

Title:           **BETWEEN DEATH**  
                          **AND THE RESURRECTION**

Text:           Ecclesiastes 4:1-2

Subject:       *The Believer's Intermediate State*

Introduction:

The title of my message is “**BETWEEN DEATH AND THE RESURRECTION.**” I began working on this message a few weeks ago, after Bro. Oscar Bailey asked me about the state of God’s elect between death and the resurrection. Few subjects arouse greater interest. This is a subject about which everyone is interested. We are interested in it personally, because we are all dying mortals. And we are interested in it because we all have loved ones whose bodies are buried beneath the earth. Where are those who sleep in Jesus before the resurrection? What is the condition of a redeemed soul when it leaves the body? These are questions about which no one can be indifferent. I have searched the Scriptures and found some answers to these questions that I trust the Lord will be pleased to bless to your souls’ consolation and joy in Christ. Let’s begin in Ecclesiastes chapter four.

(Ecclesiastes 4:1-2) “So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and

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<sup>1</sup> Date:           Sunday Evening — August 12, 2007  
                          Sovereign Grace Fellowship, Booneville, NC — (MON 08/13/07)  
Tape #         Z-34a  
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behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter. (2) Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.”

The wise man, Solomon, after considering “*all the oppressions that are done under the sun,*” the tears of the oppressed in this world, the power of those who oppress, and the fact that there is no comfort for God’s saints in this world, said, “*I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.*” In the Book of Revelation, we read a similar statement – “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*” (14:13). Yet, when you and I go to the funeral home and graveside to bid our loved ones good-bye, we are filled with sorrow and weeping. Why is that so?

- If the one God has taken is an unbeliever, the sorrow is understandable. Those who die in unbelief and sin die under the wrath of God.
- If our sorrow is the sorrow of parting friends, it is reasonable. None of us likes to part with cherished friends and loved ones, even temporarily.
- However, if the sorrow is the sorrow of those who have no hope, uncontrollable anguish, or even anger at God for having taken someone we love, I cannot understand that.

Such sorrow reveals both ignorance and unbelief,

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ignorance of the blessed state of God's saints in heaven and unbelief regarding the Word of God, the promises of the gospel, and the finished work of Christ.

**Proposition:** I want to show from the Scriptures that God's saints in heaven, our departed friends, are alive and well. Though their bodies have died and lay in the earth, they are more alive than ever and full of happiness.

**IMMEDIATE GLORY**

*First*, let me show you from the Word of God that the souls of redeemed sinners, immediately after death, enter into heaven and into a state of eternal happiness. It is not my intention to answer the foolish questions of infidels, and heretics. Neither will we be sidetracked by the foolish speculations of ignorant men and women about life after death. **As we think about the wonders of immortality, our only source of information is the Word of God.** Only the eternal God can unveil the mysteries of eternity.

We are creatures of God made with immortal, undying souls. Though these bodies must die and rot in the earth like the brute beasts, our souls will exist forever. **As soon as you die your soul will enter into a state of endless happiness or misery.** Man does not die like a dog. When your dog dies, that is all there is to it. It ceases to be. But when you die, that is not all there is to

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it. Your soul lives on, not in a state of sleep, insensitivity, and inactivity, but in the fullness of life and consciousness.

**The souls of believers**, redeemed sinners, men and women who have been made righteous before God in Christ, the souls of God's saints return to God at death. Our departed brothers and sisters, as soon as they closed their eyes in death, opened them again in glory. There they shall remain until the second coming of Christ. Then, when Christ comes again in his glory, he will bring them all with him, raise their bodies from the dust, and reunite their bodies and souls in resurrection glory. Believers yet living when Christ comes shall then be changed, glorified, caught up into glory. Thereafter, we shall forever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

(1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. (14) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. (15) For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (16) For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: (17) Then we which are

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alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (18) Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

Though hell is as real as heaven and damnation as real as salvation, lest I turn your thoughts to matters of great sorrow and grief, **I will say little about the horrible state of the wicked and unbelieving after death.** They shall immediately, as soon as they close their eyes in death, wake up in the torments of the damned in hell **If you are yet without life, without faith, without Christ, and thus without hope, be warned.** The wrath of God is upon you. If you die without Christ, you must be forever damned! To die without Christ is to die without hope. But for the believer things are different. The believer, as soon as he dies, is alive forever. His soul goes immediately home to God in heaven.

