

A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of Mr. Aaron Spurrier, Baptist Minister.

by John Gill

The apostle Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ is a spiritual desire, not from nature but from grace, and is far better than living in the flesh.

Scripture: Isaiah 40:11, Jeremiah 31:3, Matthew 9:38, Luke 23:43, 1 Corinthians 15:26, 2 Corinthians 5:1, Philippians 1:23, 1 Thessalonians 4:14, Hebrews 2:15, James 4:14

Topics: "Death", "Eternal Life"

Description

John Gill reflects on the life and death of Mr. Aaron Spurrier, emphasizing the apostle Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ as a profound truth for believers. He highlights the transient nature of life and the ultimate joy of being united with Christ after death, which Mr. Spurrier longed for as he completed his earthly ministry. Gill encourages the congregation to recognize the providence of God in Spurrier's passing and to find comfort in the hope of eternal life. He reminds them that while they mourn their loss, they should also celebrate the legacy of faith and service left behind by their pastor. The sermon serves as a call to remain steadfast in their faith and to seek God's guidance in the face of loss.

Transcript

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH OF

THE REVEREND MR. AARON SPURRIER,[1]

Late Pastor of a Church of CHRIST at Limehouse.

Preached Sept. 17, 1749.

PHILIPPIANS 1:23.

--Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.

ABOUT two years ago I stood in this place, and delivered a discourse at the ordination of your late pastor, and now I am here at his dying request to preach his funeral sermon: a sudden change, a quick alteration this! He has soon done his work, run out his race, and finished his course, and is entered into the joy of his Lord; and what remains for you to do, is to take notice of the providence, and make a right use of it; and

now to attend to the words read, the subject of the following discourse; which are part of an epistle sent to the church at Philippi by the apostle Paul, when he was a prisoner at Rome.

And after the inscription of it; and description of the church, its officers and members, and various expressions of respect unto them and petitions for them, the apostle gives an account of his bonds, and the usefulness of them for the spread of the gospel, and the encouragement of gospel-ministers: and though some did not preach Christ from right ends, and with right views, as others did, it was a pleasure to the apostle that he was however preached; and he was persuaded, that the ill designed him in their ministry would be for his good and Christ would be magnified in him in life and death: that continuance in life would be for the glory of Christ, and the good of his interest, and his death also would be gain both to Christ and himself: And this made it difficult with him which to choose, life or death, since he could not well say in which way Christ would be most magnified in him, whether by his life or by his death: and seeing that living in the flesh, and laboring in the ministry a little longer would be more necessary, useful, and profitable to the churches of Christ; and so be for the honor of his name; and to die and be with the Lord, were better for himself; this put him in a strait between life and death, a desire to live for public usefulness, and a desire to die for private and personal gain, as David was on another account, and which some think there is an allusion to here, 2 Samuel 24:14.

I have not read to you the former part of the text, for I am in a strait betwixt two; because I observed, your pastor left it out, when he gave me the words read, and desired me to preach from them: for whatever difficulty he might have had in his mind, as doubtless he had, which to desire, life or death, whether to live longer, that he might be more useful to you, this church of Christ, and be more serviceable in the interest of religion, or to die and be with Jesus; it was all over then, he saw his work as done, it was the will of the Lord to call him home, and he was desirous of going, that he might be with him.

In the passage before me, I observe, I. The phrase by which death is expressed, to depart. II. The desire the apostle had to depart, or die, having a desire; III. The ground of that desire, what raised or moved it, to be with Christ. IV. The preferableness and superexcellency of what is desired, dying and being with Christ, which is far better. I. I shall consider the phrase by which death is signified, to depart; and I observe, 1st, The word used analusai, has the signification of a dissolution or loosening, and is by some rendered, to be dissolved, to be loosened, and to loose; and may be used by the apostle, 1.

In reference to the solution, resolution, or analysis of a compound being, into its parts; and such a being is man, he is composed of spirit and matter, of soul and body; these are the two integral, essential and consistent parts of man, and are very different in their original formation; the body was first formed out of the dust of the earth, the soul was breathed into it by the Lord; in their continual production, the body is by natural generation, is born of the flesh; the soul is created by God, and infused into the body.

Hence one of the epithets of Jehovah is, that formeth the spirit of man within him: (Zec. 12:1.) in their nature, the body is material, and consists of flesh, blood and bones, of arteries, veins and sinews; the soul is immaterial, and possesses such powers and faculties, we call the understanding, will and affections; the body is mortal and dies, the soul is immortal and never dies. Now between these two there is a nexus or bond of union by which they make one composition, one being, one individual person, which is denominated sometimes from one part and sometimes from another; when from the body, man is said to be of the earth, earthly; and when from the soul, he is said to be yucikov, an animal, a souly man; when from the former, he is called a mortal man; and when from the latter, a rational intelligent being; these two parts, though so widely different in their nature, are closely united together; of this union God is the author,

and what he has joined together no man ought to put asunder; but what is the band of this union, what it is that ties and keeps body and soul together; what are the bands and ligaments by which they are fastened to each other, none can tell, nor account for it; how it is the spirit and matter should operate upon one another: and by the way, this may serve to abate the pride, vanity, and insolence of some objectors to mysteries in the gospel, and the mysterious union of the three persons in the Godhead, and to the mysterious union of the two natures, divine and human, in the Son of God: let them first sit down and try whether they can give an account of the union of their own souls and bodies, and tell us what that is that unites them together; and then let them go on to object to the above, and other mysteries of the christian religion.

