

Time Flies — What About It? The Rapid Flight Of Time Holds No Terror For Christians

Text: 2 Cor 5:1-9

Suggested Hymns:
22, 624, 330, 556, 347

- 1) Because We Can Look Forward To A Happy Goal At Life's End
- 2) Because We Have The Assurance Of Reaching This Goal
- 3) Because We Know How To Utilise Our Time On Earth To The Glory Of God

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 2 Corinthians 5:1-9, *¹ For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴ For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.*

⁵ Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶ So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. ⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today the Church stands between two important festivals. The good news *“Unto you is born .. a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* has resounded in our church. In spirit we were led back to the peaceful plains of Bethlehem, there to hear the angels sing, *“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men.”*

In spirit we accompanied the humble shepherds to the lowly stable in the dark of night, there to see the Light of the world. With the shepherds we resolved to spread this happy news among all with whom we come in contact.

And now, while echoes of Christmas carols are quietly fading away, we are reminded of the fact that this is the last Sunday of the year. Another year of our life is about to be concluded, and we are therefore another year nearer to death and eternity.

Is the rapid flight of time a disturbing factor in your life? To our sinful nature it is, but not to the Christian. Joy and happiness fill the Christian's heart as he contemplates the rapid flight of time in the light of Christmas. To him Christmas and the blessed hope of heaven are inseparably united.

One of our Christmas hymns says of the Christ-child:¹

*To this vale of tears He comes,
Here to serve in sadness,
That with Him in heav'n's fair home
We may reign in gladness.*

Because Christ entered into this transitory tabernacle, we can enter the permanent palaces of peace. Because God has prepared salvation for us, we have the joyful assurance of heaven. Therefore the rapid flight of time holds no terror for Christians. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Rapid Flight Of Time Holds No Terror For Christians Because We Can Look Forward To A Happy Goal At Life's End

The various concepts concerning the goal of human existence indicate clearly that natural man cannot look forward to the end of his life with happy anticipation.

To the Buddhist the goal of the good life is Nirvana — forgetfulness, eternal unconsciousness. Socrates, the wisest of pagan Greeks, endeavoured to cheer himself as he viewed the goal of his existence and reasoned: This life is bad. The life to come must be either good or bad (forgetting it can be worse). If bad, he said, then we continue as here; if good, why not welcome it?

The Mohammedans claim that the final goal will be a life of sensuality. Others are looking for a vague *“Beautiful Isle of Somewhere.”* At best there is a melancholy note pervading their hope.

How different is the picture which our text gives us of the goal to which we are looking forward!

The Christian hope is cheerful. Life does not end in eternal oblivion nor in endless doom. The termination of time brings a happy and welcome change to the Christian. He is to view this moment as a change of homes.

The present life is compared to a tabernacle, a tent. This is what King Hezekiah had in mind when he said in Isaiah 38:12, ¹² *My life span is gone, Taken from me like a shepherd's tent.* We read in Psalm 103:15-16, ¹⁵ *As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.* ¹⁶ *For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more.*

Our earthly existence is not permanent, nor should it be considered such. At the most our stay on earth is of brief duration. We read in Psalm 90:10, ¹⁰ *The days of our lives are seventy years; And if by reason of strength they are eighty years, Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.*

As tents are most insecure and are quickly removed, so our earthly existence with its repulses and rebuffs, its disappointments and failures, its sorrows and sicknesses, its sins and transgression, may come to an end quickly and abruptly.

Over history we have seen nations come and nations being toppled over by other nations and therefore losing their independence. Dictators and politicians come and go.

Along the shores of the Black Sea in Turkey the mountain peaks, which for centuries have been considered secure foundations for castles and fortifications, have toppled into the sea or crumpled into valleys. Earthquakes and floods can remove the security that you once thought that you always had.

Have we not experienced this again during the past year among our friends, possibly even among our relatives, that people who seemingly were enjoying sound health and gave promise of reaching a ripe old age were suddenly snatched

away by the relentless “last enemy,” death? “*Change and decay in all around I see*” writes the hymnist.²

The rapid flight of time brings Christians quickly to that moment when “*our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, and they enter a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*” St. Paul rightly calls this existence a building. The tabernacle is insecure, but the very word “building” suggests stability and unchangeableness.