**The Word of God, when speaking of the believer's death, always represents it as an immediate entrance into heavenly blessedness and glory.** Actually, for the believer, death is not death at all, but the beginning of life. Our Lord said, “*Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die*” (John 11:26). **God's elect never die.** The death of the body is the liberty of the soul. And as soon as our souls are freed from this body of sin and death, we shall enter heaven.

**When the righteous perish from the earth, they live in**

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**uprightness forever** (Isaiah 57:1-2).

(Isaiah 57:1-2) “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth *it* to heart: and merciful men *are* taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil *to come*. (2) He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, *each one* walking *in* his uprightness.”

When the righteous die, they are taken away from evil, enter into a world of peace, and rest in their beds. Their bodies rest in hope in the grave, in hope of the resurrection. Their souls rest in the arms of Christ, their Redeemer. Our departed friends have entered into everlasting rest (Hebrews 4:9-11). There they walk in their uprightness. God reckons the righteousness of Christ, imputed to us in justification and imparted to us in sanctification, to be our righteousness. And he makes it ours perfectly and experimentally in heaven. There our departed brethren walk in their uprightness, in spotless purity and holiness, in shining robes of bliss and glory.

**As soon as a believer dies, he is carried by God’s angels into heaven, Abraham’s bosom, the place of endless comfort** (Luke 16:22-25)<sup>2</sup>.

(Luke 16:22-25) “And it came to pass, that the

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<sup>2</sup> “Abraham’s bosom” was a Jewish expression referring to the place of heavenly happiness prepared for God’s saints between death and the resurrection.

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beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; (23) And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (24) And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. (25) But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."

Every believing sinner, as soon as he dies, is taken to be with Christ in Paradise (Luke 23:43). Paradise is heaven, the garden of God (Revelation 2:7). It is the third heaven to which Paul was raptured for a brief visit (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) during his pilgrimage here. Paradise is the place of the divine Majesty, the place of happiness, pleasure, and endless delight. It was to Paradise that Christ went as soon as he died, having obtained eternal redemption for us (Hebrews 9:12). Paradise is a place of assured blessedness, promised to sinners who seek the mercy of God in Christ. The dying Savior said to the dying thief, who had just been converted by his omnipotent grace, "*Today* (immediately, as soon as this ordeal of death is over) *shalt thou* (most assuredly) *be with me* (in my full presence and company forever) *in paradise* (Heaven)."

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**IMMEASURABLE GAIN**

Death for the believer is gain, infinite, immeasurable gain (Philippians 1:21, 23).

(Philippians 1:21-23) “For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. (22) But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. (23) For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

Paul was confident that as soon as he departed from this world he would immediately be with Christ in blessed communion. Believing the Word and promise of God, he looked upon death as a desirable thing.

**What is the state of the saints’ life between death and the resurrection?** I will not say more than the Bible says. But this much I know, — the souls of God’s saints are not floating around in the sky. They have gone to a specific place where Christ is. They are assembled as a glorified church (Hebrews 12:22-23).

(Hebrews 12:22-23) “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, (23) To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the

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spirits of just men made perfect,”

Their souls exist in a **recognizable form**. Moses and Elijah stood upon the mount of transfiguration in a recognizable form (Matthew 17:3). When the rich man saw Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom, he saw and recognized him as the very same man who laid by his gate upon the earth (Luke 16:23).

**Do God’s saints in heaven have a body between death and the resurrection?** A physical body? No. A spiritual body, a heavenly form, a house for their souls? — Most definitely (2 Corinthians 5:1). Every believer, as soon as he leaves this body, enters into heavenly glory with a heavenly body with Christ. It is this assurance of heavenly glory and bliss that makes death a desirable thing for the believer.

(2 Corinthians 4:17-18) “For **our light affliction**, which is but for a moment, **worketh for us** a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; (18) While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* **temporal**; but the things which are not seen *are* **eternal**.”

(2 Corinthians 5:1-9) “For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, **we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**. (2) For in this we

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groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: (3) If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. (4) For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. (5) **Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.** (6) Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst 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, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (9) Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”

Here the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to tell us plainly that as soon as this earthly house is dissolved we have a “*house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*” **What is that house?**

- Some say the house is heaven itself. Perhaps, Paul is saying, “we have a heaven in the heavens,” but I do not think that is his meaning.
- Others say that this “*house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” refers to the resurrection body; but Paul is not speaking here of the resurrection. He is telling us about the state of God’s saints immediately after the death of the body.
- It seems obvious to me that the Apostle is here

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declaring that as soon as we drop this earthly house of clay, we enter into another house for our souls, an intermediate body that is specifically prepared for that blessed state.

