

The Brevity of Life



In this world, nothing is certain, except death and taxes, wrote Ben Franklin in 1789. During the next 100 years, Mark Twain popularized those words through his own writing. It's remarkable how times do and don't change, isn't it? Death and taxes are still certain at the turn of the 21st century, but ironically, while today's society has come to grips with taxes (albeit grudgingly at times), this same society has shown a complete unwillingness to come face to face with death. Many people flat out deny or refuse to discuss it, looking for cryonics or some other future technology to eliminate death. Others simply shy away out of fear, hoping if they don't think about it, then maybe somehow it will just "go away." Across the board, the dilemma remains: people today seem unable to address it, deal with it, or respond to it in any meaningful way.

Yet, each of us inevitably faces death. Have you ever stopped to consider that in 100 years from now, you and I and everyone else now living in this world will be dead? In a manner of speaking, planet earth is one big graveyard! So, there you have it. Death is certain and sometimes, unexplainably swift. So, what now? If we as a people struggle to address death, then where do we turn?

The Bible speaks about the certainty of death from cover to cover. It also speaks about our longevity. *“The length of our days is seventy years - or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow for they quickly pass, and we fly away”* (Psalm 90:10). The Bible encourages us to *“number our days.”* In Psalm 90:12 it says, *“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* If we accept the fact that on average, we might live to be 70 years old, then we can know how to “number our days.”

Take a calculator and key in 365. This number accounts for the days making up one year. Now multiply 365 by 70 (years) and you will get a finite number of 25,550. That is the average number of days an average person can anticipate living. Simple enough. Hardly the likes of “rocket science.” Positionally then, we can all determine “where we are” in our own personal sandglass of time. If you are, for example, nearing the age of 35, then you are more or less “middle-aged.” Half of your time is gone, or spent. If you are 70 years old or older, then many would say you are on “borrowed time” or “running on fumes;” much like the race car driver who passes up the last pit stop in an attempt to win the race. It is only a matter of time then, before the car finally stops!

Using another analogy, take your Bible, or any other book, and hold it between your hands in front of you. If this book represents the whole of your life span, then half of the pages represent half of your life lived and the other half represents how many pages of life you have left to go. Where are you in the book of earthly life lived today? How many more pages are left? What are you doing with them? What will you do with your page today?

The great American literary writer Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “This time, like every time, is a very good time, if we but know what to do with it.”

Let’s look at James 4:13-15, which reads, *“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”*

Thus, the phrase “Lord willing” originated in the Bible. Look closely now at James 4:15, which says, *“If it is the Lord’s will, we will live . . .”* Did you know that you are alive today because God wills it? He wants you alive right now at this

point in history for some reason. WOW! Think about it. While we are not here for long, we are here for a reason, for a purpose. What are you doing with your time here? Proverbs 27:1 says, ***“Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth.”***

Perhaps you have noticed the Latin inscription *tempus fugit* on a grandfather clock. It means “time flies.” Psalm 39:5 supports this idea when it says ***“You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath.”*** In his later years, evangelist Billy Graham stated, “The greatest surprise in life to me is ***the brevity of life.***”

Like me, you may not have acknowledged the brevity of life until someone you know, maybe someone very close to you, passed away. When my younger sister, Jane, died, I remember many people asking at the time, “Why? Why did she die so young?”

It was then that I thought of this analogy, which I’d like to share with you. I believe that God has made each of us somewhat like PARKING METERS when we are born. Then God puts some money in us and sets our meters “ticking.” Listen to our hearts . . . “TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK.” He puts different denominations of coins in each of our meters, and with each “metered

life,” this measured “time” (known only to God), begins to tick away. This precious time is a gift from God (He buys us the time). Then when the time he has bought us is spent, when our time is up . . . the flag pops up and reads, “EXPIRED.” Yes, “EXPIRED.”

Interestingly, the word “expired” literally means, “out of breath.” Inspire means to breathe into (inhale). God buys us the time and God gives us the breath to live moment by moment. Don’t you see, all life is a gift from God . . . and when a loved-one dies, at whatever age, we need not ask “Why?” Rather, we should say, “Thank you, God, for the gift of life; for the gift of time down here that this loved-one shared with us before they expired.” Yesterday is the past. Tomorrow is the future. But today is a gift. That is why it is called the present . . . today is your present.

But that is not the whole gift story . . . For God also has ANOTHER gift for us . . . the FREE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE. His desire is to have a loving relationship with each of us forever. And the good news is this, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16).

