



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

March 19, 2018

ON FINAL DEPARTURES

...I desire to depart and to be with Christ... Philippians 1:23

When Jesus was crucified, one of the thieves put to death with Him cried out, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom!” And Jesus responded, “Today you shall be with me in Paradise.” But scores of people are not sure that they can apply that to their personal lives. Are they to believe that when God’s child draws his last breath here on Earth, his next one is going to be drawn in heaven?

Some 30 years later, Paul addressed that same issue, and what he wrote can eliminate any question in your mind. Perhaps you remember that Paul wrote a very warm, personal letter to the church at Philippi, and in this letter, he told them that he was in a dilemma. He said he wanted to depart and to be with Christ, but remaining in the flesh to help the church was more important or necessary.

What did Paul really mean? Obviously the word *depart* was a euphemism meaning, “to die.” Understanding how the word was used in the first century gives some pictures which let light filter through a lot of dust and fog. First, the word was used of a boat which was loosed from its moorings in a harbor and gradually began to drift to sea. Then it was used of a door which was flung open with force! If you recall how Paul was imprisoned in the very city where the church was located to which he was writing, you may remember that following an earthquake, an angel released Paul. “Flung open” the door of the prison is the translation of the same word Paul used here.

There’s another picture which is meaningful. A person goes to a dinner party at the home of a friend. It’s a great evening and no one really wants to leave. The guests stand around and talk, then finally they depart and go home. The same word is used in all of these pictures.

How do people die? Sometimes a person is cut down in his prime. He or she dies unexpectedly in an accident or a mishap of some kind. A teenager loses his life prematurely, or a little child dies in infancy. “A tragic accident,” we say. But for God’s children there are no accidents, only incidents. It’s like what happened to Peter. An angel has flung open the door and God’s child walks through the doors of heaven.

In some cases, people slowly slip across the vale and walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Much like a little boat which has been loosed from its moorings in the harbor, a person gradually loses touch here and drifts towards heaven’s shore.



guidelines for living

a 5 minute message

Then there's the picture of the dinner party. Some live long, full lives, and at the end, reluctantly they bid farewell to friends and family and leave us.

The reality is that almost everyone's death fits into one of these three categories, but I still haven't made my most important point. No matter how colorful the picture, how you make your departure isn't the most important thing. The way Paul worded his letter, it is obvious that the action of both leaving and arriving takes place simultaneously. Leaving here means arriving in the presence of Jesus Christ.

That's good news, friend. There's no period of waiting, no purgatory which must consume your dross. When you are God's child, when your time has come and you leave us here, your next breath is the cleanest, purest air your lungs have ever experienced.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "We are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord..." Then he added that "We...prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:6,8).

How you die isn't the important thing. Where you are headed after you die is the real issue. Never forget it.

Resource reading: 2 Corinthians 5:1-10.