But to return; Death now is the dissolution of this composition, a separation of soul and body, a disunion of these two parts, a loosening of the bond of union between them; hence the apostle James says, that the body without the spirit, (James 2:26.) cwriv, separate from it, is dead; death is no other than an untying of the knot or band, a dissolving of the union that holds soul and body together, nor can it dissolve any other. As it could not dissolve the hypostatical or personal union of the two natures in Christ, divine and human, only the union that was between his soul and body; so it cannot dissolve the union between the person of a believer and God, Father, Son and Spirit; the bond of which is everlasting love: death cannot separate from the love of God, nor from the love of Christ, or disunite him and his people; for then when they depart they could not be with him as the words of our text suggest, nor from the spirit who dwells in the mortal bodies of the saints, and by whom they will be quickened. 2.

The word in the text may be used in allusion to the loosening of the stakes and cords of tabernacles or tents when taken down; with respect to which the apostle says, for we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, (2 Cor. 5:1.) kataluh, a word akin to that in the text. The body is compared to a tabernacle, the human nature of Christ is called a tabernacle: and the apostle (2 Pet. 1:13, 14.) Peter speaks of his body under the same metaphor, and which is used by other authors;[2] the reference may be to the tents or tabernacles of travelers and soldiers, who carry them with them, and pitch them, and take them down, as is convenient for them; and which is the case and condition of the people of God in this life, whose state is a pilgrimage and a warfare; and their bodies are the tents they dwell in, which are pitched for a while, and then taken down; so that this simile denotes the short continuance of the saints here; there is no abiding for them, here they have no continuing city; this is not their rest, it is polluted: now death is a dissolving of this tabernacle, a loosing of its silver cord, an unpinning its several parts, and a removing of it elsewhere; as Hezekiah the royal saint said, mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherds tent: (Isa. 38:12.) and as Peter calls it, it is a putting off this tabernacle, as a man puts off his clothes; and it may be observed, that the apostle Paul uses the simile of unclothing, at the same time he speaks of the dissolution of the tabernacle of the body, 2 Corinthians 5:1, 4. 3.

The allusion may be as some[3] think, to sailors loosing the ship, and departing from one port to another: so we read of loosing from one place, and failing by another; and departing in a ship, Acts 13:13, and 27:13, 21, and 28:11. The port from whence we loose at death, and launch into the ocean of eternity, is this world, which some leave with great reluctance, and others with great cheerfulness; as it is with sailors who have been long at a port, used to it and delighted with it, and the accommodations they find there, do not care to set sail and go from it; so it is with many who are glued to this world, and have their affections let on the things of it, who are taken and delighted with what is in it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; they do not choose to quit it and go into an eternal world: but as others, who know it is their interest to be gone, make all necessary preparations for their voyage, and are in readiness

to depart at a proper and convenient time, so such who are crucified to the world and that to them, and know that their true riches, pleasure, profit and honor, lie elsewhere, are willing to loose from hence, and go where it is most for their interest and happiness.

The port or haven men are bound unto at death, and to which their course is steered and directed, is either heaven or hell, either they go to Abraham's bosom with Lazarus, and to paradise with the penitent thief, or to hell with the rich man, who, as soon as he died, lift up his eyes there in flames of fire, in everlasting torment. Death is the ship or boat in which men are wafted over from the shore of this world to the banks of another; angels are the pilots to good men, who convey them over the swellings of Jordan, and bring them to their desired haven, to Canaan's land: devils are the pilots and convoy of others, who carry them over the black lake to regions of darkness.

The heathens had some such like notions of death and of a future state, and expressed their ideas in such like language as this. Who is it almost that has not heard of the Elisian fields, which have their name from a word, of which this in our text is compounded,[4] the seat of the souls of good men after death? and of the Stygian lake, and of old Charon and his boat, the ferryman of hell? 2dly, The word here used also signifies to return; and so it is rendered in Luke 12:36, and by the Vulgate Latin version here, and by others, and which agrees with the account the wise man gives of death; who says, Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it: (Ecc. 7:7.) the body, which was first formed out of the dust of the earth, at death returns to its original; whereby the divine sentence passed on fallen man is verified, dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return: (Gen. 3:19.) and the spirit or soul, which God is the father and maker of, returns to him who gave it; it being, by him, to be judged for the things done in its body, and to be sent by him to its proper place and state, either of eternal bliss or endless woe: death is the reversion, or returning of the parts of man, when separated by it, to their original from whence they came. 3dly, We render it to depart, as many others do; it was usual with the[5] Jews to express death by a departure; and the apostle uses the same way of speaking, in conformity to his countrymen: so our Lord's death is called a departing out of the world, and a leaving of it and going to the Father, John 13:1 and 16:28. .And the apostle Paul calls the time of his death the time of his departure, 2 Timothy 4:7, which he speaks of with pleasure.

Some go out of this world willingly and cheerfully, and are desirous of it, as the apostle was here; others are chased out of it, driven away in their wickedness, as a beast out of a pasture where it ought not to be, Job 18:18. It is an usual way of speaking with us, when we would signify that anyone is dead, to say he has departed this life; there is the life that now is, the life we live in the flesh, and there is the life to come; the present life is a transitory one, it is, as James says, even a vapor that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away: (James 4:14.) death is a departing this life; and when a good man departs out of it, he enters into another, even into eternal life.

