



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Psalm 16:1-11

“Ancient Thoughts on Death and Afterward”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for this morning is Psalm 16 and we're going to read verse 1 through verse 11, or the entire Psalm. I'm reading from the New International Version with no particular reason involved except that in one or two places the text I think is a bit more accurate than some of the other translations, and so we're using this particular text. Psalm 16 and verse 1,

“Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing." As for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight. The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods. I will not pour out their libations of blood or take up their names on my lips. LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the LORD, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy

One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

I think when you read this passage you’ll realize that the apostles, both Paul and Peter, were not in error when they traced this particular part of the Psalm, particularly but this Psalm to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It’s obvious that it’s not about David simply because he says, “Nor will you let your holy one see decay.” The only one who has not seen decay is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is a Psalm that ultimately has to do with him. The apostles, both Peter in Acts chapter 2 and Paul in Acts chapter 13 use it and use it in reference to our Lord. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the word of God. We thank Thee for these marvelous passages from holy Scripture, so impressive in their inspiration that down through the centuries have encouraged the saints of God, have strengthened them, have built them up in their faith and have given them the hope to look into the future with confidence. We thank Thee and praise Thee for all that is stated here concerning the one who experienced no decay, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that the words that we say, the hymns that we sing, the thoughts that we have may exalt him who alone should be ultimately and perfectly exalted.

We pray for this country. We ask thy blessing upon the United States. We pray that Thou would give our President wisdom and guidance and those who are associated with him in the government. We pray for wisdom for them. They surely need it, and we pray, Lord, that Thou will give it to them. We remember we’ve been challenged and called by the word of God to pray for the state, and we do that.

We pray for the whole church of Jesus Christ. We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon all of the bodies and assemblies of people in which the Lord Jesus is recognized as the head, the head of

the church, the Savior of the souls of men. We pray for the church that Thou will give wisdom and guidance to her, that Thou will also, by Thy grace, make it possible for the word of God to be ministered in the assemblies of the saints. That the word of God may be given first place, and we may remember that we do meet around the word of God to be instructed and counseled by Thee through the Holy Spirit.

We thank Thee for this assembly. We pray Thy blessing upon its elders and its deacons, and its members and the friends who visit. We ask, Lord, that Thou will so undertake that our Savior may be exalted here always until our Lord comes.

We thank Thee for the experiences of life. We know, Lord, that we are here for a limited time upon this earth, all of us, and we pray, particularly, for those who have gone on in years and need the physical sustaining of our great God in heaven, and so we pray for the sick. We pray for those who are troubled by various problems of life, and we ask that Thou wilt encourage them, that Thou wilt strengthen them, that Thou wilt by Thy presence uphold them, and as we all together look forward to the future, the coming of our Lord, or our passing into his presence through death that we may do so in harmony with the promises of the word of God and the marvelous sustaining power of the Holy Spirit.

We pray Thy blessing upon our meeting. May our Savior be exalted in it and as we listen to the word of God. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for this morning is “Ancient Thoughts on Death and Afterwards.” In our society death is often the unmentionable. I notice that people even have a difficulty saying that a person died. She passed away, or he passed away. And in fact in many cases the “away” is eliminated. “He passed.” Now I would think perhaps that’s a bridge game. He passed, [Laughter] but no, it means he passed. He passed evidently through our society and it’s a short form for pass away, or for the fact that she or he died. I don't find anything wrong with the word

died. Read the 5th chapter of Genesis. “And he died.” “And he died.” “And he died.” “And he died.” “And he died.” “And he died.” And there is more of it than just that to remind us of the fact that death is something that each of us faces, unless we are the generation alive when our Lord returns. To the youth death is just a distant rumor. We understand that. I remember in my youth, I didn't think much about death, but as I grew older, I thought more about death. And to tell you the truth, I think more about death now. “It's appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment.” The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has said.