God’s absolute moral perfection is the standard upon which this relationship is based.

Matthew 5:48 says, ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.”*** Why perfection? Imagine for a moment that you prepared dinner for a fixed number of guests. At the last moment, you learned that more guests would be coming. To extend your recipe, you decided to add some leftover ingredients that had gone slightly bad, hoping that they would be absorbed in with the good ingredients and not be noticed. No, I don’t think we would do that! We know that no matter how small the amount of spoiled food — spoiled food, by nature, contaminates, and when mixed in with the other ingredients, the whole batch then becomes contaminated. Similarly, God cannot allow any sin into heaven, not even a small amount, lest it contaminate the entire place.

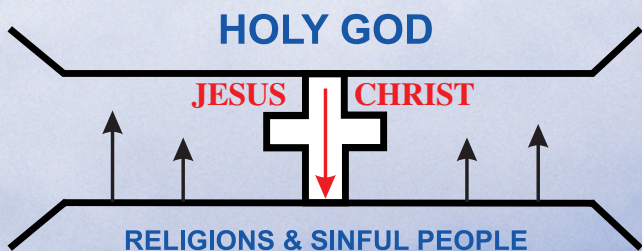
The Bible tells us that we fall short of God’s standard of perfection. Romans 3:23 says, ***“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*** Short means to “miss the mark,” and Romans 6:23 says, ***“For the wages of sin is death (eternal spiritual separation), but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** And Isaiah 59:2 says, ***“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”***

Picture all of humanity lined up around the rim of a canyon. The object is for each person to

jump from one side of the rim to the other. Each person's ability to jump is directly proportional to how many good deeds he has performed. A mass murderer goes only one foot and plummets downward. The average person jumps 8 to 10 feet, but this, too, is still far short of the goal. An exceptionally good person jumps 25 feet away from the bank. But the same thing occurs to everyone who jumps — each falls far short of the other side. Great differences exist among people in their levels of goodness, but all of mankind falls short of perfection.

God, in the person of Jesus Christ, took the initiative to search for man by substituting Christ's perfection for our imperfection. He did this through his death, burial and resurrection. I Peter 3:18 testifies to this, saying, *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.”*

Some people are confused about all of the various religions and denominations around today. I have found the following definitions helpful in understanding the difference between religion and Christianity. Religion can be defined as, “man's best attempt to reach God.” Whereas, Christianity can be defined as, “God's best attempt to reach man (through the person of Jesus Christ).”



The diagram above illustrates what I mean.

Remember, religions and denominations are man-made institutions. Some might refer to them as labels, or better yet, designer labels. People are drawn to pick up these designer labels; some through membership in a given house of worship, because doing so creates a sense of security and belonging. But labels, in-and-of-themselves, cannot get you into heaven — that would be an insult to the finished work of God through Jesus Christ.

Historically, the early Christian church had none of these labels. They were simply called Christians, which literally means followers of the teachings of Christ. Please understand, we need the local churches and various houses of worship for instruction, correction, confession, encouragement and fellowship. When it comes time to die, however, the Bible tells us that each one of us will need to meet God on His terms and according to His plan.

God explains His terms and demonstrates His plan in I John 4:9-10, where it says, *“This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice [satisfactory payment] for our sins.”*

We are all invited to heaven, but it is by RSVP only (a response from you is required). So, the search for God ends in a choice: Either accept or reject Christ’s perfection and payment for you. What will be **your** final answer?

Accepting God’s gift involves:

- 1. Understanding and agreeing with the facts.** *“These have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name”* (John 20:31).
- 2. Transferring your trust from yourself to Jesus Christ.** *“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”* (John 1:12).

Now you can have a personal relationship with God.

Romans 10:9-13 says, *“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart*

that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For, it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, 'Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and rightly blesses all who call on him, for, 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

You Can Receive Christ Right Now by Faith Through Prayer (Prayer is talking with God).

God knows your heart and is not as concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer.

Lord Jesus, I need You. I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life. (Take a few moments to ask His forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience.) Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.

Thank You that You died on the cross for me so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank You that You offer me forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life. I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by Your Holy Spirit to be with me forever.

Thank You, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, I invite you to pray this prayer now, and Jesus Christ will come into your life, as He promised. Then, I encourage you to find a local house of worship where Christ is magnified and where you'll be encouraged and equipped to grow in your new relationship with Him.

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