

THE STATE OF THE SOUL AFTER DEATH

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It is often said by modern theologians that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not a Christian teaching. They hold that the conception of an immortal soul is a dogma of Greek philosophy which somehow crept into the theology of the church. When, a few years ago, Dean Loomer of the Divinity School of the University of Chicago was asked, "What do you do, then, about the immortality of the soul?", he answered, "As a theologian I am not interested. The immortality of the soul is a philosophical and not a theological question."

When this was mentioned at the time to a Lutheran pastor, he said that while he did not agree with Loomer, yet he did not believe that the immortality of the soul was a Christian doctrine, but that it was a Platonic conception that had become current in Christian thinking. When he was asked, "What do you do with the words of the Lord Jesus, "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul," for surely these words indicate that the Savior believed that the soul cannot be killed?", he answered, "Jesus never spoke those words. He was much too intelligent and much too Christian ever to say anything like that. This is what Matthew says He said."

These words remind us of the argument of some of the higher critics, who argue that books like Ecclesiastes and Job must be written late, since they clearly teach the immortality of the soul. Since the Jews learned of the immortality of the soul from Plato, they say, these books could not possibly be written until about 300 B.C. Strangely enough, it is this misconception that the wisdom literature is late and belongs into the Greek period of Jewish history that is responsible for the mistranslation of Job's great words of faith to make it appear that Job believed in the immortality of the soul but not in the resurrection of the body.

It is just as logical to argue that the Israelites could not have learned the doctrine of immortality from the Greeks since Old Testament books written hundreds of years before Plato clearly teach this truth. That Plato might have learned it from the writings of the prophets, as Luther believed, never seems to occur to these higher critics. And if they insist that the Jews had to learn it from somebody, why could they not have taken it from the Egyptians? The Egyptian conception of the immortality of the soul is much closer to that of the Bible than is that of Plato and the Greek philosophers. That the Egyptians believed in the immortality of the individual person and not just a vague indestructibility of soul substance is clearly proclaimed by their elaborate tombs and by their highly developed embalming processes.

But when Plato held to a view of the immortality of the soul, he did not teach that a person continues to exist after death. The will of man, for example, and the sensibilities of man do not continue after death, according to him. What he called the immortality of the soul was nothing more than a perduration of the intelligence or the conservation and preservation of reason. The individual person, who is so important in the Christian view of things, is of no significance to Plato. The later Platonists looked upon the individual soul as being only an infinitesimal fraction of the great world soul, imprisoned for a time in a mortal body, but longing to be freed from that body to be absorbed and lost once more in the supreme unity of the spirit.

This, as we will all recognize immediately, is not the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul. But it should be noted at the very beginning that the Bible uses the word "soul" or "spirit" in various senses. At times it uses the word "soul" to mean simply a person, or even an animal, or any living creature. We do the same today when we count the number of souls in our congregations. Paul did this when he said, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers" (Rom. 13:1). This was done also by Moses, for we might translate Genesis 2:19 in this way, "Whatsoever Adam called every soul, that was the name thereof." And the context makes it very clear that the "souls" that he named were the animals. We are here evidently dealing with a figure of speech, in which the part is named for the whole.

But how can we say that the soul is a part of an animal? The answer to that question lies in the fact that the word “soul” is at times used in the Bible to denote nothing more than life itself. In the first chapter of Genesis the animals are described as having souls, for when it speaks of beasts, and fowl, and creeping things, “wherein there is life,” we might more literally translate, “wherein there is a living soul” (Gen. 1:30; see margin.). And when Paul said of Eutychus, “His life is in him,” we could just as correctly translate, “His soul is in him” (Acts 20:10). All this should prompt us to be a little cautious about using a passage like, “Man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7) to prove the soul’s immortality. When the word “soul” is used in this sense it comes very close to the modern, unbelieving view of the soul, which sees in the soul nothing more than the vital functioning of the body, and which treats anger and worry as little more than a superconcentration of the wrong kinds of acids in the body.