Now we do have people around like George Burns. George lived a long time. He lived to be a hundred years old. He said, “I don't worry about getting old. I'm old already.” [Laughter] “Only young people worry about getting old. When I was sixty-five I had cupid's eczema. I looked up cupid's eczema. I couldn't find that in the dictionary, but at any rate I get the point. It's a child's disease, cupid's eczema. You know every child has the appearance of being beautiful, lovely. Who can look upon a baby without smiling, of course? So he said, “I don't believe in dying. It's been done. I'm working on a new exit. Besides, I can't die now - I'm booked.” I can understand that. Burns was a great comedian. But we have been pointed to the significance of death.

Value Jet, Value Jet, and we are reminded because of the death of the one hundred people or so who died, that death is a reality, and that death is not simply for old people. That death was for young as well. All of us face that. Those hundred people got on that plane, very few of them probably thought of death. I do every time I get on the plane. I think of death, [Laughter] but I think I'm different. At any rate, we have death constantly before us.

Luther spoke about death as looming large in the affairs of men and as terrifying because our foolish and faint hearted nature has etched its image too vividly into itself and constantly fixes its gaze on it. He says, “Furthermore the devil presses men to think about death and to think about death in the light of the wrath of God so that we are disturbed as we think about the wrath

of God, and then think about death. In fact he tells us in one of his comments concerning this that one of the ways that the devil disturbs us and gets us really down is to get us to thinking about our election. Are we elect or not? He goes on to say, “When man is assailed by thoughts regarding his election, he is being assailed by hell, as the psalms lament so much. The person who overcomes temptation has vanquished sin, hell, and death all in one.”

Well I don't have those worries because the Scriptures tell me that the man who believes in Jesus Christ is an elected man. And so I know I'm elected. He cannot disturb me by talks about election, but he disturbed Luther. Luther's views about the death of Christ were deficient in some ways, and perhaps that had something to do with his disturbance or maybe the age in which he lived. At any rate, he gave the advice, “Don't paint the devil over your door.” In other words, let's think about some other things, what Christ has done in vanquishing sin, death and hell.”

The message that I'm going to give you is based, or originated I perhaps should say, in two things. I've been writing a little paper on the intermediate stage, or the intermediate state. What is the intermediate state? Well the intermediate state is that period of time between our death and our bodily resurrection. That's the intermediate state. Now, of course for some people who are caught up to meet the Lord in the air and are resurrection at that time, given a new body, they won't know the experience of the intermediate state, but in the meantime, all who have died previously know the experience of the intermediate state, countless millions of believers in Christ are in the intermediate state at the present time theologically. So, that was one thing that made me think about “Ancient Thoughts on Death and Afterwards.” I'm confining myself to the Old Testament. The New Testament is filled, more so even than the Old with details, but I'm just confining myself to the Old Testament.

And the second thing that made me think about this is perhaps something that would be helpful to me, and to others, is, I read a sermon by Martin Luther called, “Preparing to Die” about

three months ago. I cannot get that sermon out of my mind. It was a very, very, I would say, inspiring sermon in so many ways, and then a way in which one may mark the difference between Luther’s 16th century days and to our days is to read the things over which he was concerned. One of the great things over which he was concerned was the sacraments and the place that they had in the life of the believers at that time.

We do not appreciate the importance of the signs and symbols that God has given us of our faith to strengthen us, baptism and the Lord’s Supper particularly. There are Christians who never attend the Lord’s Supper. Our Lord has said/ask that we remember him in this way. They never remember him and yet they do not realize, do not think, that perhaps they are being disobedient to our Lord’s own words. If he were here he would say, “In this way remember me.” There are some who have been Christians for a long time and have never been baptized. Isn’t that interesting? Our Lord said, sending out the apostles to go out and baptize. The sacraments should mean a great deal to those who are interested in our Lord’s words and seek to be obedient to him. Baptism, have you been baptized? The Lord’s Supper, do you regularly attend the Lord’s Supper and remember him in the bread and in the wine? There are things that point us back to the fundamental facts of the Christian faith. They are reflective of our own Christian experience and status at the present time. Well that paper on intermediate state and Luther’s sermon, “Preparing to Die” made me think about this more and more.

