor of either body and mind-is forever done! No more exposure to storms and tempests, to burning suns or pinching frosts! No more biting winds nor pelting showers! "The winter is past!" These things are forever over and gone!

Rest! O how sweet is rest-to the weary!

Rest! O how delightful the sound-to the exhausted traveler!

Rest! O how pleasant-to the poor, tired, and afflicted believer!

No more wearisome nights are appointed for you now!

No long, almost endless, days of strong pain remain for you now!

No need now to wish for the wings of a dove, that you may flee away and be at rest!

You shall rest, and rest forever!

Your rest will be sweeter than an angel's, it will be as sweet as the rest of Jesus-when he ascended from the tree of agony, from the field of blood.

"Arise, and depart! For this is not your resting place, because it is defiled, it is ruined, beyond all remedy!"
Micah 2:10

THE INHERITANCE

"God has reserved a priceless inheritance for his children! It is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay!" 1 Peter 1:4

Heaven is called an inheritance, because it comes to us by heirship. Being born of the Spirit-we are the children of God. And if we are God's children-then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ!

What a glorious inheritance must this be! Meditate upon it, O my soul! It is incorruptible. It will endure forever; no part of it is subject to decay. It is undefiled. No one can acquire it dishonestly; no one can soil it by sin. It is beyond the reach of change and decay. Its glory is ever new!

The plants on that inheritance, know no winter.

The sun never goes down.

It is always in full perfection.

As the noblest production of God's power-Heaven will stand out in bold relief from his other works, as the paragon of excellence.

Heaven is the eternal portion of God's children-the dwelling-place of the Lamb and his glorified bride! It is the reward given to Jesus, for his agonies and death. There the Lord God will dwell among his people. The tabernacle of God will be with us.

But description is impossible, for the powers of conception fail!

"No eye has seen,

no ear has heard, and

no mind has imagined-

what God has prepared for those who love him!" 1 Corinthians 2:9

However great our sufferings here on earth are-and they may be exceedingly great; yet when the apostle compares them with this inheritance, he says, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time-are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us!" Romans 8:18

What! O what will that glory be!

We must possess-it to know it!

We must be actually in it-to adequately speak or write of it!

Tried Christian, however poor now, however tried now-you are heir to a priceless eternal inheritance, which comprises the unsearchable riches of Christ! Therefore, suffer patiently, and hope to the end!

"Giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves!" Colossians 1:12-13

THE CITY

"But they now aspire to a better land-a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a CITY for them!" Hebrews 11:16

It is a wondrous fact-that as poor, as depraved, and as sinful as we now are-that God is not ashamed of us! By the faith which he has given us-we "have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God!" This is our eternal home!

Jesus calls it, "the city of my God!"

John in vision, "saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God!" Revelation 21:2-3

Such a city, for . . .

costly materials,

excellent workmanship,

vast extent,

perfect purity, and

for the health and happiness of the inhabitants-was never known!

No sin,

no sorrow,

no tears,

no disease there!

For "the one sitting on the throne said: Look, I am making all things new!" Revelation 21:5

On that city-the glory of God rests forever, and there the Lamb forever dwells!

Here we shall find every delightful accommodation; the saints will be connected in bonds of holy citizenship; they will enjoy perfect satisfaction, and be elevated to the highest honor.

This city was founded before time!

Jesus promised his people: "There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready-I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am!" John 14:2-3

This city will be stored with all that can gratify and delight us! We shall possess and enjoy it forever!

How wonderful, that as poor, as sinful, and as vile as we are-the infinitely great and glorious Jehovah should not be ashamed to be called our God; but that he should prepare for us a city-and such a city! How good, how gracious, how deep God's thoughts of us must have been! Well may David say, "How precious

also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them."

Blessed be God for thinking of us, providing for us, and revealing to us such astonishing things!

May we be daily preparing to pass over Jordan-and possess them!

"But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take these weak mortal bodies of ours and change them into glorious bodies like his own!" Philippians 3:20-21

THE HOME

"Do not be troubled. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am!" John 14:1-3

How familiar with Heaven-how well acquainted with that "better land" must Jesus be! He calls it "My father's home!" Sweet view of our eternal residence!

Dying-is but 'going home!' Going home to our Father! Going to our Father's home!

And shall we fear this? Fear it! Can we do anything other than desire it? Do we not wish to go home and see our Father? We shall not be strangers there-so many of our Christian friends have gone home before us. And even if some of our loved ones are not there-we could not possibly feel unhappy-where JESUS is!

"I am leaving the world," said Jesus, "and am going to the Father!" Such should be our language, in the prospect of death. O that, with child-like simplicity, we could receive into our minds the testimony of God's Word! O that we could view death and Heaven-just as the Scriptures represent them! Where would our doubts and fears be then? What would become of our reluctance to leave the world then? Then, if we spoke of departed Christian relatives-we should use similar language to that of Judah in reference to his younger brother Benjamin, "He is this day with our Father!" We would no longer talk of losing friends or relatives. Oh no! we should speak of them as being in our Father's house, or of being with our Father!

"If I believe in Jesus-is God then my Father?"

Yes, assuredly, for "you are all the sons of God, by faith in Christ Jesus!"

My soul, I charge you, in future to look to Heaven, simply as your Father's house!

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands!" 2 Corinthians 5:1

THE HABITATION

"My people will live in peaceful habitations, in secure homes, in undisturbed places of rest." Isaiah 32:18

Here on earth, many of the Lord's people have but a poor cottage, some a mere hovel, and some have been obliged to hide themselves from persecution in dens and caves of the earth! How many deep needs and ungratified desires-we may now have!