But even when we grant all this, we have by no means exhausted the teaching of the Bible in this matter. The word is at other times used to denote that part of the man which survives after death. When John says in Revelation, “I saw the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God,” (Rev. 6:9) no other meaning could possibly fit the context. But it is not even necessary to use the word “soul” to teach the truth that we commonly understand under the term, “the immortality of the soul.” It is often said that the early books of the Old Testament do not teach the immortality of the soul, but if we examine the facts of the case we find that such a view is just as ridiculous as to say that the Lutheran Confessions do not teach the inspiration of Scripture. It is true that there is no statement in the Pentateuch, for example, which says, in so many words, “The soul is immortal,” just as there is no statement in the Augsburg Confession which says, “The Bible is inspired.” But throughout the Pentateuch the immortality of the soul is taken for granted, as the inspiration of the Bible is taken for granted in the Confessions.

This doctrine that the soul, or the spirit, of man lives on after death is so universally believed and so generally accepted by men that we may say that it is a part of the natural knowledge of reality possessed by all men. When the ancients buried their dead and placed into the tombs the implements and the supplies that they would need in the next world, they gave eloquent testimony to their belief in a life after death. That man has a soul which survives the body is a part of man’s natural belief as an incurably religious being, What we usually call the immortality of the soul we might just as well describe as the survival of the personality of man, of the deathlessness of that part of man which makes him a real person. Even if we were willing to grant, which we are not, that the word “soul” is used in the Bible only to denote the life principle of man and animals, the doctrine of the perdurance of the individual personality would still stand secure. That the individual human person survives after death is clearly taught by the earliest books of the Old Testament. This will be seen in the formula which is so often used to describe the death of the patriarchs. We are told, for example, that Abraham “was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8). This surely does not refer to the burial of Abraham’s body, for his people were buried in Ur of the Chaldees and in Haran, and Abraham was buried in the cave of Machpelah. Of Isaac (Gen. 35:29) and of Jacob (Gen. 49:29,33), too, it is said that they were gathered unto their people. The same words are used also of Aaron (Num. 20:24,26) and of Moses (Num. 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50), and especially in their case there can be no reference to burial in the family tomb. Gesenius, in his Hebrew dictionary (sub מָצָא), says that “this being gathered to one’s people, or fathers, is expressly distinguished both from death and from burial.”

Remarkable in this connection are the words of the Lord Jesus when He spoke of these things to the Sadducees. The Sadducees denied the existence of an immortal soul and of the resurrection of the body. The Savior told them that their views reflected an ignorance of Scripture. And to show them that the Bible teaches this doctrine, the Savior quoted a passage which we would perhaps hesitate to use for this purpose, but which shows us again that the Lord expected the details of the Scriptural revelation to be treated as authoritative and inspired. He told these Jews that when God appeared to Moses, He identified Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. And Jesus comments, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:32). When God spoke to Moses, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob had been dead and buried for hundreds of years. Yet

God did not say, “I was the God of Abraham,” but “I am the God of Abraham.” Consequently, so our Lord argues, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob must still be alive.

There are, of course, many Bible passages that speak of the immortality of the soul of man. Solomon, in the twelfth chapter of Ecclesiastes, describes the hardships of old age and ends with the poetic picture of death as the time when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl is broken, when the pitcher is broken at the fountain and the wheel is broken at the cistern, and then he concludes with the words, “Then to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). And when Jesus said, “Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul” (Matt. 10:28). He was establishing the immortality of the soul beyond any question or doubt. And when John, in the much-abused twentieth chapter of Revelation, writes, “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4), he makes it very clear that the souls of those who have died in Christ live and reign with the Savior between the time of their death and the time of the resurrection of the body.

This is made evident also by the words of Paul with which he comforts the Thessalonians in the face of the death of their loved ones. He says, “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” (1 Thess. 4:14). Their bodies lay buried in Thessalonica, but they were with the Lord, and Jesus will bring them with Him when He comes again to judge the quick and the dead.