When a man dies, he departs from his relations, friends and acquaintance, and they see him no more; the place where he lived, and the men of it, know him no more; he returns no more to this present world, into this frail mortal state: his friends shall go to him, but he shall not return to them, as David said of his child; and at the resurrection-morn there will be a glorious meeting of the saints, when they shall come together, both living and raised ones, and shall never part more, but shall be together forever with Christ.

Death is, as it were, no other with the saints, than a departing or removing from one house to another, from the earthly house of this tabernacle, the body, to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens: from houses of clay which have their foundation in the dust, to everlasting habitations, to those

mansions of joy and bliss, which are in Christ's Father's house. Now all this may serve to make death easy and familiar to us, and take off from the terror which it naturally induceth; it is but like going from one house to another, and that a better, an house in heaven; from one city to another, and that a better, a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is the great God; from one country to another, and that a better, even an heavenly one.

So Job speaks of death in such language as this, and to such a purpose, to render it more agreeable to him; if I wait, the grave is my house: I have made my bed in the darkness: I have said to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister, Job 17:13, 14. And from this account of death, it may be observed, that it is not an annihilation of man; it is an analysis of human nature, a separation and disunion of its parts, soul and body, but neither of them cease to be; the soul exists in a separate state, either of happiness or misery; and the body is reduced to dust, yet not to nothing: though it is crumbled into ten thousand atoms and more, yet it is still in being; though it is, like a tabernacle, taken down, and its parts separated, yet these are carefully laid up to be put together in a more beautiful form and order; though man at death looses from one shore and port, he is presently at another; and though he goes out of one world, he is in another; though he is not here, he is elsewhere: it is said of some, that they were not, as Enoch and Rachel's children, Genesis 5:24, Jeremiah 31:15, but the meaning is, not that they were not in being, but that they were not on earth; they were taken from thence, and were with God.

I proceed, II. To consider the desire the apostle had of departing or dying; having a desire to depart; which phrase, as a learned man observes,[6] signifies, a vehement and perpetual desire; it was not a mere velleity, that rose up in his mind, a cold and faint wish in his breast, but a strong impulse upon him, a passionate desire to be gone; nor was it a new desire, a sudden start of mind, but what he had had a long time, and which grew stronger and stronger; nor was it carnal and sinful, but spiritual, not from nature but from grace; for, 1st, He did not desire simply to die, or desire dying for the sake of death, but for some other end here mentioned: to desire death, simply considered, is contrary to nature; contrary to a first principle in nature, self-preservation: all men naturally desire to live: what man is he that desireth life? (Ps. 34:12.) every man does; he will do, or suffer, or part with anything, to keep that: true it is, what Satan said, skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his life: (Job 2:4.) when human nature was innocent and sinless, nothing was more disagreeable to it than death; wherefore, to keep man in awe of his maker, and fix in him an attention to his will, and preserve him in his obedience to him, death was made the sanction of the law that was given him; therefore when our first parents were tempted to eat of the forbidden fruit, the greatest fence they had against the temptation, and the strongest objection to a compliance with it, was, God hath said, ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die: and the devil had no other way of answering and removing this objection, than by asserting a downright falsehood, and contradicting the express word of God, saying, ye shall not surely die. (Gen. 2:17 and 3:3, 4.)

Even in the sinless human nature of Christ there was a desire of life, and an aversion to death: as such he prayed to be saved from the hour of death, and that its bitter cup might pass from him; it is true, his death was attended with such circumstances as made it terrible indeed; he had all the sins of his people on him, and suffered in their room and stead; and bore the wrath of God; and endured the whole curse of the law, and all the punishment due to their sins; and therefore it is no wonder that his human nature, left to itself, should shudder and shrink at it; yet it seems that death itself, as such, was disagreeable to it; though he corrects his desire of life, and submits his request to the divine will, John 12:27, Matthew 26:39.

Death is not in itself a real good, and therefore not to be desired in itself; yea, it is an evil, a penal evil; it was threatened in case of sin, and is inflicted as a punishment of it; the wages of sin is death: (Rom. 6:23.)

and on the other hand, life, and a continuance of it, long life, has been always esteemed a blessing; and is promised as an encouragement to obedience. (Eph. 6:2, 3.) Death is the fruit and effect of sin; it entered into the world by it, and has set up its empire through it: it reigns over men with an uncontrollable power and authority; it is a king, and a king of terrors; (Job 18:10.) a terrible one, very formidable to human nature, it is an enemy to it, and the last enemy, the stoutest of all, which holds out the longest, and is hard to be subdued and conquered; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:26) Death in itself is awful and shocking, and which nature seeks to flee from and avoid; there being pain and bitterness in it, and in its consequence, an awful judgment, a future state follow upon it, in which men must be happy or miserable: and even good men have sometimes been all their life-time, through fear of death, subject to bondage. (Heb. 2:15.)

When therefore the apostle desired to die, it must be something above nature that moved him to it. Nor, 2dly, Did he desire it in an unlawful or dishonorable way; not to take it away himself; for as to desire death is contrary to a principle of nature, so for a man to be the author of it himself, is contrary to a principle of grace: nor that any other man should take it from him; as Saul desired his armor-bearer to draw his sword, and thrust it through him; which he refusing, he fell upon his own sword and died, being unwilling to fall into the hands of the Philistines.

