



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

“Clothed, Unclothed, and Clothed Upon”

2 Corinthians 5:1-5

TRANSCRIPT

You do that very well, Mark. I think you've done that before. [Laughter] We're going to read this morning, in addition to the passage from 2 Corinthians, two or three verses or three or four verses from 1 Corinthians 15. And so before we turn to 2 Corinthians 5:1 through 5, I want to ask you to turn to 1 Corinthians 15 in verse 12, and then we'll read verse 50 through 54 there, and turn finally to 2 Corinthians 5. But in verse 12 of 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle writes,

"Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

Now, the important little phrase is the phrase “among you.” It's probably somewhat inconceivable for us to think of individuals in one of all Paul's churches, so to speak, who did not believe in the bodily resurrection. But in the light of current beliefs among Romans and Greeks and even among Gnostics as well, it would not be surprising at all that some should have doubts about the bodily resurrection. And evidently in Corinth they did.

Now, in verse 50 through 54 the apostle, after a lengthy discussion of this matter of resurrection, writes,

“Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,” (Now, what he means by that is we shall not all die but we shall all be changed physically having a resurrection body.) “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we (this is we living) shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, ‘DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory.’”

I’m going to ask you to turn over now to second Corinthians 5, and we’ll read for our Scripture reading verse 1 through verse 5, which is the topic for the exposition today. Paul writes in verse 1,

“For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,” (Now, that is an expression that means clothed upon with our dwelling from heaven) “inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed upon (The apostle adds to the verb that means to clothe the preposition “upon”. It’s not translated in the New American standard Bible, but nevertheless the emphasis lies there in

the original text.) “in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. We turn now to the Lord in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And we give Thee thanks for all of the blessings that are ours by virtue of what he has accomplished, not least of which is the hope of the resurrection of the body. And we thank Thee for the apostle's words concerning this topic. We thank Thee that in these chapters that from which we have just read the apostle lays stress upon the fact that our hope is not simply a hope of the living again or the living eternally of the soul and spirit but of the resurrection of the body, and, furthermore, that we have this hope of a resurrected body as an eternal hope.

And we thank Thee for the fullness and wholeness of our salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. And how wonderful it is to realize that this all rests upon the accomplished work which the Savior has done in giving himself for sinners on Calvary’s cross. We're grateful for the security of the hope, for the assurance that it brings to us. And we thank Thee, Lord, not only has Thou hast spoken these things in the words in which there can be no lying, Thou hast also given us the presence of the Holy Spirit as a pledge, as an earnest of the inheritance that is ours in Christ.

And we say again, Lord, how blessed we are by marvelous grace that Thou has come in our unwillingness, made us willing, brought us by effectual grace to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal, settled our eternal destiny in the blood that was shed. And now we have nothing but the optimistic hope of the future before us.

In the experiences of life as in the experiences that the apostle underwent, we're thankful for the significance of the hope that we have in Christ, and we know that as the

apostle has suggested that that which is mortal shall be swallowed up in life, that that which is corruptible shall find victory through that which Christ has done. We thank Thee, too, Lord for all of the other blessings of the word of God. And we pray for our country. Bless our President and others with him in the government and in the local governments as well. We pray, Lord, for the whole church of Jesus Christ, for all and for every individual who by grace has been brought to know Christ. We pray for them. May today be a day of edification and growth in the knowledge of him.

And, Father, we also pray for those outside of him. May there continue to be the work of the Holy Spirit in gathering the elect of our Lord into the body. We thank Thee for the promises of the word of God that other sheep our Lord has which are not in the fold and we can look forward the continuation of this work of gathering the lost into the body of Christ until our Lord comes.

We thank Thee for the local churches of this land and for the local churches over the face of this globe, and we pray for them and all of them that the Lord Jesus Christ and the word of God has lifted up. May there be today significant blessing from Thee. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt glorify the name of our Triune God through the preaching of the inspired word of God. We pray for those whose names are listed in our calendar of certain with their problems and trials. We bring them to Thee. And those who minister to them, we pray for them as well. And for those in our audience who are friends and who have friends or family members who have significant trials, Lord, minister to them, supply the needs that exist, encourage them in the things of the Lord. Be with us now as we sing, as we listen to the word of God.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] As many of you know and as others of you may be easily able to surmise, I have been preaching the word of God for 40 years or so now, but I want you to know that this morning I had a new experience. I have a lot of people who criticize

my sermons. They write me. They approach me personally, and they tell me the things that they think are wrong with my messages. And I want you to know that I learn from them because occasionally I've either overemphasized something, neglected something, or on one occasion in 1938 or so, I was wrong [laughter].

