This may seem like a strange topic for a man who is literally dying. I do not want to appear frivolous, dramatic, or morbid, but I would like to express exactly how I feel. We have always preached about the glories of passing on and we have quoted Paul in saying, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all" of you wonderful, wonderful people of the Canton Gospel Center who "love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6, 7, 8). We used to read that passage and wonder, Would I feel this way or would it just be putting up a front, so to speak? Now, I can tell you.

My kidneys have been in the process of deterioration for a number of years through glomerulonephritis, an incurable kidney condition. I knew that my life would be shortened but I didn't know how much. The time has come that all human agencies have failed and I must go. How does it feel?

A year and a half ago, I asked the Doctor how much time I had left. At that time he was as evasive as possible and said two to five years, perhaps. About a year and a half have gone and Doctor White appears to know exactly what the score is from having had many other cases. I am at the moment of this writing in the hospital, having had all together seven blood transfusions. I told Doctor White, whom I believe is a thorough physician, that I was ready to go, that I did not fear death, and I believed in what I have been preaching, and if he knew for certain anything about how many days I have left, I wished he would tell me and be frank with me. I also told him that I did not care to be a guinea pig and go through ridiculous and expensive operations just to buy another month's time here on earth if there was no hope. If I could buy another year of life in order to be here just to advise my children in taking my place, no expense would be too much. However, I do not care to be lying around with tubes and experimental jobs, when we know that there is absolutely no hope. The Doctor frankly told me that he felt that I had at least a week, possibly a month, and of course, possibly but not probably six months. All he could really feel sure of was a week.

I have had a strange experience which one cannot put into words, but must be experienced to know. I have no fear concerning the end. All fright has been taken away. Someone has said, "God gives grace for dying as well as grace to live." I have always felt that I would fear death because of the unknown, but it is true that God gives us grace for every task as it is needed. He gives us grace to live, grace to battle and grace to die. I can honestly say I am looking forward to it. I don't want anyone to turn me back. The fact that our prayers have been answered is revealed in the peace of heart and now knowing the will of God for me. Jesus prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane desperately. He cried all night for the cup to pass from His lips, but He finally accepted the will of God, rose from His knees and as much as said, "Let's quit praying now, quit struggling; it is all over and I am now ready for God's purpose and plan." Paul, the apostle, likewise said, "I have prayed thrice, that it might depart from me." The Lord answered him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Paul said, "Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." Paul appears to have as much as said, "Let's quit praying now — the time for prayer is over and let's accept the will of God."

Friends all over the nation have literally held me up in prayer. The people of our church have faithfully, in prayer meetings, literally begged the mercy of God in my behalf. I do not want them to feel that God has let them down. Their prayers have been marvelously answered in the fact that God's will has been made known to me and I have been given a peace that I can't explain and I don't want to turn back.

I have traveled the world around and I've gone on many trips. My first experience in traveling around the world was somewhat frightening. I was filled with mingled emotions, the importance of its purpose, with the want of its pleasure and the sorrow of parting. The purpose demanded it, the pleasure encouraged it and the parting drew tears. But the joys far superseded the sorrows. I literally feel that I am taking another trip only in a much safer traveling vehicle than I have ever had before and there is not nearly as much fear, for He said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." He is literally fulfilling that promise in me. Of course, there are the tears of good-by and thought of leaving the family and friends, but I do not want the tears to be misinterpreted. Now that I get ready to cross the river, it is strange how earthly values have changed. The things that I thought were so important are not and the things which we gave little heed to are tremendously important. All bitterness has left.

Let me illustrate it in this way. Through my childhood days, I had many battles with my brothers and sisters. As we grew older our values changed and what was bitter in the early days became humorous to us now and became an enjoyable point of conversation. Friends that have visited me in more recent years have discussed the growing of our church. We talked about the trials and the conflicts and many incidents that we had at that time become humorous to us now. As I get ready to embark on the mystic river of death, all bitterness has become incidental, and in the lives of all of those people all I can remember is the tremendous good that they have done. This causes me to cry and I am only afraid that the onlooker will misinterpret my tears and feel that it is because of the fear of death. Why should a Christian not want to die? Every passage in the Bible indicates something greater on the other side. In Matthew 25:21 we read, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: ENTER THOU INTO THE JOY OF THY LORD." I can now for the first time understand Paul's statements, "We are . . . willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8) and "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim. 4:6).

My wife and I have discussed the occasion freely. We want to talk about it as though it were as common as sitting down to a meal. My chief concern is my loved ones that I have to leave behind. I find myself wishing that I could make up a bus load and take us all together.

If I had been choosing the time of my life to depart, I would like to have had three more years so that I might see my son through college. But God has given me the privilege of hearing him preach and I am quite confident now that he will make it on his own under God's guidance. To ordain him to the Gospel ministry at nineteen years of age would seem to some, perhaps, to be premature. However, he has been rigidly examined by eleven qualified ministers who have recommended the procedure of ordination. No greater joy could thrill my heart. I somehow feel the experience of the prophet Elijah when he left and his mantle fell upon Elisha. It is not a coincidence that my son is able to answer the call at the exact time of my passing.

We are proud for this occasion to ordain two young men. Others are soon to follow. Larry Myerchin's father passed away when he was two years old. His mother was hospitalized for an extended time and Larry was brought up in a children's home. In strange ways God has led him through the path and the influence of the Canton Gospel Center where he gave his life to Christ and where his future plans have been cast. He has made basically his own way through Bob Jones University, and now is a senior in the ministerial course. At this point, our approval of ordination will be of great value to him as he looks beyond graduation to full time service. We are proud and pleased to help him in every way we can.

I feel, at this point, that this may be my concluding sermon at the Canton Gospel Center. After almost a quarter of a century of service, I could not be happier than to have this opportunity of invoking the blessing of God on these two young men and especially since one of them is my own flesh and blood and the other I love equally as well.

And now I have just a word for the congregation. Believe me, I am not casting you aside and feeling that it doesn't matter what happens to you