A few weeks ago, about two weeks ago I was in Boston at the meeting of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, a group of a bit over a hundred men who are very much concerned about the state of the church. Jim Boyce is the organizing head of the movement and a number of well known men that you would know about from our theological seminaries and from our churches met there right by the side of Harvard’s campus and discussed for three days the status of the evangelical church. While I was there Alistair Begg pastor of the Parkside Church of Cleveland gave one of the messages and his was a biblical sermon really.

But he gave an instance of something that happened to him that very morning. That morning he had awakened, he was to speak during the day, and he said, “I went out this morning on the streets around Harvard Square, and I was walking along, and finally I thought I would go into a restaurant/bar and have something to eat.” And he said, “I walked in, and it was filled with you people dressed in all kinds of attire in that part of the world, around a college campus. Every kind of attire that a young person could be dressed in, they were there,” and he said, “I walked in, and I looked around. There were a few tables around, and one table had one young lady sitting at it with a Bible on it.” He said, “It was obvious it was a Bible, so I went over to the table and I asked permission to sit down with her.” And he said we began to talk, and he said something like, “You read the Bible.” And she said, “Yes, I read the Bible.” “You believe the Bible?” “Yes I believe the Bible.” “Are you a Christian?” She said, “Yes, I’m a Christian.” She said, “I’ve had a horrible life. I’ve committed all of the kinds of sins that you might expect a person to commit, but I’ve become a Christian.” And Alistair said, “I ask her, ‘How did you become a Christian?’” She said, “I got in by the narrow gate.” You remember the expression? “I got in by the narrow gate.” How typical. Tears came in my eyes. Think about a person, didn’t know much about Scriptures, opened up the Bible, saw our Lord’s statement, “Enter by the straight gate or the narrow gate,” and she entered.

We’re living in days, of course, when these things are extremely important, and I want to concentrate on what you might experience if you too enter by the narrow gate. We’ll confine our text today to the Old Testament. I’m going to look at four of them very quickly, but I hope that we’ll get the point that the Old Testament saints had some very wonderful ideas about the life beyond this life.

The first passage I want you to turn to is not Psalm 16, but Isaiah chapter 57 and verse 1 and verse 2. Here we read these words--now to understand this fully you must understand the context preceding. So perhaps I should read verse 9 of chapter 56.

“Come, all you beasts of the field, (Isaiah, the prophet writes) Come and devour , all you beasts of the forest! Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough.”

These are the leaders of Israel. These are the leaders of the religious body of our Lord. We have some of these dogs today. In fact quite a few of them, but we confine our text to the Old Testament.

“They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. ‘Come,’ each one cries, ‘let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer!’ (It’s the New International Version, but it’s right up to date isn’t it?) ‘Let us drink our fill of beer And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.’ (And then Isaiah writes,) The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.”

What a magnificent sentiment. What Isaiah is saying, that many people die to escape what’s going to come on the earth; in other words, they’re not going to have to face that. The wickedness of Israel and her shepherds leads the Lord God, in mercy, to take away the righteous who are to be spared from the coming judgment.

Now this is very, very much up to date also because--I say up to date, I mean 16th century. That’s up to date, 16th century, because one of the things that Luther particularly talked about so much was the wickedness of the German people, and furthermore he talked of the



terrible calamity that was sure to come upon them. John Calvin wrote about Luther and he spoke about the fact that Luther in the mercy of God had been taken away simply because God did not want him to face the problems that were to come. Shortly after Luther died, the German nation was involved in war, and aside from the wickedness of the sins which Luther had invade against so. Now Luther is in the presence of the Lord where even worse things have come to the state of Germany. So here when the prophet says, “Devout men are taken away, no one understands, the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil.” Sometimes when individuals die it’s out of the mercy of God. They’re not going to face what is going to come to pass on the earth.