But this morning I had someone criticize my message before I preached it. That's the first time I've had anyone criticize my message before I had even given it. But Hilary Sullivan, who is in our tape ministry and is a marvelous worker and prepares the tapes for the broadcast came in before I preached the message this morning and criticized it. Now, you have to understand Hilary, he is a school teacher, and therefore, he's very careful about the phraseology of things. And he came in and he said, “I'm sorry, but I have to utter a word of criticism. Your title this morning, it ends with a preposition. And of course he's right. And I told him while I didn't exactly look at it that way, I did try to change it.

Because, you see, the apostle uses the term that means something like to put on an overcoat over other clothes. Clothed Upon. And I did see someone who suggested that we should render this something like, Further Clothing, but that didn't seem to be a very good title, Clothed, Unclothed, and Further Clothing, because you might wonder what in the world that was. So with apologies to Hilary and other grammatical experts and whose consciences make it difficult for them to say something like this, Clothed Upon.

Now, I only ask your indulgence and, in spite of the wording of the sermon, perhaps the truth that is found in Paul's words will come through in some way. So “Clothed, Unclothed, or Clothed Upon.”

This passage touches some very interesting topics. For example, the doctrine of the intermediate state; that is, the period of existence between physical death and the bodily resurrection. Now, this is a doctrine taught very plainly in the word of God. The voice of reason itself would stand behind it. History and intuition support that, logic

would support it, the moral order of things would support the necessary existence of an intermediate state. Even Socrates suggests something in connection with it when he says, “Bury me if you can catch me.”

Or if death ends all, to speak of the moral order of things, then God would receive, as someone has said, a triple wound: a wound to his wisdom in doing the marvelous things he has done in the creation and in the governing of the ages that have transpired and then to have everything end without an intermediate state; it would be a wound to his goodness; and a wound also to his justice.

Remember as early as Genesis Abraham says that God does all things right. So when we think of the intermediate state then, we have that which is supported by the voice of reason, but that can never be fully convincing to a man outside of Christ. So from the standpoint of Christians, it's the voice of divine revelation that is convincing for us. This doctrine is a doctrine that we find in the word of God. And in this passage, the apostle says things that touch it.

There is another doctrine that one thing thinks about when one looks at 2 Corinthians 5, and it's the supposed doctrine of an intermediate body. It is the conviction of some Bible teachers that after an individual dies, if he is a believing individual, until the resurrection of the body which takes place when Christ comes, he receives an intermediate body so that we have our present body and then -- which is perishing, and then if we should die before the Lord returns in the interval we should be given an intermediate body, finally receiving the body or resurrection body like unto our Lord's own glorious body at our Lord's coming.

Now, Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer, at Dallas Seminary, used to teach that, that there was an intermediate body. He used to say with some question about it, but he said, I think that Paul suggests we have an intermediate body here. He's not the only man who thinks like this. Charles Hodge suggested that in his own teaching concerning the topic. That question arises here. We won't deal with it this morning because I don't think

there's sufficient evidence for it -- to -- for us to bother in an exposition such as this. The other question that comes before us is the question of the immortality of the soul.

Now, we do not doubt at all that the soul and spirit of a man are eternal. But the Greeks and the Romans believed essentially in the immortality of the soul and the perishability and, in fact, the perishing of the body. The Greeks and the Romans believed that the body was like a tomb, and it was a thing to be desired for an individual to die physically because when he died physically, his soul and spirit -- they spoke only of soul -- his soul was released from the bondage of the corrupt body.

Plotinus could say he was ashamed he had a body. Epictetus said of himself, “Thou art a poor soul burdened with a corpse.” Seneca wrote, “I am a higher being and born for higher things than to be the slave of my body which I look upon only as a shackle put upon my freedom, and so detestable a habitation dwells the free soul.”

