

**Message given by the Rev. Wendell C. Hawley  
at the funeral of  
Kenneth N. Taylor**

Welcome

On behalf of Margaret and the entire Taylor family, I welcome you to this Christian celebration of the life and death of Ken Taylor. You should know that Ken planned this entire service. He selected the Scriptures to be read. He chose the hymns we will sing, along with instructions on how to sing them! He selected, for the most part, the participants of this service. And he dealt strongly with me that the gospel be presented clearly, and that time be given for reflection upon the gospel's imperative, and an encouragement to all that are present who have not as yet been "born from above" to turn from unbelief to obedience to the Word of God.

Prayer

Will you stand for prayer and remain standing for the singing of the first hymn. You may be seated with the singing of the second hymn. Let us pray.

*Great God in heaven—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—we have come to worship you, for the glory of your great name is worthy. We have come to give you honor that you alone deserve. We praise you for your wisdom, power, and love. We thank you for the life that is ours in Jesus Christ, both now and forever. We pray that you would instruct us by the ministry of your Word, that you would refresh us in the singing of your praises, and that you would comfort our sad hearts with the joy of your presence. For it is in the name and through Jesus Christ our Lord that we pray. Amen.*

Scripture Reading

Now will you give attention to the reading of the Word of God.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
How unsearchable his judgments,  
and his paths beyond tracing out!  
"Who has known the mind of the Lord?  
Or who has been his counselor?"

“Who has ever given to God,  
that God should repay him?”  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! (Romans 11:33-36 NIV)

O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:1, 3-5 NIV)

Our days on earth are like grass;  
like wildflowers, we bloom and die.  
The wind blows, and we are gone—  
as though we had never been here.  
But the love of the LORD remains forever  
with those who fear him [and put their trust in him]. (Psalm 103:15-  
17 NLT)

The LORD is my shepherd;  
I have everything I need.  
Even when I walk  
through the dark valley of death,  
I will not be afraid,  
for you are close beside me.  
Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will live in the house of the LORD  
forever. (Psalm 23:1, 4, 6 NLT)

The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. (John 10:11 NLT)

All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his  
death. We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death

in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (Romans 6:3-4 NIV)

If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (Romans 14:8 NIV)

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. . . . I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:1-3, 6 NIV)

“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” (John 11:25-26 NIV)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33, 36 NIV)

### Homily

Life is like a story with a beginning and an ending. A good question to ask is: How does the story turn out? When we are dealing with fiction, it is of little consequence, but when it is the *life* story, it is one of eternal significance. For some, death is the end of the story—but certainly not for the believer!

Dr. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a young Lutheran pastor in Germany who, shortly before the end of World War II, was executed by the Nazis. When the prison guards came to his cell that cold spring morning and told him that he was wanted at the front office, the other prisoners with him knew immediately what that meant. It meant the gallows. Dietrich, upon leaving his cell mates, turned to one of them and said, “*They* (meaning the Nazis) may suppose this is the end, but for me it is the beginning.” And that is the story of the Christian. Death is but the beginning. In fact, the Christian looks at life as only the prologue to eternal life.

Viewing death as a Christian and as a believer in the eternal Word of God and a student of it, the Christian sees death as a *process* and a *place*. And I'm going to call your attention to five words in the New Testament that speak of the process of death. Each of those words is a goldmine that we haven't time to mine today. But there's a rich vein of gold with every one of them and I would encourage you, at the proper time, to look at each of these verses and meditate upon them.

To the believers in Corinth [1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20], the apostle Paul refers to death as "fallen asleep." In this sense life's regular *activity* is suspended momentarily, but life is not ended nor is it concluded. Sleep, as we think of it, is only temporary. There is the full expectation of awakening when life goes on, refreshed, regenerated, revitalized. "Fallen asleep"—that's one of the processes of death as the Christian views it.

Another expression found in the New Testament is "departure." And we read this word in Philippians 1:23. In this instance, departure is not a simple leave-taking or a going-away or an exit from the scene. It isn't even really a "goodbye" or a "farewell," as much as "we'll meet again"—just a little later.

In his eightieth year, Dr. Louis Talbot, chancellor of Biola—the Bible Institute of Los Angeles—was struck down with pneumonia. His wife and daughters were gathered in the hospital room greatly overcome with grief at his imminent passing. And Dr. Talbot rallied briefly and noticed everyone around the bedside crying. And he said, "What's the matter with you? For *this* was I born! For *this* I have lived all my life—to see my Savior face-to-face! I can hardly wait!" And that is the view the Christian has of the process of death—a departure.

As the apostle used the word to the believers in Philippi, it is a nautical term implying the lifting of an anchor, the swelling of the sails, and the sailing away of the vessel. But in its departure, the deeper meaning of the word is that the vessel is going on a scheduled voyage with a definite destination in mind that will bring it to another port—so that "departing" implies "arriving." The Christian departs this life not into nothingness. Not into nowhere. He departs as does a sea vessel leaving one port with the scheduled assurance of arriving at another port, "Home Port." The vessel that passes out of sight for those on this shore, comes into sight for others on another shore. And while some of us wave "farewell," those on another shore are saying, "Welcome home!" This is the view that the Christian has of the word *departure*.

Another expression of the process of death is found in 2 Corinthians 5:8—“to be absent from the body.” Death is a leave-taking. When the body is laid aside and left behind, life is not left in the body, but the process of dissolution takes hold of it and reduces it to its original, anonymous, and impersonal elements. The person who inhabited it, lived in it, and made it his vehicle of expression goes on to live a larger, fuller, and much better life in another manifestation called, elsewhere in the Holy Scriptures, “a spiritual body.” There, without any hindrance whatsoever, one joyfully fulfills the perfect purposes of God.