So, the upright die, but notice how they die, that’s the point. In verse 1 we read, “Devout men are taken away, no one understands, the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.” In other words, the upright dies, but they die in peace. They rest in their tombs at peace. They enter into their peace. Now I know the Old Testament, we are often told by theologians, the Old Testament does not give us a big doctrine of the intermediate state, full discussion of all aspects of it. That’s true. In fact some of the finest of the biblical students have said, “In the Old Testament we have simply clear whisperings of the intermediate state,” but I want you to underline the word clear. The Old Testament is clear. There are whisperings. It is true. We don’t have the fullness of some of the New Testament passages. But they are clear whisperings, and this is clear for Isaiah says that those who walk uprightly, that is the believing ones, they enter into peace. They find rest as they lie in death. So the Old Testament makes the point that when a person dies as a believing man he enters into peace. He enters into rest. To say he rests in the Lord is not only biblical, but it’s Old Testament biblical too.

But now let’s turn to another passage, Psalm chapter 49, and we look at verse 14 and 15, Psalm 49 and verse 14 and verse 15. Listen to the Psalmist. “Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the

morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.” Now I notice over here just in the earlier part of the Psalm we have these words. “No man can redeem,” this is verse 7, “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.” That would be enough to allow me to preach on Mark chapter 10, verse 45 for a few minutes where, you remember, our Lord himself said, “The Son of Man did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Now here he says, “Like sheep (verse 14) they are destined for the grave, death will feed on them.” In other words, what the Psalmist sees, generally speaking is death is the shepherd, not a shepherd of Israel to shepherd people, but the shepherd is really death and death acts as a shepherd just going out among humanity gathering in individuals because they are his sheep. Their death sheep, that’s quite an interesting figure, isn’t it? Death is their shepherd. What’s your shepherd? Is it death or is it our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?

But at any rate, “Death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. But God.” Now in the Hebrew text at this point, this is very emphatic. He says, “El ale,” “But God.” This is so different. Death shepherds everywhere, “But God.” Ah, I think I see something about divine election here too, but I won’t say anything further about it. “But God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.” So in other words, the Psalmist looks out over humanity, and he sees death acting as a shepherd. We speak of death as the grim reaper, don’t we? He’s reaping in the field, but also shepherding his flock, and he’s gathering his flock into life after death “under punishment,” as Peter puts it in 2 Peter, chapter 2, but on the other hand, there is something else happening. The lot of man is death, but the lot of the Psalmist in verse 15 is “God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.” It’s a ransoming.

It's a “padah” which is the Hebrew word for ransom. Ransoming, and further, notice he says, “God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.”

Now if you just look at this for a moment I think you'll realize that what he is saying is he's talking about the fact that God is going to assume some people out of the mass where death is acting as the shepherd and bring them to himself. In fact one of Old Testament commentators likens the experience of the believer here to that which the Psalmist is professing in his firm conviction that “God will take him to himself,” just as he took Enoch and Elijah. In other words, he's stating his belief in assumption. Now if you'll look at this in the original text, when he says, “He will surely take me to himself,” he uses the Hebrew word, “laqach” which is the same word that is used in the Old Testament for Enoch being caught up to be with the Lord. “Enoch walked with God and he was not for the Lord took him.” It's the same term that is used to describe Elijah being caught up to heaven with his chariots of fire. That's what the Psalmist is talking about when he says, “God will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.” It is an assumption. The rapture is not a New Testament doctrine only. The rapture is an Old Testament doctrine, and the great men of the Old Testament hoped for just such an experience to be caught up to him. So, one of the commentators makes the point that the Psalmist speaks about this in an offhand way. He doesn't say now, he doesn't telegraph is punch so to speak and say, Now I want to say a few words about the rapture for those people who are hung up on the rapture.” Here is a word for them. No it's just an offhand kind of thing isn't it? In other words, the write doesn't dwell on the matter and why he doesn't may be difficult for some people to determine, but it must be that the hope of the life with God was much more real in the Old Testament than some people had thought. In other words, these little incidental expressions tell us a whole lot about what they really thought about the intermediate state and the fact of being with the Lord.