Some, through the terrors of a guilty conscience, have desired death, and have even destroyed themselves, as Judas did; not being able to stand up under the weight of guilt they are pressed with; crying out with Cain, that their punishment is greater than they can bear. (Gen. 4:13.) This is a piece of shocking stupidity, that, in order to be out of a lesser hell they feel within them, they throw themselves into the greater, into an abyss of woe, into endless horror and misery; and to avoid the present gnawings of a natural conscience, plunge themselves into a state irretrievable and irrecoverable, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched.

Others have desired death because not able to support themselves under a disappointment of what their pride and ambition have prompted unto; because they could not have their will complied with, and their lusts gratified: so Ahitophel, because his counsel was not followed, and his ambitious views answered, in the pride of his heart fought death, and laid violent hands upon himself. It is reported of Aristotle, though some say he died a natural death, that not being able to find out the cause of the ebbing and flowing of the sea, at a place called Euripus, where it ebbed and flowed seven times a day, he threw himself into it and was drowned: and Nazianzen[7] says, he died there; and Justin Martyr[8] that he died there with grief: this is dying in a poor, mean, and dishonorable manner.

It has been an infirmity that has attended some good persons, who have wished for death in a pet or passion, because they could not have their wills, or were under some sore and pressing trouble: so Rachel said, give me children, or else I die; (Gen. 30:1.) suggesting, that she could not live, nor desired to live, unless she had some; and that she had rather die, than live childless. So Jonah, when he had lost his gourd, and the sun beat vehemently on him, in a passionate fit wished to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live: and when the Lord expostulated with him, saying, dost thou well to be angry for the gourd?

He persists in his passion, and insists upon it, that he did well to be angry even unto death: (Jonah 3:8, 9.) but this was his weakness. So Moses, unable to bear the weight of the care and government of the children of Israel, desires the Lord would kill him out of hand and let him not see his wretchedness: (Num. 11:15.) so Elijah the prophet, when threatened and persecuted by Jezebel, requested for himself that he

might die: (1 Kings 19:4.) and this was what Job very vehemently wished for under his sore troubles and afflictions: but it is a much more noble and ingenuous spirit, which the saints show in the exercise of grace, when they desire, that neither their afflictions may be removed from them, nor they from them, until it is the will and pleasure of God; and when they request more grace and strength to support under them, and pray for more faith and patience to bear them, and wait the Lord's own time to deliver them out of them.

But, 3dly, The apostle desired death upon right principles, and with right views; he desired it with submission to the divine will; he that would not determine upon a journey to visit any of the churches, or promise to take one, without saying, if the Lord will; would never think of a journey into the other world, or of a voyage from the shores of time, to those of eternity, without a special regard to the will of God: he did not desire to die sooner than it was the pleasure of God he should; his desire was bounded and limited, as that of his Lord and Master's was, saying, not my will, but thine be done: (Luke 22:42.) nor did he desire to die before he had done his work; the context shows the struggle he had between personal gain, and public usefulness; and of such a noble spirit he was, that he postponed his private advantage to the public service of the church, and inclined, upon this consideration, rather to live than die.

Good men, in a right spirit, when they most vehemently desire death, desire it that they may be freed from sin, from the temptations of Satan, and the snares of this world; being burdened with a body of sin and death, they drag about with them, they groan and earnestly desire deliverance; being pressed with Satan's temptations, they long for that state where they shall be no more exposed to them; and, their righteous souls being vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, as was Lot, and weary of their lives, because of the wickedness of the sons of men, as Rebekah was, because of the daughters of Heth; they breathe after that perfect state in which they will be completely holy, without sin and sinful company: and it was with such a view as this, no doubt, that the apostle desired to die; and certain it is, that he did not desire death of itself, but in connection with something else, with being with Christ: and so every gracious soul desires to die, not for the sake of dying, not that they would be unclothed, stripped of the body, the tabernacle, but clothed upon with their house from heaven, that mortality might be swallowed up of life: not that they desired a mortal state, or to be under the power of death and the grave; but that they might enjoy eternal life: wherefore, seeing they reckon themselves absent from the Lord, whilst they are at home in the body; they choose rather, and it is their earnest wish and desire, to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord; (2 Cor. 5:4, 6, 8.) which is the same thing as to be with Christ: for the sake of which, and perfect conformity to him, and uninterrupted communion with him, death is desired.

Now before a person arrives to a settled, composed frame of soul, as to desire in good earnest to die upon such principles, and with such views as mentioned, 1. Such persons and things in this world, which were once near and dear to him must, be as nothing; he must be dead to the world, and that to him, or he will never truly desire death; so long as he hankers after any person or thing in it, he will be loth to die: which is frequently the case of the husband to the wife, the wife to the husband, and one friend to another; relations hang about them, and have a great share in their affections: the things of the world stick close to them, and they do not know how to part with either: one has a family of children, and he would be glad to see them brought up or better provided for; another, his circumstances in the world are good, and he chooses to live a little longer, that he might enjoy what with great care and industry he has obtained, or what God in his providence has plentifully put into his hands; a third, his circumstances are bad, and he is very desirous of abiding in the flesh, in hopes he shall be able to retrieve himself, and make a better provision for his family, and not leave them distressed and incumbered; now that man must have his heart

loosened from the world, and all things in it, ere he will be willing to die; and when this is the case, then he is for leaving all to be with Christ; then, father, mother, wife and children, brother, sister, houses and lands, are all nothing: God, Christ, heaven, glory, and eternal life, are all in all; the things of the world are light in comparison of the eternal weight of glory he is rejoicing in the hope of; and he can easily part with them, and leave all to be with Christ. 2.