Passages such as these are meaningless except in a context in which the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is taken for granted. But it will be noted that the word “soul” is not used here. The persons who have died are with Jesus, they will come with Him when He returns, and they will also rise from the dead, for Paul, when later in this passage he speaks of the resurrection, does not specifically say that their bodies shall be quickened, but simply, “The dead in Christ shall rise first.” (v.16)

In the fifth chapter of 2 Corinthians, the apostle compares our body to a tabernacle, a tent, in which we live. The soul is again not mentioned, but no one could say that Paul did not clearly teach the immortality of the soul when he wrote, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord, (for we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” And when we remember how clearly, in the first letter to the Corinthians, written just a few weeks before, Paul had taught the resurrection of the body, (1 Cor. 15:35-58) which is to take place at the end of the world, it be evident to us that when he speaks here of being absent from the body and present with the Lord, he has in mind the period between the death of the Christian and his resurrection, when he will be present with the Lord in his body.

We are we, we are ourselves, then, whether we live in the body or outside of it. After death, we will not be vague shadows of our former selves, without will, without emotions or feeling, as Plato pictures the disembodied souls of men, but we will still be what we were, persons in every sense of the term. Such a thought surely underlies the words which St. Paul wrote to the Philippians, “I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Phil. 1:23, 24). It is the “I,” the ego, the person, who goes to be with Christ when death comes to the Christian.

Peter spoke of himself in exactly these same terms. Shortly before his death, he wrote, “I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover, I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance” (2 Pet. 1:13-15). Peter was getting ready to move out of his temporary dwelling, out of the tent in which he had lived during his life on this earth, but to

him dying was not a cessation of being, it was not becoming something else, but really nothing more than a transfer of residence. The early Christians spoke of the day of their death as their birthday. They might just as correctly have called it moving day.

When we keep this concept in mind we will find it a little easier to deal with the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). This passage of Scripture is often ruled out of the discussion of the question of the state of the soul after death on the plea that this is a parable. But there is nothing anywhere in Scripture to indicate that this is a parable. Certainly the text does not say so. If we define a parable as a story taken from the earthly life of men which is used to teach a spiritual truth, every story that we usually classify as a parable will fit the definition except this one. There is no parallel here between earthly, bodily life and spiritual things. It reads more like an actual historical event. We may never, in this world, be able to decide for sure whether this is a parable or an account of something that actually took place and of which Jesus knew because of his omniscience.

But even if we grant that it is a parable that does not mean that we cannot use it as an account which is true to the facts, even if we say that it is presented in terms we can understand on the basis of our present experience. When we read the parable of the sower, we do not say that the literal details of the story are not true to life. We do not caution people against using this story as an accurate presentation of farming practices in Palestine. The same may be said of the parable of the leaven and of the mustard seed. Sowers really went out to sow seed on land such as that described in the parable; women really put leaven into large lumps of dough, and men really planted mustard seed in their gardens. So it is with all the parables.

And thus, whether we say the story is a parable or actual history, we may say that the account of the rich man and Lazarus gives us an insight into actual conditions in the next world. When men die, they either go to heaven or to hell. Lazarus died and went to heaven, and there he found refuge in the bosom of Abraham, who was also there. The rich man died and went to hell. And surely, in the light of our present inexperience and ignorance of the conditions that apply in the life after death, we will not want to criticize the picture that Jesus presents to us here. It may be easy to find all sorts of things here that are easy to make ridiculous. But none of us ought to have much patience with the smart aleck who knows exactly what things will be like in the next world. The Lord Jesus has been there and we have not. The picture he presents to us in this account may not wholly agree with the picture that we have drawn for ourselves, but we are poor judges since all this is beyond the scope of our experience, and the most ridiculous thing of all would be for us to correct the omniscient God with our ignorance.