But in Heaven, the poorest saint will have a mansion-a magnificent dwelling-place; in comparison with which the most imperial palaces of earth will look poor and beggarly!

The dignity of our nature will be raised to the exact resemblance of Jesus! No wish for an alteration will ever arise, no desire for a change will ever be felt!

Look around you, aged Christian, at your inconveniences, at the many causes of discomfort; they will soon be left behind you, and you will inhabit a mansion especially prepared for you by Jesus!

Look around at your present poor habitation; and then look UP-and remember that you will soon be in a mansion; a mansion to which the most splendid of earthly palaces will bear no more resemblance, than the light of the glow-worm does-to the light of the sun at noon.

Blessed, thrice blessed Jesus-what great love you have for me! Not only to die for my sins and quicken my soul; but to go and prepare a mansion for me-a mansion in your Father's house!

Believer, no longer complain of your lot; no longer think your trials heavy, or your privations great; it is but a little while-and your beloved Lord will call to you, saying, "Come up hither-and enter into the joy of your Lord!" What joy is that! What tongue can tell, what heart can conceive, what the joy of the Lord is! But, however pure its nature, however exquisite its sweetness, however vast its degree-it will be ours, and ours very soon! Joy of Jesus! you are my portion after death-and then forever!

"He led them forth by the right way-that they might go to a city of habitation." Psalm 107:7

THE WHITE ROBES

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands!" Revelation 7:9

Here on earth, we are often clad in sable, and forced to mourn and weep. But "in the better land" we shall be clothed in white robes and hold palm branches in our hands!

The white robe indicates acquittal from all charges. Here on earth, we have many things laid to our charge-Satan and our consciences often accuse us. But "in the better land" we shall not only be justified from all things-but our very garments will witness that we are faultless before the throne of God.

The white robe indicates victory-and then we shall have gained the final victory over the great red dragon, that old serpent, the devil, who deceives the whole world. We shall have conquered every inbred lust and every fleshly principle. The victory will be complete and final! The shield will be hung up in the hall of glory, and the weapons forever grounded at the feet of our all-conquering King. The last enemy, Death, will be destroyed then.

The white robes indicate purity also-and those who wear them are purified from every stain! They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! Jesus has purified and cleansed them with the washing of water by the Word, and they are without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing!

The white robes are the wedding robes-and being clothed in them shows that the bride has made herself ready, and is waiting for the nuptial ceremony. In snowy white robes-Jesus will wed his Church!

The white robes also are the emblem of praise-and praise will be the constant and pleasing employment of our souls forever. The heart, like a crystal fountain, will send forth streams of gratitude, love, adoration, and praise before the throne of God and the Lamb forever and ever!

"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy!" Revelation 3:4

THE CROWN

"In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people!" Isaiah 28:5

Everything "in the better land" is in harmony:

If we have an inheritance-it contains a city;

if we dwell in a city-we shall live in a mansion;

if we live in a mansion-we will wear white robes;

and if we wear white robes-we will have a crown.

Not a quickly fading crown of myrtle, or laurel-like those awarded in the Grecian games; but a royal diadem, a gemmed crown!

Their crown is called a crown of righteousness; because the righteousness of Jesus purchased it, and being graciously promised to the overcomer, God in righteousness confers it.

It is called a crown of life. It will be the crown of an endless existence; that which sheds luster and glory upon it. It is promised to all who patiently endure, and perseveringly overcome the temptations of the present state.

It is called also a crown of glory. "When the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive an unfading crown of glory!"

Men on earth strive for corruptible crowns-but we shall have an incorruptible crown!

Never were such crowns seen, as those which Jesus will place on the heads of his people! And they, as if they felt unworthy to wear them, will, in the ardor of their devotion, cast them at his precious feet! As if crowns of glory were alone fit to form a pavement for the feet of the Lamb to walk on!

What will it be to wear a crown of righteousness, a crown of life, a crown of glory, an incorruptible crown! To know it-we must enjoy it! And blessed be God, through free and sovereign grace, we hope to finish the good fight, to endure temptations and to fill up the character assigned us-and then receive from the hands-the once nail-pierced hands of Jesus-our crown-and wear it to his praise forever!

The circlets of righteousness, life, and glory, will forever adorn those brows, which were not ashamed to confess Christ, and help forward his cause on earth.

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test-he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him!" James 1:12

THE SONG

"And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation!" Revelation 5:9

They sang a new song before the heavenly throne.

It is always new, because accompanied with new joys, and arising from new thoughts and new views of Jesus. It is pleasant to sing of Jesus, and to sing to Jesus now; but what will it be above? Here on earth, lack of knowledge, or lack of voice, or lack of suitable feelings-often prevent our singing, or enjoying what we sing. But there-our knowledge will be perfect, our voice will be sweet, and our heart will be always in tune.

Our recollections of the past-what we were, what we did, what we deserved, and what we were doomed to suffer; and what Jesus did for us, suffered for us, and conferred on us-will fill us with lively and everlasting gratitude!

And then, the presence of Jesus, the glories of Jesus, and the communications made by Jesus, will keep that gratitude alive and vigorous forever.

Aged Christian, Jesus loves to hear your tremulous voice sing his praises now. Never stop singing-but continue to praise his dear and ever-blessed name. O that we praised him more! O that our hearts were always in tune to praise him! It is not so much the voice-as the heart that is out of tune.

But let us rejoice in this, that we have an eternity before us, in which we shall forever praise and bless our Savior's dear and adorable name! There, in the city of saints, in the mansion of glory, in our Father's house, in that "better land"-we shall all unite to praise the Father, for his free, sovereign, and glorious grace! We shall praise the Son-for his precious blood, perfect righteousness, and all-prevailing intercession! We shall praise

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