Now, Jewish thought sometimes had the idea, but generally Jewish thought believed in man as a holistic being and, therefore, body, soul, and spirit were inseparable. So it's not surprising, in one sense, that Paul affirms what he affirms, but, nevertheless, we look at it as divine Revelation. The apostle is not looking for a Nirvana with a peace of extinction. He's not looking for the absorption in the divine that some of the cults teach from the Eastern cults. He's not looking for the freedom of a disembodied spirit. The apostle, as Christians have believed, is waiting for the resurrection of the body.

The Christian church has always affirmed the doctrine of the resurrection of the body; that is, we shall have a physical body like unto our Lord's physical body. It will not be made out of the same material as this body. It will be a spiritual body. But nevertheless the Christian church has always believed in a physical resurrection, the resurrection of the body.

So these are some of the questions that we touch upon in this particular place. Now, Paul's interest in the subject relates to his defense of his ministry; that is, its nature, its sufferings, and its goals. He's been talking about this since chapter 2 in verse 12. He's

been talking about his ministry giving an apology for it, an explanation of various things that touch it. He's just in the immediately preceding context spoken about the afflictions that have troubled him and also, in the last few verses of the chapter, in verse 16 through verse 18, he stated, We do not lose heart, though our outer man is decaying our inner man is being renewed day-by-day. Our affliction is momentary and light. It's producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all of comparison that one might seek to bring to it. While, he says, we look not at the things which are seen but the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

So the apostle, against that background, now raises the question of the hope of the resurrection. Now, we must ask ourselves the question immediate in what -- for what is the reason or what is the reason that the apostle does raise this question of the hope of the resurrection? Well, if you'll reflect for just a moment and think about what he's been talking about, his sufferings, his trials, the fact in one place where he says that for him every day is a day of dying -- notice, for example, in verse 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. Verse 11 of the preceding chapter, For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So you can understand the apostle naturally tends to thinking about what is going to happen if this death, which is his experience every day almost, does finally come to him.

Now, the apostle begins then the 5th chapter with a little “for.” One commentator - - one preacher has said, Paul is always argumentative. That is, he always gives reasons for the things that he talks about, and I guess that's one reason I like Paul because I do like reasons for my things -- for the things that I am to believe. He's not like some religious people who are deliriously happy, but if you ask them why they really cannot tell you why. Or if they tell you why, they give an irrational answer, one that does not

really follow. They can sing and shout and dance, but they can give no reason for their excitement. They see an enthusiastic crowd, and they catch the infection and their religion is purely emotional. I'm not going to condemn the emotional. But it's obvious that if the mind is not in control of things, then one is not really looking at things from the Christian standpoint, for in Christianity it is the mind that is the controlling factor and the things that the mind comes to see through the enlightenment of the spirit are worked out in that man through his will and through his emotions.

So Paul is an individual who is an argumentative individual, argumentative in the nice sense that his thought is a rational thought, one thought flowing after the other. And that's why he uses terms like because and for, on this account, therefore, wherefore, et cetera. These are the keys to Pauline thought. We often sing songs that disturb me. And one of them is a very popular song which we sing, tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the circumcised Philistines of other congregations hear, but “He Lives.” He lives. He lives. Christ Jesus us lives today.” Marvelous sentiment. You asked me why I know he lives? So I'm looking for a good reason why he lives. And what do I hear? He lives within my heart. That's a declaration. That doesn't tell me why. It just states it. It assumes it. In other words, it begs the question and, surprisingly, Christians like that. I don't like it. Whenever we get to that part of he lives, I just -- oh, why doesn't everybody see this doesn't follow? You ask me why I know he lives? He lives within my heart. But why does he live within your heart? How do you know he lives within your heart? I think Paul would have given us some good reasons at that point, and there are good reasons ultimately.

But nevertheless Paul is a man who does like rationale discourse. So he begins the first verse for. So we have to ask the question. Paul, why did you say for? Well, his answer, I think would be something like this. I've been talking to you about afflictions. I've been telling it you how they lead to the eternal weight of glory. The dissolution of the body, the dismantling of this tent does not bring annihilation, it brings translation to

glory. And that's why I look at the things that are not seen, not the things that are seen, for we know that if our earthly tent of our house is -- that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down we have a building from God. That's why the apostle can experience those things that he's experiencing, why he can look to the things that are invisible rather than the things that are visible, and pass through all of these experiences with confidence and assurance, because even if I lose my life in the midst of them, I know I have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. So when that little word “for” that gives me a clue as to what Paul is really concerned about.