He has other views and notions of death, than what are common; he considers it not as an evil, but as a part of the inventory of the saints goods; death is yours; (1 Cor. 3:22.) not as a penal evil, as the wages of sin, but as a blessed privilege; not as having the sting of sin in it, and as armed with vengeance; but as having its sting taken away from it by Christ, and disarmed by him; and can say, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:55.) He looks upon it, not as an enemy, but as a friend, as an outlet of his sorrows and troubles, and as an inlet of his joys and pleasures: it does not appear with that grim and ghastly look, and in that terrible form, it does to others.

Wherefore, 3. He is without fear of it, or of him that has the power of it, or of any consequence following upon it: he is not afraid of the pangs of death; he knows his Lord can make it easy to him: the bitterness of it is past with him; nor is he afraid of Satan, and the whole posse of devils; the reason why wicked men, when they come to die, are afraid, is because they apprehend a band of infernal furies are about their bed, ready to carry their souls into eternal torments; but the believer has no such fears, he knows the angels are about him, ready to do their office, and carry his soul into Abraham's bosom, as soon as separated from his body: nor has he any dread of a future judgment; he knows things will go well with him then; the Judge will be his friend, and give him the crown of righteousness laid up for him; and if a man has any fears about either of these, he will never desire to die. 4.

He must be satisfied of his spiritual state and condition; that God has loved him with an everlasting love; that he has chosen him in Christ to be holy and happy; that he has made a covenant with him in Christ, ordered in all things and sure; and is his covenant God and Father: must be persuaded that Christ has loved him and given himself for him, and is his Savior and Redeemer; and then he will say, as old Simeon did, when he had the child Jesus in his arms, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation: (Luke 2:29, 30.) he must know that his iniquities are pardoned through the blood of Christ, and that he is justified by his righteousness, which will answer for him in a time to come; that "he is an heir of God, and joint-heir with Christ, being begotten again to a lively hope of a glorious inheritance;" he must be satisfied that the Spirit of God has begun the good work of grace upon his soul, and is working him up for that self-fame thing, eternal glory; that he has both a meetness for it, and a, right unto it, through Christ; and that the everlasting doors shall be thrown open for him, and he shall have a rich and an abundant entrance into the kingdom and glory of his Lord. 5.

He must know whither he is going, or he will never desire to depart hence; that he is going to heaven, to glory, to eternal happiness; who would choose to loose from one port, unless bound for another? and he knows where it is he is bound for? who would choose to remove out of one house, unless another is provided for him, and that a better, and he knows it to be so? who would be willing, with Hobbes the Atheist, to take a leap in the dark? or to be in the case of Adrian the emperor, who when dying said, Animula, vagula, blandula, quo tu abilis?

"Ah, poor, little, wandering, fluttering soul, whither "wilt thou go? where art thou going?" He knew not where. But a gracious soul, that is truly willing to die, knows where it is going, and to what company, to be with God, Father, Son, and Spirit, with angels and glorified saints; and therefore he desires to depart. This

was the happy case of the apostle Paul; he knew his interest in the unchangeable love of God; and was persuaded that nothing could separate him from it; he knew his interest in Christ, he knew in whom he had believed; who he was, and what he was to him; and that he was able to keep what he had committed to him against another day; he knew, that though he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an injurious person, he had obtained mercy; and that the grace of God, in great abundance, was bestowed upon him; and that he was an heir of glory; and indeed it is no wonder that such a man should desire to die, who had such an assurance of the love of God and Christ unto him, and had been so long and eminently useful; had done so much service for Christ, and good to the souls of men; and was now Paul the aged, far advanced in years; his race run out, his course finished, and the time of his departure at hand.

But that our deceased friend and brother should have a desire to die, may seem somewhat strange; a man, and desire to die, which is contrary to a principle in human nature; a sinful man, and desire to die; and therefore must know that his sins were pardoned, and his soul cleansed from the guilt and filth of them through the blood of Christ; a young man, and desire to die, and leave all the pleasures of this life, which the youthful age delights in, and to which long life is usually desirable; a young minister of the gospel, and desire to die, when just arrived to the highest post of honor in the church, having a large prospect of usefulness before him; just entering upon it, and blessed with much of it; beloved by the church, caressed by his friends; and yet willing to leave all, and depart hence; this must be owing, not to nature, but to grace, and to the faith and hope he had of being with Christ?

Which brings me, III. To consider the ground of this desire; what it was that raised, moved, encouraged, increased, and continued it; to be with Christ. To be with saints in a perfect, glorified state, is much; to be with the holy angels, more; but to be with Christ, is best of all; and which is to be understood, not to the exclusion of the Father and of the Spirit, for these three are one; and where the one is, the others are; and he that is with one, is with them all; and in the ultimate state of glory, God, Father, Son, and Spirit, will be all in all; but Christ is only mentioned, as being in our nature, in heaven, and the medium of all glory and happiness there, as of all grace here; and as being dear to the apostle, and so to all the saints; having done and suffered so much for them, standing in such relations to them, and bearing and performing such offices for them; as well as by reason of the glory and loveliness of his person, and his exceeding great love to them.