If someone should, therefore, object that this story cannot be true to actual fact, because the people in heaven and hell will not be able to see each other, we will only ask, "Are you sure?" The devils are in hell, are they not? And the angels are in heaven. Yet I suppose that there are both devils and angels in this room, and I have no doubt that they are able to see each other. At least we are told in Scripture that they dispute with one another. And if the critic continues that the story cannot be true to life because it is said that the rich man talked about his brothers and surely we will not remember those whom we have left behind when we die, we might remind him that it is Greek and Roman mythology that lets the dead drink of Lethe. And we might just ask him again, "Are you sure?" And if he should say that it would never be possible for us to be happy in heaven if we would know that there is a hell or if we could see the people in hell, we might ask him how much he is doing for the people who are without Christ and without the Gospel now. Instead of worrying about how he will feel about their damnation then, when he will no longer be able to do anything about it, he might do a little more worrying about them now, when he is still able to pluck the brand from the burning. And if he should ask how the rich man could desire a drop of water for his tongue, when his tongue was buried in Palestine with his body and only his soul was in hell, we may not know what to say, but we might remember that many things happen which we cannot fully explain. But it may be possible, for all we know, for the soul to feel such things. There was a man in my congregation in Iowa, who lost an arm in a corn picker, and who for years afterward insisted that he could still feel his hand, that he could feel the fingernails digging into his palm. But, aside from all such

questions, this picture of Abraham and Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell is perfectly in harmony with the passages of Scripture to which we have previously referred.

After death, then, the soul, or the person of the believer goes to heaven, and the soul of the unbeliever goes to hell. It is often held by theologians who do not accept the unity of the Old and New Testaments, that the Old Testament makes no such distinction, because the Old Testament knows of only one place to which the souls of the dead go. The name for this place in the Old Testament is *Sheol*. And it is true that the Bible speaks of both believers and unbelievers as entering into *Sheol* after death. The word *Sheol* means, literally, the “hollowed-out place.” It is to be noted that this is also the meaning of the English word “hell” and the German word *Hölle*, which is related to the word *Höhle* or “cave,” and to the English words “hollow” and “hole.” Literally, then, when we speak of hell, we might just as well say “the Hole,” just as *Sheol* is sometimes translated as “the Pit.” Significantly, this is also the original meaning of the Latin word for heaven, *coelum*, which is related to the Greek word κοι=λοζ, which means “a hollow place.”

Sheol is the place to which the dead go. Sometimes it is the place to which the bodies of the dead go, and in such passages it is correctly translated as the “grave.” There are only a few passages in the Old Testament in which we can definitely say that it is used in this meaning (e.g. Job 17:13; Ps. 6:5; Ps. 49:14; Ps. 139:8, etc.). Usually, it refers to the place where the souls are after death. When it is said, for example, that the wicked shall be cast down into *Sheol* (Ps. 9:17), there can be no doubt that the word should be translated as “hell.” But, on the other hand, when the Savior in prophecy says, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in *Sheol*” (Ps. 16:10), “hell” is a translation which causes us difficulty. It is clear from the words of the Savior that His soul was in Paradise after His death on the cross, and yet in the Old Testament His soul is said to be in *Sheol*. We must be careful to interpret Scripture by Scripture and not according to our preconceived notions of what a word ought to mean. It is clear that *Sheol* can either refer to heaven or to hell, just as we speak of “the next world,” or “the afterlife,” or “the great beyond.” When we say that a man has passed over into the great beyond we do not thereby teach that there is only one place to which men go after death, or that all those who have passed over are in the same compartment. And if we say that the believers will find joy in the next life and the unbelievers will find sorrow there, we make it plain that we do not believe that they are all in the same state, or even in the same place, but they are all in the next world.

After death, then, the soul goes to heaven or to hell. When I was a boy, we had an unbelieving neighbor who used to ridicule the teachings of the Bible. One day I heard him say to my father, “If there is a heaven it is outside of this world, isn’t it? It must be farther away than the farthest star. But the stars are millions of light years away from us, and if the soul could travel with the speed of light, 186,000 miles every second, it would take the soul millions of years to get there.” For a long time afterward, this question was a severe trial for me. I had always believed that heaven was beyond the stars somewhere, and yet, up to that time, I had never been disturbed by the question of how long it would take the soul to get there. I had no doubt that the soul might be able to travel faster than light, but I was not so sure that it could travel beyond the stars in one day. And I also knew that the soul of the thief was in paradise on the same day he died.