In heaven we shall always be with the Lord. While tents are folded up when the night is spent, houses are built with a view to permanence. It is difficult to describe in temporal pictures that which is eternal in heaven.

Our text, however, gives some fine hints as to the glorious nature of our goal. We read of the “*building from God.*” Since it is of God, it abides like God. It is secure and immovable. We read in Hebrews 11:10 that it is *the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

A blessed exchange for believers! Instead of a flimsy, insecure tent we shall inhabit a building erected by God, a house not made with hands. How much more beautiful, larger, and more glorious than even the monumental structures produced by man! It is eternal, indestructible — in heaven. This is the glorious home of the heavenly Father. It is that same city of God for which Abraham waited in faith, that same dwelling-place of which the Lord says in John 14:2,² “*In My Father’s house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you.*”

In Jesus priestly prayer He says in John 17:24,²⁴ “*Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me.* The goal of the Christian is described by yet another comparison, that of putting on a garment. When “*swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day,*”³ the Christian must put off the garments of mortality. But he has the blessed assurance that he shall stand before God and the Lamb in not only new, but in heavenly robes. Mortality will be swallowed up by life.

The Christian will put on the robe of immortality, of bliss and endless happiness. Little wonder that the believer contemplating the rapid flight of time cheerfully speaks his evening prayer in the words of this hymn,⁴:

To rest my body hasteth,

*Aside its garments casteth,
Types of mortality;
These I put off and ponder
How Christ shall give me yonder
A robe of glorious majesty.*

But while we wait for our happy goal, we groan in this mortal tabernacle. It is not easy to go through the dark hour of death. It is true, the knowledge that we shall put on immortality cheers us throughout our life and in the hour of death.

But at the same time the Christian would rather enter eternity like Elijah and like the believers at Christ's second coming. The Christian would rather put the garment of immortality over his present garment than to be unclothed, that is, to walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

But no matter what God has planned for him, the Christian is looking toward the goal, and he is happy that the flight of time is bringing him quickly to that blessed goal. We Christians set our affections on things above. The future holds no terror for us. We look far beyond the last hour and see Jerusalem, *"that city fair and high."*⁵

2. The Rapid Flight Of Time Holds No Terror For Christians Because We Have The Assurance Of Reaching This Goal

In the second place, this rapid flight of time holds no terrors for the Christians because they not only look forward to a happy goal at life's end, but also have the assurance of reaching this goal. The element of uncertainty and insecurity is ruled out.

God Himself wrought us for this very goal. From all eternity He has elected us unto eternal life through Christ Jesus. When the fullness of time was come, He sent His Son into the world, who in deepest lowliness was born at Bethlehem, true man of a young unknown Jewish woman.

In poverty and with just the bare necessities He spent His life among men, kept God's Law perfectly in every detail, and finally died on the accursed tree of the cross, — all as our Substitute that we might receive a complete and perfect redemption.

And in order that God might prepare us for this blessed goal, He proclaims the good news, the Gospel, to you, and if you believe it, you receive the results of your faith, the salvation of your soul.

The promises of God should be sufficient for us. And they are. But God's grace wants us to be fully persuaded that we shall reach the goal. Therefore God gives us His Holy Spirit as the pledge, like a down-payment, to guarantee us our heavenly home.

When we enter into a contract to purchase a house, we are required to give a pledge, to make a down-payment or deposit, as a surety that the contract is binding. God gives us a pledge as proof that He will not break His promise and that the heavenly mansions are really ours. And what a pledge! It is His Holy Spirit, who by the Gospel calls us, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith. *"This regeneration is, as it were, the beginning of eternal life,"*⁶ as our Lutheran confessional writings put it.

By virtue of this regeneration the Holy Spirit lives in us and through the Gospel gives us the inner testimony, the inward assurance, that we can rely on God's promises and shall have life eternal. Again and again He will let us think about these promises and come to a clearer and firmer assurance.