There is a nearness between Christ and his people now; they are in him, and he is in them; they are chosen in him, and blessed in him with spiritual blessings; they are created in him unto good works; they are brought to believe in him, and are in him as branches in the vine, and bring forth fruit; and he is formed in their hearts, and lives in them: it is not so much they that live spiritually, as it is Christ that lives in them; he dwells in their hearts by faith, and they in him; and hence they have communion with him, both in a private, and in a public way; when they are alone in their closets, or in secret meditation and ejaculations of mind, when in their families, and in conversation with christians, and when hearing the word, and attending on ordinances: sometimes they are with him in his chamber above, where he brings them, and they remember his love; and sometimes in his banqueting-house, with other saints, where they sit under his shadow with great delight, tasting the sweetness of his precious fruits; and where he sits with them at his table; bids them welcome, and they enjoy his gracious presence and desirable company; but then he is but as a wayfaring man, who continues but for a short time; wherefore being in the body, though fellowship with Christ is sometimes had, is reckoned no other than absence from the Lord; but after death there is an immediate being with Christ; the separate soul is at once with him in paradise, where it remains until the resurrection-morn; and then, the glorified saint, in soul and body, being reunited, lives with Christ a

thousand years on earth; and when the term is up, it reigns with him forever end ever in heaven; and so shall be for ever with the Lord, enjoying uninterrupted communion with him.

Now this is what the apostle desired to die for, that he might be with the Lord in this sense; and this is the sum of Christ's prayers and intercessions for his people, that they might be with him, and behold his glory; and this is the design, the end and issue of his preparations for them, that where he is, they may be also; and herein lies the happiness of the saints, and great it is to be with such a glorious person as Christ, whose glory is the glory of the only-begotten of the father; who is the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person; is in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with him; is possessed of all divine perfections, the fulness of the godhead dwelling bodily in him; and is King of kings, and Lord of lords.

To be with one that stands in such near relations to them, as their everlasting father, that bears an everlasting love to them, takes an everlasting care of them, and makes everlasting provisions for them; their tender husband, who nourishes and cherishes them as his own flesh; their near kinsman; their brother, and first-born among many brethren; and who is their dearly-beloved friend, a friend that loves at all times, and sticks closer than a brother; to be with such a person must needs be desirable; to be with one that has sustained such offices for them, who is the only mediator between God and man; is their prophet, to teach and instruct them, as he does by his word and spirit; their priest, to atone for their sins, and make intercession for them; their king, to rule over them, defend and protect them, the head of the church and over all things to it, the Savior of the body, and the Redeemer of their souls from destruction, is worth dying for: to be with one who has done and suffered so much for them, who became their surety in eternity, made a covenant with his Father on their account; assumed their nature in the fullness of time; was made under the law; obeyed its precept; and suffered its penalty; bore their sins, and was made sin and a curse for them; shed his blood, and washed them from their sins in it, and made them kings and priests to God; to see and be with such a person, and that forever, must be esteemed an happiness indeed; and as such to be desired and even death, in order to it.

If his gracious presence now is so desirable as to be preferred to all things in life, and as filling with a joy that creatures cannot give; how much more to be desired is the presence of Christ in heaven, where are fullness of joy, and pleasures for evermore? To be with Christ, is not only the believer's gain and profit, but it will be for his honor and glory; he will be where his Lord and Master is; he will appear in glory with him; he will walk with him in white apparel, being worthy through his worthiness; yea, he will sit down upon the same throne with him, and reign with him, and be glorified together.

And this leads me, IV. To observe the preferableness and superexcellency of this desired happiness; which is far better, by much the rather better, abundantly exceedingly much better;[9] there is no comparison between being in the flesh, and being with Christ: it is not indeed better to die than to live; life is preferable to death; but it is better to die and be with Christ, than to live in this world; whilst the saints are in the world, they must expect trouble; God has appointed it, man is born to it; Christ has left it as a legacy to his people; and through it they must enter the kingdom: but at death there is an end put to all; and in the other state there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, nor trouble of any sort, inward or outward; and therefore preferable to this: the present state is a sinful one; there is not a just man that lives without sin; as long as the saints are in this tabernacle, they will be burdened with a body of sin and death, under which they groan; but after death there will be no more sinning, no more of the corruption of nature, or an evil heart of unbelief; but their souls will be among the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Christ, presented to himself without spot or wrinkle, and to his Father faultless.

Now they are harassed with the temptations of Satan; but then they will be out of the reach of his fiery darts: now they have only communion with Christ at certain times; but then it will be without any cessation or interruption; wherefore it must be much more eligible to a gracious soul to die and be with Christ, than to live in this sinful, troublesome world. Moreover to depart hence, and be with Christ, is better than a well-spent life in the service of Christ, and to his glory; yea, than even laboring in the ministry; and that with success, and usefulness to the souls of men, and honor to the Redeemer; for though a minister of Christ may, as the apostle did, take the utmost pleasure and delight in the work of the ministry, and be very useful in it, as no man was more so than he; yet it is a work, and a toilsome and laborious one, and wearisome to the flesh; wherefore dying, and being with Christ, must be desirable, with proper limitations before observed; since then, the servant of Christ rests from his labor, and his works follow him: at least, it must be better for him, though not for others; and so the Syriac and Arabic versions add, by way of supplement, for me; for the apostle to live longer, might have been better, and more to the service of Christ, the glory of his name, and the good of his churches; but to leave the world, and be with Christ, was better for him; which made him incline to desire death.

