



I'll fly away to a home on God's celestial shore

¹ Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. ² For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. ³ Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. ⁴ And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. (Isaiah 34:1-4)

Many of you may have heard this Gospel Song first in the movie, *O Brother, Where Art Thou*; but it was a common household song when I was growing up in the Blue Ridge Mountains in the 1940s. In those days, we did not have a separate Christian radio station for every commercial station in my region began the broadcast day with preaching, Bible study, and hymns. Though bluegrass is not one of my top choices for genre of musical styles, there are certain of those old gospel songs that strike a chord in my heart and remind me of many long-forgotten friends, as well as a time when the mountains of the Lord were all located in east Tennessee. Though I would usually be writing devotion about an Advent hymn at this time, I have decided to defer that writing until next week and respond to the sweet desires of a lovely member of St. Peter's Anglican Church in Statesville, NC named Linda.

The song is composed by Mr. Albert Edward Brumley (1905-1977) who owned Hartford Musical Institute of Hartford, Arkansas. He is the author of more than 800 gospel songs that were composed to be sung by shape notes. Among some of his more popular pieces are: "*I'll Meet You in the Morning*", "*Listen to the Radio*", and "*This World is not my Home – I'm Just Passing Through*." Now, once again, you may not be familiar with any of these songs, but for me, it was daily fare on the radio stations of the Blue Ridge. As a little boy, I used to wonder about Flying Away and how that would be accomplished. Now I know. Just as certainly as the body of man returns to the dust of the earth at death, so does the "*Spirit return to God who gave it*". (Eccl 12:7) Consider also the heavenly escort to which Lazarus was treated at death compared to the rich man:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was

laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (Luke 16:19-23)

I'll Fly Away

Some glad morning when this life is o'er,
I'll fly away.
To a home on God's celestial shore,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.
When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

When the shadows of this life have flown,
I'll fly away.
Like a bird thrown, driven by the storm,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.
When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

Just a few more weary days and then,
I'll fly away.
To a land where joy shall never end,
I'll fly away.

I'll fly away, O Glory,
I'll fly away.
When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye,
I'll fly away.

"Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away. To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, O Glory, I'll fly away. When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye, I'll fly away." There is quite a depth of spiritual insight planted in the lyrics of this song. We have all had moments when we wished that we could simply "fly away" from the troubles and problems that beset us. That is called, by psychologist, *escapism*. Well, there is coming a great escape much like that of Noah and his family aboard the Ark during the Deluge! Of course, our modern-day Ark is the Lord Jesus Christ. All who are in Him shall be saved and will "fly away" from the destruction that comes upon the earth at the last trumpet. You will note that the author says that this great release will happen *"Some glad morning."* How true this is! When this life is over, there will be the most glorious and resplendently light morning of all time and eternity – a never-ending day will begin with a never-ending morning. The beloved of God will take wing at the point of death, and be escorted to that Celestial Shore remarked in the song.

"When the shadows of this life have gone, I'll fly away. Like a bird from these prison

walls I'll fly, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, O Glory, I'll fly away. When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye, I'll fly away." Though the similarity of a bird in flight is symbolic, they are not altogether accurate. We shall not fly away by our own works and efforts, but carried by the angels in the Grace of God. Truly, this life, and the body in which it dwells, is a prison. But we shall be released from the prison at the "twinkling of an eye." "*Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*" (1 Cor 15:51-55) Just like the shadow of death in the 23rd Psalm, this life, too, is merely a shadow of the true life to come. I truly love the family prayer for evenings found on pages 594 & 595 of the 1928 Book of Common Prayer:

"O LORD, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen."

"Just a few more weary days and then, I'll fly away. To a land where joy shall never end, I'll fly away. I'll fly away, O Glory, I'll fly away. When I die, Hallelujah, bye and bye, I'll fly away." What are the days of our lives compared to the Eternity that awaits every living soul – saved or lost? Every soul has an "*appointment in Samara.*" (Fate) Our days are brief and uncertain. Eternity is sure and endless. As we grown older in this life, we begin to understand that life has slipped by as an "*Arab folds his tent in the Night and slips away.*" Where did all of those beautiful, exuberant days of youth go? "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" (James 4:13-14) Have you ever noticed the vapor of steam as it leaves the lip of the kettle? It lingers only a brief moment and is no more. What of the flowers of the field? "*All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*" (Isaiah 40:6-8)

We are not to despond over this fact of life with which the Lord has blessed us. We are to make the best of that which is now, and that which is to come, by God's Grace. Though expressed with great beauty, the immortal words of Thomas Gray, in *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, slightly miss the mark: "*Full many a gem of purest ray serene The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear: Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air.*" The sweetness of the Christian soul enjoys an eternal rest in the blessed bosom of our Lord Jesus Christ – and no sweetness wasted.