Now my third passage is Psalm chapter 16 and verse 10 and verse 11. This is very important because in the New Testament both the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul make reference to this particular passage as being very significant for them. I'll read it, Psalm 16 verse 10 and verse 11. “Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” You remember that Peter in the context of the resurrection of Christ in his great sermon at Pentecost refers to this text and says that David was a prophet and he spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ here. It's obvious to Peter and it should be obvious to us too because the language that the Psalmist speaks about the one of whom it speaks is something they cannot apply to a man. “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” Why every one of us sees decay. This cannot be a reference to David. This is a reference to someone who does not see decay. There is only one such person who does not see decay. That is our incorruptible Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And furthermore he also was the individual who always fixed his hope upon the Lord God.

So, “You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” Well what again he seems to be saying is that the same experience, the same privilege, that others have had are the privileges that he shall have. The Psalmist firmly believes, someone says, that he will be granted the same privilege accorded Enoch and Elijah. He's convinced that God will assume him to himself without suffering the pains of death and the sentiment is expressed incidentally in other places as well.

The last verse is marvelous. Yesterday I attended a wedding and the reception was to be held at the Dallas Country Club. I've known the family for many years, and I knew that if I went to that reception that I would be very, very pleased with what was out on the tables because at the Dallas Country Club they've had a little experience at that. They're very particular about those who are members, and they want to treat their members right, but I had to say no because I was

preaching today. So, as I thought about that I came home and looked at this text, “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.” It seems obvious to me that what he is talking about is being, may I put it this way, being fated at the right hand of God. This is the experience of the person who passes into this intermediate state of the presence of the Lord. It’s like being fated, far better than any wedding reception and the cake that’s there. This is much greater, eternal pleasures at your right hand. In fact this “fill” that is used here, “You will fill me with joy in your presence,” is the same word that is used in chapter 17 and verse 15, the same root, I should say, “When I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.” Fated at the right hand of God, what could be better than that? That’s good to me. I don’t know about you, but that is good to me, those eternal pleasures.

Now there is one final passage that we want to look at. It too is a great passage. Some like this even better than anything I’ve read so far. But all of them seem very good to me. It’s Psalm 73, and verse, well we’ll just read a few verses beginning at verse 15. Psalm 73 verse 15, the Psalmist is having great difficulty because as he says earlier when he looked around and saw the prosperity of the wicked and their arrogance he envied them so much. I know this has no application to you. You’ve never felt arrogance. You’ve never envied the wealth of the wealthy. You’ve never envied the fact that the figures in the bank statement are seven or eight figures and not your two or three or four or whatever it may be. You never have had this but the Psalmist really had this. You know he begins by saying “Surely God is good to Israel,” that’s his theme now; he’s learned this, “To those who are pure. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked,” and he could not, he said, understand what was happening. But now there is a Copernican turn, if I may put it that way, in his experience because he writes about the iniquitous and the evil and

what their life is like, and finally he says, “When I tried to understand this (verse 16) it was oppressive to me (17) till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.”

Now I called this a Copernican turn because that’s precisely what it is. He is envying the wealth and the riches and the life of the wealthy, but they’re wicked and now suddenly he says I understand. I’ve gone into the sanctuary. I’ve gone into the temple and God has spoken to me. And God has spoken to him in this marvelous way. Have you ever, most of you I know have, you’ve been in a cathedral haven't you? I went all over Europe that is Western Europe, looking at cathedrals. If it had anything to do with the Reformation I wanted to go in it and see what it was like because Calvin may have put his foot there, or Luther may have been in this one, or Swingley may have been in this one. We went to a number of them. My daughter was attending. She was about 15 at the time. Gracie was going with us, and she would sit in the back seat and we would go with great anticipation thinking about what had transpired in the marvelous cathedrals. And I remember one time finally Gracie said, “I hope I never see another cathedral as long as I live.” [Laughter] She was 15.