From all which it appears, that there is a future state after death. Some think, when they die, there is an end of them; and therefore indulge themselves in all manner of sins; but such should know, that after death comes judgment; and that for all these things they shall be brought into it; and thus the soul exists in a separate state, and the body, though laid in the grave, will be raised again, to receive for the things done in it, of which an account must be given: besides, if this was the case, death would not be desirable; it is better to be, than not to be; to have a being, though attended with infirmity, imperfection, and trouble, is more eligible than to have none at all; especially it is much more desirable to a believer, because now at times, he has the presence of God, communion with Christ, the comfortable influences of the Spirit, and delightful conversation with the people of God; all which he would be deprived of, if at death he entered into a state of non-existence; wherefore the apostle, when he expresses his desire to depart, he signifies, it was that he might be, might exist somewhere else; and he tells us where and with whom, with Christ, and where he is.

Hence it may be further observed, That the only happy state after death, is to be with Christ: if a man is not with him, he is with devils and damned spirits, he is in hell, in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone; he is gone to his own place, and is in everlasting punishment; but if he is with Christ, he is happy, he enjoys the beatific vision of God, he sees Christ as he is, in his glory, and is made like unto him, and is in fullness of joy: and this happy state is entered into at once, upon a departure out of this world; hence these two are closely joined together, to depart, and to be with Christ, the one immediately following the other; and so our Lord told the penitent thief on the cross, that that day he should be with him in paradise: (Luke 23:43.) and were it not so, was this happiness to be deferred longer, was there any future period fixed when it was to commence, as at the first resurrection, the beginning of the thousand years, and the last judgment, it would be much more desirable to live on earth until that time, than to die; since in the meanwhile some service might be done for Christ, and some enjoyment might be had of him; which would make living in the world, preferable to a state of uselessness and inactivity; wherefore from this desire of the apostle's, it may be concluded, that the soul does not sleep with the body, in the grave, until the resurrection-morn: had he known anything of this, death would not have been so desirable to him, at least not so soon; it would have been better for him, and better for the churches of Christ, if he had continued to this day, and even to the end of the world, than to be in a sleepy, senseless, and inactive state and condition.

Thus have I endeavored to explain and improve the passage of scripture read to you, at the request of my deceased friend and brother, whose character will now be expected from me, and I shall only attend to that part of it which concerns him as a christian and a minister of the gospel. MR. AARON SPURRIER was born of believing parents, and had the advantage of a religious education; his father was a Minister of the word, who died when he was young, and left him to the care of his religious mother, who brought him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; and a blessing it is to be so brought up; for when a child is trained up in the way he should go, he will not easily and ordinarily depart from it: yet so it was, in the case of our brother, as he informed me, that notwithstanding the religious restraints that were upon him, he broke through them, and privately, and unknown to his friends, fell into the sins and vices of the age; which, when his conscience was awakened, and his mind illuminated by the spirit of God, lay with great weight upon him, and filled him with inexpressible horror and terror; under which he continued for some time, until it pleased God to bring and apply unto him, and set home with power upon him, these words of Christ to Peter, I have prayed for thee;--and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren (Luke 22:32).

Two things he concluded from hence, one was, that he had an interest in Christ, an interest in his heart's love, and in his powerful and prevalent mediation and intercession; which eased him of his burden, and gave him comfort: and the other was, that he saw it was the mind and will of God, that when he was converted, he should be a preacher of the gospel, and so be an instrument of comforting and strengthening others: wherefore when he came to a settled composure of mind, and to be satisfied about his spiritual and eternal estate, he gave himself up to the study of the scriptures, and of the doctrines of the gospel, to be learned from them, and to meditation and prayer, and to the reading of useful books, with a view to the work of the ministry; his qualifications for which, in process of time, being taken notice of, he was called to exercise his gift, by the church to which he belonged; what difficulties he met with in coming forth into the ministry, and the source of them, I shall not touch upon; they are well known to many of you: however, these in time, were happily got over, and he was comfortably settled as a pastor among you, this church of Christ; the good effects of which you soon felt in the increase of your audience, and in the addition of members to your society.

Few young ministers come forth with such seriousness and solidity, with such spirituality and experience, with such humility and modesty, with such fervency and affection, with such clearness of light and foundness of judgment, as he did, considering his years, and some disadvantages he labored under; he was a burning and a shining light, and his light was more and more increasing, which promised a great deal of usefulness to the church of God; and ye for a season rejoiced in his light; (John 5:35.) and it was but for a season, and for a short season too; a great deal of work was done by him among you in a little time, in the conversion of sinners, in the instruction of your minds, and in the regulation of the discipline of the church: but the all-wise disposer of all things thought fit to lay his hand upon him, and to afflict him with a lingering illness, which laid him aside from his work for some time, and at last issued in death.