And so the children in our classroom and the people in our Bible classes might someday ask us the question, “If the soul goes to heaven after death, how far must it travel to get there and how long will it take?” It is true, we need not and we should not attempt to answer every question that is asked, but if we can give an answer which is in harmony with the teachings of the Bible, we may spare some of them some anxious moments. We will all realize that this question is far less important than how we can be sure that we will get there. But nevertheless, there are some things which the Bible tells us which may keep us from forming ideas that will cause us to stumble in our faith the first time we are faced with the apparently intelligent questions of the so-called “deep thinker,” which often have a show of wisdom.

First of all, we should be clear on this point that when the Bible speaks of heaven in the literal sense it means the sky, or the expanse above the earth. God called the firmament heaven, says Moses, and the word which is translated as “firmament” means, literally, that which is stretched out, or the expanse. It is certainly not a solid dome over the earth, for in a later verse it is said that the birds flew in the open firmament of heaven

(Gen. 1:20). Heaven is, then, according to this passage, the place where the birds fly. It is just another name for the space above our heads, the atmosphere, and the space that stretches beyond it.

When I was a boy and heard how the people of Babel wanted to build a tower whose top would reach into heaven, I thought that these were people who wanted to save themselves by their works, who wanted to build a tower so high that they could step off the top of it into heaven and thus get there without faith. But the story makes it very clear that these men built the tower not to help them get to heaven, but to keep themselves from being scattered, to enable them to stay together on the plains of Babel (Gen. 11:4). And when we know from Genesis 1 that heaven is simply the sky above us, we realize that these people wanted to build a skyscraper that would be visible for miles and serve as the focal point of their community.

In the light of all this, the words of Paul, in which he says that we will meet the Lord “in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17) become doubly significant. How far do we have to go to meet the Lord? The Lord is everywhere. If our eyes could be opened, as were the eyes of Elishah’s servant, we might see not only the angels who are present round about us, but we might even see the Lord here and now. And the Savior tells us of the angels who watch over the children, “In heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). The angels watch over the children, and yet at the same time they always see the face of God. They are with us in this room, here and now, and yet they are always in heaven. To get to heaven, then, it is not necessary for us to travel great distances when we die. The veil is simply lifted from our eyes, or the curtain goes up, and we, too, shall stand with the angels before God and see our Savior in His glory.

The Bible does not tell us a great deal about the state of the souls after death. All we know for certain is that those who have died in Christ will be blessed and happy, that they will live and reign with Him, and that those who have died in disobedience and unbelief will be in “prison” (1 Pet. 3:19-20) and in torment. Whether we will be fully conscious or whether it will be like a dream from which we will fully awaken only when our bodies are once more joined to our souls, we do not know for sure. Whether we will still know of those whom we have left behind, or whether we will forget our life on earth, we cannot tell for certain. From the story of the rich man and Lazarus we might conclude that we will still know of those whom we have left behind. But the fact that those in hell remember their life on earth does not necessarily establish the fact that those in heaven remember it, and the fact that one man remembered does not mean that all remember. One swallow does not make a summer. One thing we do know. We shall not know those generations that come after us, for Isaiah says that Abraham and Jacob, who presumably would be most interested in the later Jews, knew nothing of the Jews who lived at his time (Isa. 63:16). It would seem, then, that when the curtain goes up before us, it also goes down behind us. And yet there may well be a general knowledge of what goes on on the earth, for in the book of Revelation we are told that the departed saints are reminded of their fellow-Christians who are still on the earth (Rev. 6:9-11).

A question that always causes trouble and which sometimes leads some people to say things which they ought not to say if they want to remain theologians bound in Scripture, is the question of the interval between death and the day of judgment. Men often speculate in this matter and hold that since the soul, as they say, enters into timeless eternity at death, therefore, for the soul there can be no interval of time between death and the resurrection and final judgment. Moreover, if the soul is judged immediately after death, and if there is another judgment at the end of the world, this would mean that there is a twofold judgment.