Arthur Way, who was a classical scholar and translated the Pauline epistles in Hebrews, entitles this chapter, “The Hymn of the Home Eternal.” I like that, The Hymn of the Home Eternal. So Paul will talk about that.

Now, we mentioned the Greek and Gnostic thoughts, which are so contrary to the apostle’s as they concern the death of the body. The body is a tomb; to die is to have that which is unpleasant and a handicap to us stripped away so that the soul is naked. This is what Plato desired. This is what Philo desired. This is what the Greeks and Romans generally desired, the body placed in the tomb was a liberating thing for them, not to Paul.

Now he says for. I can do what I'm doing for we know. Now, I think that's interesting, too. The apostle says we know. How did he know it? Not by the Ouija board, not by a deck of cards, not by some word that Madam Blavatsky has spoken. He knew it by divine revelation. That’s how he knew it. As a matter of fact, in Paul’s case, he knew it not simply by divine revelation, but he knew it also by his own experience. In the 12th chapter, he will tell us that he has been caught up to the third heaven and there he has seen things that it is not lawful for him to even mention. So the apostle then can say, we know in a special sense that even you and I cannot know. But if we say know based upon the divine revelation as taught us by the Holy Spirit, we have the same

assurance and the same certainty that the apostle had, even though he had an experience that is beyond ours. So he knows.

We live in the day in which there's a whole lot of confusion even in, quote, “Evangelicalism,” unquote. Evangelicalism is a position claimed by some to whom the term doesn't really belong but we are speaking generally about people who at least make a profession of belief in our Lord Jesus Christ and the work that he accomplished on Calvary's cross. But one of the saddest things that has happened today is as you know as well as I evangelicalism has become the society of the entertained, what we know have in evangelicalism is primarily entertainment. And the better we entertain, the more people we have interested in the things of the lord, so called.

In fact, I think that evangelicals today give me the impression of being very much like the insects and the bugs in my garden, and I have a generous share of them, I want you to know. The insects and the bugs are having a marvelous time in the midst of the flowers, and they are just having a wonderful time biting on my flowers and making holes in the leaves and things like that. But it's not going to be long before the insects are gone. And evangelicalism, unfortunately, is spending its time being entertained rather than coming to know the truth of God by which they may be built up in the things that really count.

Paul says we know through the divine word. The chances are that you have some evangelical friends who could not tell you at all why we can be sure that we have, as Paul says here in the first verse, a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

Now, I want you to, notice because it bears on what we're going to say that the apostle says for we know that if the earthly tent, which is our house, is torn down... Now, when he says if, he introduces some uncertainty. We have to realize that in the original text that is plainly found. There is some uncertainty. But you ask the question,

Uncertainty over what? Uncertainty over the fact of the resurrection? No, not uncertainty over the fact of the resurrection, but uncertainty over how the resurrection will take place.

Now, some have suggested that the apostle here is really changing his eschatological viewpoint; that is, his viewpoint concerning prophecy. In I Thessalonians chapter 4, and 1 Corinthians chapter 15, the apostle, it is said, taught or seemed to teach that he was going to be alive when the Lord comes, whereas here he's suggesting that he is going to die. And so his eschatological viewpoint has changed. The one who thought he was going to live to the coming of the Lord now has serious questions about it. In fact, one of the most respected New Testament commentators in our day has said that what this represents here is a spasm of unbelief in the apostle. I don't really think that that is true.

You have to remember that when the apostle wrote to the Thessalonians and talked about the fact of the coming of the lord and the resurrection, he was talking about people who had doubts over those who had already died. So he adjusted his doctrine to that fact in order to encourage them that those who had died would not miss out on the resurrection. And he talked about those who had died, and then we who are living in. And in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 he presents the two alternatives of those who are going to die who will perish and then those who are not going to perish but shall experience the resurrection in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.