During his illness, he was for the most part very comfortable in his soul; at two several times that I visited him, I found his faith in Christ very strong and steady, built upon the Rock of ages, the sure foundation God has laid in Zion; there being no other Savior, or better foundation, as he observed, to be proposed instead of him; to him he looked, on him he depended, in him he trusted; and could with pleasure reflect upon the doctrines he taught others, as yielding the most solid consolation to himself on a dying bed: but at my last visit, and when he sent for me, I perceived he had had a conflict with Satan; the enemy of souls came in upon him like a flood, putting him upon it to prove, that he ever knew what growth in grace was; which he not being able to answer at once, he was tempted to question whether he had experienced any

work of grace at all; which threw him into great concern and distress, until the Lord was pleased to relieve him by a powerful application of these words, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee: (Jer. 31:3.) which filled his soul brimful of comfort, with a joy unspeakable, and full of glory, and which continued with him to his last moments; when he sweetly and easily, without a sigh or a groan, fell asleep in Jesus.

And now give me leave to close this service with a few words to you, the members of this church, to which he was a pastor: and, 1. To the younger members of it; you that were converted under our brother's ministry, and were the first-fruits of it, you have lost your spiritual father indeed, who would have had a watchful eye over you, and a tender regard for you; but consider, Christ your everlasting father still lives to care and provide for you, and supply all your wants; your prophet is gone, who, you might have expected, would have instructed you more largely in the truths of the gospel, and in what would have made for your peace and comfort; but remember, that though the prophets do not live for ever, yet the word of the Lord lives and abides forever, to nourish you up to everlasting life; your under shepherd is no more to feed you, the lambs in Christ's flock: but the great and chief shepherd and bishop of souls is still with you, and he will feed his flock like a shepherd, gather the lambs in his arms, carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young: (Isa. 40:11.) he does not despise the day of small things, (Zech. 4:10.) nor will he break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; (Isa. 42:3.) you may be confident of this, that the good work of grace begun in your hearts, shall be performed until the day of Christ: what one minister has been the instrument of planting, another will water.

But a few words, 2. To the elder members of this church, and the officers of it, who have been of long standing in it: you have seen various changes and alterations in it, the several steps and methods of divine providence towards you, and his hand upon you in many respects: your ancient pastor,[10] that was many years over you in the Lord, was sorely afflicted for a long time; frequently interrupted in his work, and at last wholly laid aside; though before that a young man[11] of good abilities and promising usefulness was settled among you, and was soon snatched away from you by death; and now another young man in like manner; so that within these five or six years you have lost no less than three pastors!

An awful dispensation this! It should put you upon search and inquiry what should be the reason of the Lord's coming forth against you in such a manner, and of his controversy with you; and it might be reasonably thought you would be saying one to another, Is there not an Achan in our camp? and that everyone would be putting the question that the disciples of Christ did in another case, Is it I? Is it I? Have you nothing to charge yourselves with? No disrespect to the doctrines of the gospel?

No want of attendance on the ordinances of it? No negligence in the affairs of the church and the discipline of it? No unsuitable and unbecoming walk and conversation in any of you? No declensions and backslidings among you, not taken notice of; and the laws of Christ against delinquents not put in execution? Something of this latter kind I understand was matter of concern to your late pastor; who, as I am told, has left you his dying charge. May it be of use unto you to stir you up to be more active and diligent, to be stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; and to recover backsliders, and bring them back to the fold, or put you upon doing your duty to them.

And, 3. To the church in general, I close with a word or two: do not be discouraged in your melancholy circumstances; though the Lord has stripped you of one pastor after another, the residue of the Spirit is with him: who knows but that a double portion of it may fall upon some Elisha or another, that may be sent among you: our exalted Lord and King has received gifts for men, and he bestows them on them, to

qualify them for pastors and teachers, that they may be useful in the work of the ministry, and for the edifying the body the church: and he has a sufficiency of these to give; pray to him for them: I understand you are a praying people, that there is a spirit of prayer of late among you; I rejoice to hear it; you may hope for a blessing and expect it: go on praying to him who has promised to give pastors according to his own heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and with understanding; (Jer. 3:15.) and considering what a number of ministers have been removed by death, how few there are that are come forth in their room, how many churches are destitute of pastors; it becomes us all to lay it to heart, and earnestly and fervently to pray the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth laborers into his harvest, (Matt. 9:38.) faithful, diligent, and useful ones. FOOTNOTES:

[1] This Sermon was never before printed.

[2] Wisdom of Solomon 9:15, Democrat. sentent, p. 13. Ed. Gale.

[3] Illusione facta ad nautas qui quando e portu alio fui graturi sunt solvunt navim & simpliciter etiam analusai dicuntur. Sic Chrysostomus, sic Syriacus, sic Beza & alii. Zanchius in loc. Perinde est sive per verbum solvendi, sive per verbum migrandi reddetur proprie tamen de navibus dicitur, quae solutis rudentibus e portu navigant. Vorst. in loc.

[4] Elysium est ubi piorum animae habitant, post corporis animaeque discretione unde & interitus dicitur res inter animam & corpus veniens: ergo Elysium; & apo thv lusewv, nam sic dissinitur mors yuchv ki< swmatov lusiv, Servius in Virgil. AEneid. 50:5. p. 973.

[5] See my notes on Job 13:1. and on Philippians 1:23.

[6] Zanchy in loc.

[7] Orat. 3. adv. Julian, p. 79. vol. 1.

[8] Ad Graecos Cohort. p.34.

[9] pollw mallon kreisson.

[10] The Reverend Mr. David Rees.

[11] The Reverend Mr. William Coombs.

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