Why the question of a twofold judgment should trouble men is difficult to understand. If God tells us over and over again that we are forgiven, why can He not twice tell those who believe that they have been given eternal life, especially when the body is not present at the first judgment? If it pleases Him to do it in that way and hold two court sessions as it were, the one private, and the other public, why should this trouble us?

The other question of the time that elapses between death and the final judgment involves the whole question of time and eternity. And when men speculate about the nature of eternity, they are speaking of something that we know nothing about. If eternity is timelessness, which is certainly true, it involves also the cessation of space as we know it, and it makes all change impossible. Change as we know it, requires time. If we are to judge then, on the basis of our limited experience and our finite intelligence, we might judge also that

there can be no resurrection of the dead, for this would involve a change in the status of the soul. There could be no singing as we know it, for time and intervals are a part of the essence of music. All this ought to convince us that it would be best for us not to speculate at all about these matters. We do not know anything about it, and we have no way of finding out. When men insist, however, that there can be no consciousness of time for the souls of the dead, they do not speak as the Bible speaks. In the sixth chapter of Revelation, for example, we read, “I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of god, and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?’ And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Rev. 6:9-11). It is clear that the souls are here depicted as being conscious of the time that is passing, and it seems long to them. And surely we can do no better than simply to speak of these things as the Scriptures speak of them.

We should perhaps also take note of the fact that some conservative modern Protestants, and also some of the Lutheran theologians of Germany hold that there is a place of cleansing for the soul after death, very similar to the Roman purgatory. This place they call Hades. Some of them hold that this place is for those who were believers on this earth, but who did not reach an adequate level of Christian sanctification in this life. Others hold that it is a place where those who have not heard the Gospel on this earth will have a second opportunity to be converted. The first is a denial of a clear teaching of Scripture, which tells us that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin, and which therefore makes it plain that we are clean and holy through the righteousness of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. The second lacks any kind of Scriptural warrant and also denies the truth that it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the Judgment (Heb. 9:27).

This last point should also make it clear to us that it is foolish and unnecessary to pray for the souls of the dead. Many, and some of them in our own circles, have made much of the fact that the Lutheran Confessions as they say, recommend prayers for the dead. Out of the very incidental remark, “prayers for the dead, which we do not prohibit,” they have tried to show their preying for the souls of the dead is a salutary practice. In the first place, we should bear in mind that the Apology, where this remark is found, does not in any way define what is meant by prayers for the dead. Since the Lutheran Confessions reject any notion of purgatory, it is clear that they could not have had in mind what is usually understood by prayers for the dead. We do say prayers of thanksgiving for the dead, praising and thanking God for the mercies which He showed to the departed during their lifetime on this earth, but beyond that we cannot go without leaving the solid foundation of Scripture.

From all that has been said, it will be evident that there is precious little that we know for sure about the life of the soul between death and the resurrection of the body. What we do know ought to move us first to recognize that this life is our day of grace, that now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation. This in turn should move us to “redeem the time,” to make the proper use of this life as a time of preparation for the life to come. In this spirit, then, we should turn again and again to our Savior in whom alone we can find forgiveness and the promise of everlasting life with Him. And having come to the assurance of the full and free forgiveness of all our sins through the blood and suffering and death and resurrection of our Lord, we can look forward with quiet anticipation and cheerful hope to that day when our soul will be required of us. In that faith we shall be able to sing with the hymnwriter,

O happy day! And yet far happier hour,
 When wilt thou come at last,
 When, fearless, to my Father's love and power,
 Whose promise standeth fast,
 My soul I gladly render?
 For surely shall His hand
 Lead her with guidance tender

To heaven, her fatherland.

To be with Christ will be far better, even though we may for a time have to leave this body, which is fearfully and wonderfully made, and which we shall surely miss when we have to move out of it, for it, too, is a great gift of God, given to us to enjoy. But the day will come when our bodies will again be raised, and from that day on they, too, will share in the endless bliss which shall be ours with our Savior. God grant it to us all. Amen.