**Every word here shows a distinct contrast between this new house and the old one.**

- The old is a tent. — The new is a building.
- The old, though not made with hands, was made what it is, a house of death, defiled and made defective by the sin and fall of our father Adam. The new is God's work and God's gift.
- The old is temporal and perishing. — The new is eternal.

When Paul says we have this house "*in the heavens*," it is plain that he is not talking about heaven itself. This house is a new body, replacing and surpassing the old. It is in the heavens in the sense that it is God's gift, something he has for us where he is, and which we shall wear there. "We have it" means "it is ours."

"In this the saints have a present interest. They have it already built and prepared for them. They have an indubitable right and title to it through the righteousness of Christ. They have it secured to them in Christ, their head and representative. And they have the earnest of it, the Spirit of God in their hearts. Of all which they have sure and certain knowledge: '*for we know*'. They are well assured of the truth of this from the promise of God, who

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cannot lie, from the declaration of the Gospel, the testimony of the Spirit, and the close and inseparable connection there is between the grace they have already received, and the glory that shall be hereafter.”  
— *John Gill*

If we had the wisdom of Solomon, we too would “*praise the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive.*” If we could see by faith that which John saw by revelation, if we could grasp something of the glory and happiness of God’s saints in even, even now, at this very moment, we would say with that beloved disciple, “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*”

**WELCOME RELIEF**

*Second*, we should always remember that for the believer the death of his body and the freeing of his soul is a welcome relief (Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 14:13). While living in this world, we seek to be content with God’s wise and good providence. We want to glorify our great God by living before him in faith, resigning all things to his will. We would not change our lot in life, even if we could. Our heavenly Father knows and always does what is best.

**Yet, life in this world, at best, is a burden to the heaven born soul.** In this tabernacle we groan (2 Corinthians 5:1-4). We groan for life! Our hearts cry, “O

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*wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death!'*

- In this body we struggle with sin. In heaven we shall be free from sin.
- In this body we are tempted and often fall. In heaven we shall never be tempted and shall never fall.
- In this body we weep much. In heaven we shall weep no more.
- In this body we long to be like Christ. In heaven we shall be like Christ.
- In this body we long for Christ's presence. In heaven we shall forever be with Christ.

**We have many friends in heaven whom we dearly love. We miss them. But we do not sorrow for them. We envy them!** The believer, as long as he is in this world, is like an eagle I once saw while visiting a zoo. He sat on an iron perch, with a chain holding him to the earth, gazing into heaven. It appeared that he longed to soar away into the distant clouds; but the chain held him fast to the earth.

When an eagle is happy in an iron cage or chained to an iron perch, when a sheep is happy in a pack of wolves, when a fish is happy on dry land, then, and not until then, will the renewed soul be happy in this body of flesh. Death for God's saints will be a welcome relief (Psalm 17:15).

(Psalms 17:15) "As for me, I will behold thy face

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in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake,  
with thy likeness.”

**WHERE?**

We have seen in the Scriptures that God’s saints, as soon as they die, enter into heaven, and that death for the believer is a welcome relief. Now let me answer this question — Where have our departed friends gone? I have already shown you that they have gone to heaven. They have not gone to purgatory. They are not in limbo. They are not floating around in the air. Their souls are not asleep. Our friends who have left us are in heaven. **But where is heaven?** That is a question I cannot answer. God has not told us.

- Heaven is a place somewhere outside this world, somewhere outside time.
- But it is a place, a real place.
- Heaven is the place where Christ is.
- Heaven is the place to which he has promised to bring us (John 14:1-3).
- Heaven is the place where our departed friends are right now (Hebrews 12:22-23). **Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 again.**

“For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from

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heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing *is* God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

In these eight verses Paul tells us several things about the believer’s death and entrance into heaven. **Death is the dissolving of this earthly body.** This body is of the earth. It is only suitable for the earth. It must return to the earth. **And the dissolution of this body is no cause for sorrow.** Richard Baxter wrote, “It will be like taking off a shoe that hurts my foot — a welcome relief! It will be like laying aside a tool that is no longer needed because its work is done.” It will be like tearing down a tent to move into a house.

**In heaven we shall have another house for our souls.**  
— “*In my Father’s house are many mansions,*” houses, dwelling places. Whatever our house in heaven shall be, it shall be a house not made with hands, a house prepared by Christ, and a house suitable to our life in glory.