So the apostle always taught the two alternatives, but the emphasis in each context is related to the local situation that exists. So here when the apostle says if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, he is not changing his viewpoint, he's just suggesting that it's possible he may experience the resurrection in a different way from the way in which some others will. Change of life expectancy, perhaps. After all, Paul has just been talking about these sufferings and that every day he faces death. So he realizes that it's very possible that he will not live to the coming of the Lord and experience the rapture. But it's possible that he will die. And so that's why he says, for

we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. Isn't it striking and isn't it also fitting that he should speak of the body to come as a building of God. The present body he likens to a tent. The building from God is the permanent resurrected body. And the difference between a tent and an edifice is known to all of us.

Go out camping like the career class as gone this weekend. And put up your little tent. And if a Texas windstorm arrives, you may wake up in the morning with the stars or the sun looking down upon you. Your tent pegs and your tent are gone. The tent is an article which possesses the quality of fragile impermanence has someone has said. That's what our present body is. It's our body characterized by fragile impermanence. It's a tent. Don't think of it as anything other than that. And even ladies, when you stand before the mirror and you fix it all up, it's still just a fragile impermanent thing. And men, you who do it secretly, it's for you too. So Paul says our tent may be dismantled. That's the meaning of this particular word in this spot, no doubt, which if the earthly tent, which is our house, is dismantled, we have a building, an edifice, something that is permanent. This word, as well as others, suggests permanence as over against the tent.

Now, that's the Paul's conviction of the resurrection hope, the certainty of it. But in verses 2 through 4, he speaks of the suitability of the resurrection hope. And, again, he begins with a for, for indeed that confirms Paul's concern for things unseen and eternal. He knew he had a heavenly dwelling, and he longed to enter into it. For indeed this house we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling from heaven. We groan. What did Paul mean by that? Did he mean that he was unhappy? No. No. As a matter of fact, the apostle was perfectly happy with what he was doing even when he was suffering as he was suffering. But he knew, as we all know who study the Bible, that the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus is a cosmic work. That is, it not only touches us, it touches this whole creation about us.

And Paul writes of that in Romans 8 when he speaks about the whole creation groaning and travailing together in pain until now. And we too, for we wait for the adoption, the redemption of our bodies so all of us should have, if we are in harmony with the word of God, a longing to have this body put off and our eternal spiritual body, that with which our spirit and souls are identified and related. So we groan. The groaning is positive. The apostle is looking forward to deliverance from the present situation after his work is done. So he says for indeed in this house we groan longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling from heaven.

Now, Paul changes his metaphor here, of course. He has talked about a tent and then an edifice, and now he talks about putting on clothes and putting on clothes over clothes, clothed upon. So this is a change of metaphor, and the apostle changes his metaphors every now and then. What he’s thinking about is an outer cloak to absorb and transfigure the inner cloak. He says, we long to be clothed upon with our dwelling from heaven.

Now, this particular word is related to another word that was used to describe an outer garment. Do you remember when Peter in John chapter 21 went fishing in the disappointment of failure to understand the resurrection, and they were out on the boat and the Lord Jesus called from the shore in the mists of the early morning. And John, who seemed to sense the Lord's presence a bit more than Peter said, It's the Lord, and Peter -- impulsive Peter -- the text says he was naked; that is, he had the inner garment but what he did was to pick up his outer garment, which he had taken off, throw it over that inner garment, dive into the water, and he swam to shore.

Now, that outer garment is built on this same root as this verb here, “to clothe upon.” So what he did was to put something over his garment, like you go out in January or February in Dallas and over your suit coat you put on an overcoat. So Paul is talking about an outer cloak to absorb and transfigure the inner. He wants the resurrection body,

the body that is like unto our Lord's own glorious body, and he would put that on over his other garment.

To put it in simple terms, he wants to be an Elijah, and he doesn't want to be a Moses. Moses was led up on the top of the mountain, and there he died. No one knows where he's buried, but he died. Elijah was called up to heaven. So Paul wants to be an Elijah and not a Moses so that there will be no crying, no tears, no pain, no sorrow, no death, no calling for the preacher to conduct the funeral service, no tombstone, no epitaph to say here lies Paul the apostle after his glorious triumphant life. As we sing often, Oh, joy, Oh, delight, should we go without dying. And we can all say hallelujah to that. That would be marvelous if that happened.