Well you look at a cathedral, of course, it’s dark. It’s gray on the outside, but then go in and some of those magnificent cathedrals in which you enter and after you’ve gone in and the sun shining through the windows that workman spent centuries doing and the biblical pictures, the biblical story, in the windows is marvelous to behold. Some of them are very true to life too. I was sitting at the table and the Covals reminded me this morning of one that I had seen but I had forgotten all about it because sometimes they are very true to life, and one of them when you go in you look not at the wonders of the word of God and the truth that way, but you look at the truth concerning man and you see the devil trying to pull men off to hell and there are lawyers. There are doctors. There are preachers and all the others resisting as they’re being dragged off to hell.

Well you see what happened to the Psalmist as he went in, into this particular doctrine, and finally the Lord shined in his heart, and he came to understand, and in the sanctuary, in the temple of God, God spoke to him, and listen to how he responds now, verse 18,

“Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet,”

“Yet,” this is an expression in the Hebrew text. It really literally is something like, “And I” but it’s very emphatic. “Yet,” I think it’s been translated nevertheless in some of the versions, “Nevertheless,” and “As for me, I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.” Again, “laqach,” the word used of Enoch being caught up to be in the presence of the Lord. The word used of Elijah who went up in the chariots of fire. “You will take me to glory.” “Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.”

Well, obviously the important parts here are the assurance that we have stretches beyond this life to eternity. In verse 23 he says, “I am always with you.” In verse 24 he says, “Afterward, you will take me into glory.” Verse 26 he says, “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” In other words, what the Psalmist says effectively is that by the grace of God and his mighty power he has been taken into the very realm of divinity. The ephemerality, I know that’s a big word, but the root is the word for day, the dayliness, the trivialness, the ephemerality of earth to the eternity and the perpetuality of the divine presence, what a transformation to be taken from this earth and all of the dayliness of it into the permanent eternal presence of the Lord God in heaven. That’s a rapture. That is really a

rapture. So, Enoch if you can hear me, Enoch you don't have anything on me. You don't have anything on the church of Jesus Christ. You don't have anything on the believers who are alive when Christ comes because he's going to take us to glory. When that occurs I don't know. I'm not going to speculate of course.

I know this, death shepherds the ungodly, but another person shepherds us, the one who has the keys of death and Hades. He shepherds us, and it's marvelous to realize it. “And yet I am always with you.” “Yet I am always with you.” “Nevertheless I am always with you.” The time between death and resurrection is a continuation of the mystical union accomplished by the divine covenant by which, which our Lord has made with his sheep, guaranteeing their future by reason of divine election. Such a life embodies a piece of eternity and we by the grace of God are part of that piece of eternity.

Well let me, I know I'm right at the end of the message. The faith of Asaph then soars in verse 25. He says, “Whom have I in heaven but you? Earth has nothing I desire besides you.” Luther has a remarkable rendering here. It's not surprising, “*Venich nur dich habe zo fraga ech nichz noch Himmel oder auch Erde.*” [ph 45:34] Now for those of you who ingathered a sense of that it means something like this, “As long as I have Thee, I don't ask for anything in heaven or earth.” Isn't that a marvelous thing? “As long as I have you, I don't ask for anything in heaven or earth.” *Venich nur dich habe so fraga ech nix noch Himmel oder noch Erde.* The ultimate certitude, my Christian friend, sitting here in Believers Chapel, the ultimate certitude is to possess the God of divine revelation, the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We have him. He has possessed us. We're always with him because he holds us as the Psalmist says. He grasps us. Holds us, and will hold us forever. “I give unto them eternal life. They shall never perish. Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand.” So Asaph's problem, he looked out, saw the wicked, it puzzled him because they were all so rich and so healthy, is resolved in the sanctuary



of God where he learns that he has been grasped, guided by the council of God and then will be brought to glory.