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**As soon as this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, we shall enter that house Christ has prepared for our souls in heaven.** There will be no lapse of time, no delay, between the dissolving of this body and our entrance into our house in glory. This is not a matter of conjecture, but of certainty. “*We know*,” Paul says. We who are taught of God know these things by the revelation of God in his Word, by the earnest of the Spirit (v. 5), and by virtue of our faith in Christ (v. 7). What happens to the believer after death? Do you ask, “Where have our departed friends gone?”

- They have gone to heaven.
- They have gone home.
- They have gone to be with Christ!

## **HEAVENLY ACTIVITY**

What are God’s saints doing in heaven? The Scriptures speak sparingly with regard to the saints’ employment in heaven. But some things are revealed.

**God’s saints in heaven are celebrating and adoring the perfections of God in Christ** (Revelation 5:11-12; 7:11-12). There they who behold his face speak with unceasing astonishment of his holiness, power, wisdom, goodness, grace, faithfulness, and love.

(Revelation 5:11-12) “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne

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and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; (12) Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

(Revelation 7:11-12) “And all the angels stood round about the throne, and *about* the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, (12) Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, *be* unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.”

**God’s saints in heaven are delightfully employed in beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ** (John 17:24).

(John 17:24) “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

Oh, my soul, what will it be to behold the glory of our Redeemer? We shall forever behold him as he is, with a constantly increasing knowledge of him. **Heaven is the Garden of God where the Rose of Sharon is in full bloom; and the fragrance of it perfumes the whole**

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**place.** Heaven is to behold Christ forever, never taking our eyes off him, and never wanting to.

**God's saints in heaven are employed in the constant exercise of every spiritual grace:** *Faith* — The saints in heaven believe God. *Hope* — Our brethren patiently wait in hope of the resurrection. *Love* — They truly love one another.

**God's saints in heaven are employed in the unending service of God** (Revelation 7:14-15).

(Revelation 7:14-15) “And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.”

They are engaged in **prayer** (Revelation 6:10). They **sing the songs of grace** to the praise of God. Electing, redeeming, regenerating, justifying, sanctifying, preserving grace is the constant theme of their song around the throne of God. God's saints in heaven are engaged in **constant, uninterrupted fellowship with one another and with the holy angels**. A casual reading of the book of Revelation conveys the idea that God's saints will forever discuss with one another and with the

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heavenly angels the wonders of covenant mercy, the ministry of the angelic hosts, redeeming love, saving grace, and divine providence.

**WHY HERE?**

One more question needs to be answered. — Why has our Savior left us here? He has already made us completely worthy of heavenly glory. Has he not?

(Colossians 1:12-14) “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: (13) Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins.”

So why has he left us here? I have been pondering that question a good bit lately. I cannot answer it fully; but I have found an answer that satisfies me in Mark 5:18-20. There we read about the Lord Jesus healing the maniac of Gadara. When the poor man was made to know the Lord Jesus and his grace, he desired to be with him; but the Master denied him that great joy for some time for a very noble and good reason.

(Mark 5:18-20) “And when he was come into the ship, he that had been possessed with the devil prayed him that he might be with him. (19)

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Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee. (20) And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him: and all *men* did marvel.”

What a wonderful change grace had wrought in this man. He who, but a few minutes before, was a terror to everybody, is now so heavenly composed that he desires never to leave his blessed Savior. Is that not the case with you, who have been called from darkness to light, and from the power of sin and Satan to the living God? Surely, having once tasted that the Lord is gracious, we cannot but long to be “*absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*” Yet our Savior says, “No, not yet.” Rather, he tells us to go home to our lost friends, and speak forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Our Lord Jesus has left us here until God’s appointed time shall come to take us home Glory. Our God and Savior must have his witnesses upon earth, as long as the earth remains. None of us shall live upon in this crumbling tabernacle of clay too long.

“Mortals are immortal here,  
Until their work is none.”

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What mercy! What grace! What condescending goodness! Our God has put the treasure of his gospel in these earthen vessels, choosing to employ you and me to tell other eternity bound sinners what great things the Lord has done for us, and has had compassion on us! Let us in wait in contentment, happiness, and overflowing gratitude, telling out the good news of redeeming love and saving mercy all the days of our appointed time, until our change come. Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, for now, to abide in the flesh is more needful. When we are no longer needed here, we will be with him there, in that “*house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!*”

Oh, eternity bound sinner, make certain that you are in Christ! Let every child of God take comfort with regard to those who have gone to heaven. — “*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord!*” And be assured, weary pilgrim, that your weary, troublesome life will end soon and that it will end well (2 Corinthians 4:17-5:2).

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. For we know that if our earthly house of *this* tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

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For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.”

Amen.