The apostle is a person who is afflicted with what someone has called world strangeness. And so he lives here, but he's not really happy here ultimately. To him, to live is Christ, but to die is gain. But he wants to die in a certain way. He doesn't want to be naked as he says in the following verse, inasmuch as we having put it on shall not be found naked. Now, understand, this does not mean without any clothes on. This means naked in the sense in which the context puts the matter. He wants to avoid the disembodied state. He doesn't want to be a spirit or soul without a body. The intermediate state is just such a state. Those who have died as Christians and have gone on from our presence now are with the Lord but they don't have their bodies yet. To use Paul's language, they are naked, and Paul doesn't really desire that. There's something better. Of course, that's a great blessing, to enter into the presence of the Lord. What can be better, in one sense -- and it's the greatest thing that a dying person can ever have, to enter directly into the presence of the Lord and enjoy the bliss of his presence. But there is something still better and that is to have a resurrection body for we have been created with body, soul, and spirit, and these three make up a holistic man, and we're not whole until we have our spiritual bodies, also.

So he doesn't want to be naked. Jews have a horror of that, and that -- in that sense, the apostle's thought should be understood. The expectation is stated in verse 4, for indeed while we're in this tent we groan being burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed upon in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Clothed upon. So now you can see the question with Paul is on the one hand dying and living in a disembodied state for a time until the coming of Christ. 1 Corinthians 15 makes it very plain that the resurrection takes place when our Lord comes. So the apostle, on one hand, has the option -- or shall I put it this way -- the alternative. The alternative is dying and living in the disembodied state until the coming of our Lord or surviving until the coming of our Lord, the *parousia*. And the apostle has simply expressed his viewpoint that he wants to survive to the *parousia* if that should be within the will of God in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. That's his hope, mortal swallowed up by life. The change. No fear nor unmanly monkish wish to die characterizes the apostle, but he looks forward to the future in that sense.

I think James Denny has expressed this so beautifully. I am going to take the liberty of reading a paragraph from his exposition. He says, “Nothing could be less like the apostle than a monkish, unmanly wish to die. He exalted in his calling. It was a joy to him above all joys to speak to men of the love of God in Jesus Christ, but nothing on the other hand could be less like him than to lose sight of the future in the present and to forget, among the service of men, the glory which is to be revealed. He stood between two worlds. He felt the whole attraction of both. In the earnest of the spirit, he knew he had an inheritance there as well as here. It is his consciousness of the dimension of life that makes him so immensely interesting.”

And then Professor Denny says, “He never wrote a dull word.” You know, I believe that. Professor Denny is right. He never wrote a dull word. Do you know why so many of the words of Paul appear to be dull? Because we don't yet know Paul as we ought to. He never wrote a dull word. His soul was stirred incessantly from impulses

from earth and from heaven swept by breezes from the dark and troubled sea of men's life, touched by inspirations for the radiant heights where Christ dwelled. We do not need to be afraid of the reproach of other worldliness if we seek to live in this same spirit. The reproach is as false as it is threadbare. It would be an incalculable gain if we could recover the primitive hope in something like its primitive strength. It would not make us false to our duties in the world, but it would give us the victory over the world. That, Paul had. He had it because he enjoyed his life of serving Christ. Why, to him, to live is Christ. But he never forgot that to die was gain. And, furthermore, there are two ways by which he might enter the presence of the Lord, one was to die physically with the experience of it, the other was to be caught up in the coming of the Lord and raptured into his presence. He preferred the latter.

Now, the final verse, verse 5, gives us the warranty of the resurrection hope. Paul says, Now he who has prepared us for this very purpose is God who gave us the spirit as a pledge. Now, of course, you can see from this, this is no wishful thinking on Paul's part about which he is talking. He's not moved by paralysis of fear on the one hand, nor is he just dreaming on the other hand. This is something that is grounded in the word of God and in the work of God. And furthermore, since it is God's work, it shall be done, for, remember, God is sovereign. That means all of his purposes, everything that he attempts to do -- shall I put it this way, everything he intends to do, he accomplishes. In other words, a sovereign God is indeed independent of men and all of his purposes are accomplished.

When you finally come to the place that you realize that, then you will have a high view of the Lord God in heaven. So he says, Now, he who prepared us for this very purpose is God who gave us the Spirit as a pledge. So it's God's work. It will be done. No failure is possible. No frustration of God is possible. And, further, look at that word, amazing. He has given to us the spirit as a pledge.