New Testament adds something to this you know. The Old Testament did not give the details. We're filling in a lot because we know the New Testament, but in the New Testament in 2 Corinthians chapter 5 Paul said there are two ways to go to heaven. Course there's the way to go to heaven in which you go, or experience, eternal life as a naked person, that is you, we're in the south aren't we? “Nekid,” no, no, naked. To die and our body to be placed in the grave does not in any way mean that believers do not enter the presence of the Lord, but they don't have a body. The other way to go to heaven, Paul says, is to go in the rapture of the church as a living person. What happens then? Well I'm in a body. I like this body. It's beginning to wear out, but I like this body. I think it's a grace that God has given to me, to have this body. But his grace is beginning to wear thin. [Laughter]

So, the other way to go to heaven is to have this body replaced by another body without experiencing the kind of death that some have already experienced who are believers. But Paul puts it this way. He uses a word, both a verb and a noun, that is the word for putting on something over something else, like an over coat. Now, for example, if we suddenly were to know that it was 10 degrees outside, 9 like we managed to hit this winter, then to put on your over coat, you wouldn't put off this coat, you would put your over coat on this coat. Well one of the commentators said what Paul was looking for was to be over coated. He wanted to be over coated. He wants to go into the presence of the Lord, but he would love to go, not as a person without a body, but as a person with a body who puts on over that body the body of glory. I want that too, over coated. I don't know whether I'll attain to that or not, but I won't have any desire to debate about whether I should take it or not. As a matter of fact I won't have any opportunity.

Well I usually go over five minutes and it's only three minutes after according to that so I want to close with just an interesting quotation. I didn't know whether I was going to do this or

not, but after all Stonewall Jackson is a good friend of mine. I'm looking forward to seeing him in heaven. These were notes that were taken down by Stonewall Jackson as he listened to Robert L. Dabney preach on the occasion, I think of the death of an individual. I have a good friend in Florida. He's a pastor. His wife died very young, and he put this in his bulletin and sent me a copy of it. This is what Dabney said, "But in the hour of death especially, the Christian needs a Savior who is no less than God. An angel could not sympathize with our trial, for they cannot feel the pangs of dissolution. A human friend cannot travel with us the path through the dark valley; for the creature who yields to the stroke of death is overwhelmed, and returns no more to guide his fellow. The God-man alone can sustain us; he has felt the mortal blow, for he is man; he has survived it, and returns triumphing to succor us, for he is God. Unless this divine guide be with us we must fight the battle with the last enemy alone and unaided. Just when the struggle becomes most fearful to the soul, the veil of approaching dissolution descending between it and all this world shuts it off in the outer darkness; and then, in vast solitary night, must the king of terrors be met, with no human arm to succor and no ear to hear the cry of despair that is lost in the infinite silence. So must you die, my friend, and I." So the promises of God are that in that moment of disillusion when life is fleeing from us, we have someone to stand with us, someone who has overcome. He has overcome sin, death and hell, and he stands with us and takes us on into the presence of the Triune God.

I hope you have that hope. That's the hope of Christians. It was the hope of Old Testament saints as well. It's the hope of the redeemed that beyond this life, afterward, beyond the afterward, there is the glory of union with the Triune God. May God in his marvelous grace enable you to have that hope. If you don't have it, it's available for you right now. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for all that we have in the redemption that Jesus Christ has accomplished. We are so thankful when we learn from Scripture that all of those who belong to him shall come to him. His name is Jesus. He shall save his people from their sins. And, oh Father, if there should be some in this auditorium who do not know the great Savior, the Lord Jesus who accomplished the ransom for many, may they turn at this very moment and say within their hearts most meaningfully and seriously and sincerely, “Lord I am a sinner. You’ve said you died for sinners...”

**[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]**