One hundred eleven years ago an elder of this church was found to be absent from the body. The notice to the Wheaton community of Henry Kellogg’s death was as follows: “It has pleased the Great Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ, to transfer our dear brother Kellogg from services as an officer in this church, which he loved so well, to the higher employments of the church above.” Absent here—present and active over there!

Another expression describing the process of death is “putting off this tabernacle, or tent.” This is the apostle Peter’s language in his second epistle [2 Peter 1:14]. A tent is a temporary dwelling place for those who are living under emergency conditions or are away from home. A tent is something a sojourner lays aside and leaves. In this case, the tent is the body, folded and put away. The person—the *real* person, the *real* person that we shall know in eternity, who inhabited the tent—moves out and into permanent quarters.

Possibly the most well known biblical expression for describing the process of death is found in 2 Timothy 4:7, “finished the course.” We all, someday, will finish the course laid out for us. The question today and always is: How shall we the finish course? The apostle Paul finished victoriously. He kept the rules. He finished well. He considered the *race* the task the Lord Jesus had given him. And we might well consider *any* task assigned to us by the Lord Jesus Christ as a high calling!

Interestingly enough, this is the only race in which we do not speak of a winner, for all finish the course. The question may be put in past tense: How well did I run? The apostle ran the race well. Ken Taylor finished the course well. And we are called today to follow in such footsteps and finish well. May each of us, by God’s great grace, determine this day for the course that lies before us—finish well!

The Bible speaks of death not only as a *process*, but as a *place*. Since death as a process changes us, there must be a *place* in which to experience the blessings and the benefits of that great change. It is *that* place which has

been read about, sung about, dreamed about, and hoped for by God's people for millennia. Three things I want to mention about that place.

God's Word describes it as "a new heavens and a new earth" [Rev 21:5]. This is one definition of the believer's new environment, his eternal home. And of course, in that new environment, those belonging to Christ will be a *new* person, have a *new* body, and enjoy a *new* earth. Indeed, our blessed Savior has promised us in Revelation 21:5, "Look, I am making all things new!" Imagination fails us as we try to contemplate what that *new* means. This is for sure: we shall enjoy a new beginning, untainted in any way by sin, and the joy of doing God's will perfectly throughout eternity. A new beginning to enjoy God forever.

Death, for the Christian, is described as a "city." It is a city whose builder and maker is God. It is a city no earthly architect could possibly imagine. No earthly builder could construct a city so beautiful, so peaceful, so eternal, as has our God, who gives us the briefest description of it in Revelation 21 and 22.

And again, death is described in John's gospel in terms of a "house" [John 14:2]. Jesus told his disciples that in his Father's house there were many mansions. There is nothing more definite, more familiar and more to be desired, to earth dwellers, than to be at the place called home. When you don't feel good, you want to be home. When you're tired, you want to be home. When you're confused with the frustrations of life, you want to be home. And *that* is what heaven will be—home. When we leave this world, we are not *leaving* home. We are *going* home.

Years ago, Ken Taylor was a representative of InterVarsity, visiting college campuses and meeting with Christian students, and encouraging them and giving them biblical exposition from the Word of God. And in his preparation for those talks that he gave to those students to encourage them in their life for God on the campus, his favorite commentary was Matthew Henry. And years later, as a publisher, he spoke frequently about his great desire to put Matthew Henry's commentaries into one volume for the young people of today using modern idiom, modern language, modern expression—that those seeking help with the Scriptures would have a place to turn. Now, I don't know whether Ken ever read this or not—if he did, I'm sure he would have enjoyed it. But I came across the words of Matthew Henry—that eighteenth-century Bible scholar—words written a day or two before he died. This is what Matthew Henry wrote:

Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my Father's house, in the mansion prepared for me. I am where I want to be. My sowing time is done and I am reaping. My joy is the joy of the harvest.

Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in victory.

Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of the presence of my precious Redeemer.

Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best on earth. Here are the holy angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my former acquaintances with whom I frequently worked and prayed, and they that have come before me.

Lastly, would you know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades. After millions and millions and millions of ages it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, don't you weep for me! Amen!

The promises and provisions of which I spoke today are only for the believer in Jesus Christ. Just as we are not allowed in someone's house unless we are invited and welcomed, so no one can enter God's home without acting positively upon His invitation. In the gracious providence of God, I believe that invitation is extended to all that are here today. For the Lord has said, "Whosoever will, may come and drink of the waters of life freely" [Rev 22:17]. And again he said, "Come unto me all you who are weary and carry a heavy load, and I will give you rest" [Matt 11:28]. God's invitation is most simply put: "Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and believe in your heart that God hath raised him from the dead, and you will be saved" [Rom 10:9].

And now, at the request of Ken Taylor, we are going to have a moment of silent prayer, that those who are believers will pray in a spirit of refreshed dedication, that henceforth we will read the Word of God more faithfully and understandingly than we have in the past. And if there are those who have come into this building in unbelief, that you too will pray, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." In a moment of silence we'll pray, then I'll pray, and then a word from Ken Taylor.

### Prayer

*Sovereign God, fill our minds with grandeur at the thought that with you one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day. Change*

*and decay all around we see, yet with you is no variableness, no shadow, but glorious immortality.*

*May we rejoice this day, that while men die, the Lord lives! That while all creatures are broken reeds, empty cisterns, fading flowers, withering grass, You, O Lord, are the Rock of Ages, the fountain of living waters, the joy of man's desiring, the giver of rest to every contrite heart. Amen.*