Now, that was a word that meant something like down payment. When individuals bought property and earnest money was given -- sometimes in the ancient times they just dug up a piece of the ground itself and handed it to the person, so you could take it home in your pocket if you wanted to. And that was earnest money. But if it were a piece-- if it were a check or if it were gold, that would be earnest money.

Now, when you go downtown and you buy something, and you sign a contract saying you are going to pay a certain amount of money, you put a down payment down. Do you know what that means? That means not simply that you got it, but it means also you've become a debtor. That is, you've got it, possession, but you don't have it in another way. You're in debt now.

Isn't it marvelous that God says, I'm a debtor now? I've given you the pledge. I've given you the first installment. The first installment is the Holy Spirit who has come to indwell the saints and be there permanently. That's the pledge. That's the first installment of all the spiritual blessings that we have. God's our debtor. Isn't that amazing? He's put himself in our debt, affirming that he will do this for us. The Holy Spirit is the pledge, the first installment. He's the assurance that many sons shall find their way into glory and, further, he's the sign of a Christian. He that hath not spirit of Christ doesn't belong to him. Everyone who belongs to him has the Holy Spirit. May I ask you a question? Do you have the Holy Spirit? Is he a present possession of yours? Is there the conviction within your heart wrought by the Holy Spirit that you belong to him, that he's present, and therefore you have the eternal life promised in him?

I'll tell you, Paul never wrote a dull word. That's true. He never wrote a single dull word. That, surely, is not one, the assurance that many sons shall come to glory.

Well, modern theologians and our contemporary New Testament scholars -- I keep reading them constantly. I like to know what some of my friends and some of my enemies are saying. They like to say Paul has changed his views of his life expectancy. That's possible. He may have become convinced that the experiences are such and he's

growing old. I'm not sure -- as sure -- not nearly as hopeful that I will attain to the raptures I was when I was twenty-five. That's natural. The experiences of life do change our life's expectancy.

But so far as his theological doctrine, there is no evidence at all that he changed his eschatology. Those two alternatives were always before the apostle. He always set them forth. And all he does here is simply reveal his preference, his preference is the rapture, being called up in the presence of the Lord and not his physical death. Paul's preference is mine as well. And I imagine it's the preference of every believing person.

If you're here today and you've never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you don't have these alternatives because death for you means being held for judgment at the great white throne judgment. But having come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, these two alternatives are before us. To die, we enter into the presence of our Lord. Even though we may be in the disembodied state, we await the resurrection body to be given us at our Lord's coming and perhaps our words around the presence of the Lord may be like those martyrs in the Book of Revelation, how long, O Lord? I'm sure it will happen very quickly from the standpoint of time in heaven.

For some of us it may be that we shall meet the Lord in the air and not pass through the experience of physical death. I hope all of us have that experience: These alternatives belong to believers. So if you're here today and you've never believed in Christ, let me remind you of the gospel that Christ came, gave himself for sinners, offered the atoning sacrifice sufficient for your sins. And if, by the grace of God, you have come to understand that you are a sinner before God and in need of divine redemption, if you have come to understand that and to understand that Christ has died for sinners, you may, by God's efficacious grace, come to rest yourself upon him and his saving work for time and for eternity and have the assurance of the possession of everlasting life and the presence of the Holy Spirit as the pledge and assurance of the life that is life indeed.

“Clothed, Unclothed and Clothed Upon” by S. Lewis Johnson
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Come to Christ, believe in him, trust in him, and receive the gift, free gift apart from works of eternal life, and have the Pauline hope of a certain future, resurrection body and life with the Lord unto the ages of the ages. May God, in his grace, touch your heart bringing conviction, regeneration, and faith and eternal life. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how marvelous are these words which have come to us by divine revelation. We thank thee for the apostle. We thank Thee how much he reveals of his inner life, his concerns, the things that moved him as he gave himself so wholeheartedly to proclaiming his Lord. We're thankful, and we praise Thee that we are the recipients of the testimony of a man made great by our sovereign God. Lord, if there should be some in this audience who have never believed in Christ, give them no rest or peace until they rest in him.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.