As Mary, when the shepherds had returned home, was permitted to keep all those things and ponder them in her heart, similarly the Holy Spirit wants you to take all those glorious truths you heard at Christmas time and ponder them in your hearts.

Should difficulties and obstacles arise, we may well overcome them, remembering that *"we walk by faith and not by sight."*⁷ Our life is governed by what we believe, the Word of God, and not by the things we see. The things we see may cause us grief, but they need never cause us to doubt that God will make all things well, that He will take us to Himself in heaven.

The loss of money causes great inconvenience, sickness may become exceedingly painful, betrayal by friends is very distressing, the death of a loved one leaves a great void in our lives, but none of these things must cause us to doubt the final outcome of this life.

That the Christian's life will end in bliss is not always indicated by his experiences. In the midst of the most grievous disappointments and serious

reverses Paul Gerhardt still could write, *“All my heart this night rejoices.”*⁸ Even so we need not be disturbed by the things we see. Far beyond all grief stands the promise of God’s Word, which assures us that all things, earthly, even the rapid flight of time, cannot rob us of God’s assuring promise. Though we are still at home in the body and absent from the Lord, our confidence is that some day we shall experience the reverse and shall be with the Lord forever.

3. The Rapid Flight Of Time Holds No Terror For Christians Because We Know How To Utilise Our Time On Earth To The Glory Of God

The rapid flight of time holds no terror for us Christians for another reason. Christians know how to utilise their time on earth to the glory of God. Our aim is to be well pleasing to Him.

While we Christians are eagerly awaiting the life to come, let no one think that the present life is a dreary existence for us. There is much to be done; no time to sit and hang our heads in gloom. We should want to please our God and Saviour. Just because we are looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, we should be all the more anxious to be found busy when He comes, busy in that work which He has given us to do.

We are all familiar with the fate of the city of Pompeii, on the Bay of Naples, in Italy, which was destroyed 79 A. D. Over the years the ruins of that city have been excavated. There are numerous evidences that many people tried to flee from the catastrophe. But one man did not. At the city gate was found the skeleton of a Roman guard. There he had remained, both hands clutched about his weapon, while the very ground on which he stood trembled and the fiery ashes were gradually burying him, and there, after these many centuries, he was found at his post of duty.

So you must perform the task Jesus has given you, yes, be so busy that, even though the world may go to pieces under your feet, you still will be found striving to please God. We are told of an aged “holy man” of India who became a Christian and a great man of prayer. One day he came to the missionary and asked to be taught some geography.

Surprised, the missionary asked, *“Why do you, a man of your age, want to study geography?”* *“Teacher, I want to learn some new places to pray for,”* was

the reply. Who could sit idle, in gloomy heaviness, when there still is so much glorious work to be done?

Simeon of old, while waiting for his waning life to run its course, did not sit idly by. He knew what to do. He laboured to be accepted with God. In the Temple he spoke of his impending death as a departing in peace. The assurance for this faith was based on God's Word. He was ready for his departure. And the summary of it all was that he blessed God.

Similarly we, too, have been led into God's house on this last Sunday of the present year. The very date itself impresses upon us the seriousness of the occasion. Time marches on. But soon there will be no time to march on. We shall then still exist. Tremendously serious, is this thought, but not terrifying.

The more we are reminded of the passing of time, the more we are to lift up our head with joy, knowing that our redemption draws near. Although the tent of this existence break to pieces, in our Father's house are many mansions. Oh that we were there! Yes, we shall be there. God has said so in His Word. He has sealed His Word by sending His Son into the world. By giving us strength to lead lives pleasing unto Him, He even now is giving us a foretaste of heaven. His goodness knows no end.

On Christmas God permitted us to hear the joyous Christmas message: The Saviour came down to earth to save us. Today, at the final Sunday service of the year, God wants to increase your happiness by telling you, soon you shall enjoy this complete salvation with Him in heaven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Hymn 22 v 2

² Hymn 543 v 2

³ Hymn 543 v 2

⁴ ALHB Hymn 538 v 2

⁵ Hymn 495

⁶ Apol., Art. 3, 231

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:7

⁸ Hymn 24