

## Seeing Life from a Biblical Perspective

Psalm 39:4-7, 12b

Yesterday we celebrated the life of Barb Lewis. In The Salvation Army, when a believer and faithful follower of the Lord departs this life and enters Heaven, we speak of them as having been *promoted to glory*. Isn't that a beautiful expression? Its beauty, however, lies not merely in its language or phraseology, but in the reality that at the close of this brief life on earth we do not cease to exist, rather we are transported to a higher sphere of existence, one wherein we dwell eternally in the visible presence of our glorious God.

In light of that, I want to give you something to ponder deeply. Suppose, after a routine examination, your doctor tells you that you have a terminal illness. The specialist agrees and tells you that you can likely count on about one more year of life.

How would such a prognosis change your perspective on life? How would you reorder your priorities, realign your activities, and invest your remaining time? In other words, what changes would you make? Now mark this:

**The degree to which it would alter your present perspective on life and change your priorities is the difference between your current view of life and the Biblical view of life.**

You see, the Biblical view of life emphasizes the brevity of our time on earth. This life is but a journey; we are sojourners, travelers, and this is not our final destination. Rather, it is a time of preparation for eternity. The implications of this view are profound. It means there is an urgency to invest our time, as well as our talents and spiritual gifts, in ways that will have lasting consequences for the good of the kingdom of God.

The prevailing view of life in our culture, however, tends to postpone dealing with the implications of life's brevity, and treats this life as though it will go on forever. Countless legions of people either postpone thinking about life in the hereafter, or else they deny it altogether, as they labor to build worldly assets and estates, which they know, with a moment's thought, they cannot take with them. We see them out jogging, taking care of their bodies but neglecting their souls. They are heedless of what Augustine wrote: **"We must care for our bodies as though we were going to live forever, but we must care for our souls as if we were going to die tomorrow."**

Here, then, is a radical suggestion? If a terminal illness would cause some of us to make significant changes in our priorities, then why not make those changes right now, unprompted by such a prognosis? Why not adopt a thoroughly Biblical view of life right now, and approach life with an urgency to put the kingdom of God first? Why not come to grips with life's brevity and live it accordingly? Isaac Watts must have had such a perspective on life when he wrote his beloved hymn, *O God, Our Help in Ages Past*:

*Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten as a dream dies on the op'ning day.  
The busy tribes of flesh and blood with all their cares and fears,  
Are carried downward like a flood and lost in following years.*

These words resonate with verses 5-6 in Psalm 39:

***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. Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it.***

The prophet Isaiah has the same idea in contrasting this temporal life with eternity:

***"All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."*** (40:6b-8)

James, the brother of Jesus, reflected on this reality when he warned not to boast about tomorrow:

***"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. You ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.'" (4:14-15)***

All of these Scriptures drive home the same point: our stay on this earth is briefer than most of us would like to think, and what is done – or not done – here and now has profound and eternal consequences. We are constructing a destiny for ourselves – and the march of time is swift and relentless!

I do not think that this way – the Biblical way - of viewing life is morbid. Rather, it is both realistic and hopeful. It is realistic because it reflects the way things really are. George Bernard Shaw put it this way: "The statistics on death are impressive. One out of one dies!"

On the other hand, it is hopeful because it reminds us that there is much more to life than what we presently see. The Bible assures us that our longing for more than this fallen world can offer is not a hopeless dream. We are invited to enter into not only an experience of forgiveness, but also into a newness of life in Christ, a life that will never fade, tarnish, or diminish. And this life has as its focus God and His coming kingdom.

I feel so sorry for all those lost souls who are caught up in systems of thought that exclude our God. I care not how you label these world-views; naturalism, atheism, humanism, or materialism. They all amount to a dead-end. They leave their adherents with no place to go and nothing to which to look forward.

I feel equally sorry for those who are caught up in systems of thought which embrace reincarnation. The popular understanding of reincarnation here in the West is flawed. The religions of the East teach that reincarnation is undesirable? Why? Because it keeps the soul going around and around on the painful wheel of life. The object is to get off the wheel and be absorbed into what they call the "ocean of life," a state of existence that involves neither personal consciousness nor relationships.

But the Scriptures teach something quite different. They teach that everything in this life is a preparation for the believer's resurrection into an eternally new existence filled with life, light, love, and intimacy with our Lord and with one another. Jesus once told his disciples, "***I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man***" (John 1:51). Our Lord was saying that he is the point of contact between heaven and earth, that he is the bridge on which humanity may cross over into the kingdom. It's another way of saying, "***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me***" (John 14:6). Let me tell you in the words of Kenneth Boa, our God "never builds a staircase that leads to nowhere." The Christ-road leads directly to the Father!

Let me illustrate how important the right perspective on life is. Suppose someone plans to move from Victoria to Swift Current, Saskatchewan. They will spend the remaining fifty years of their life there. So what do they do?

They carefully prepare for the two-day drive by pouring over every detail of the journey. Maps are studied, rest stops and refueling stops are planned, what motel they will stay at, what meals they will eat, where they will eat them – its all planned. Nothing about the two-day journey is left to chance. Oddly, however, no arrangements are made for the fifty years they will spend in Swift Current. None! They do not know what they will do when they get there!

Well, you say, that is an absurd analogy. Precisely! But it's just the way many people proceed through life. In this analogy, the two-day trip represents our earthly sojourn, and the fifty-year stay represents eternity. How many people there are who are careless with their eternal destiny, perhaps because it seems so vague. Maybe this careless reality is what prompted Jim Rohn to make this sobering observation:

**"I find it fascinating that most people plan their vacations with better care than they plan their lives. Perhaps that is because escape is easier than change."**

Look, here's what it all comes down to. If we examine our deepest longings, it becomes all too evident that our aspirations cannot be satisfied by the offerings of this fallen and fleeting world. There is insufficient time, opportunity, and energy to do all the things with which the world entices us. As A.W. Tozer so aptly puts it:

**"The days of the years of our lives are few, and swifter than a weaver's shuttle. Life is a short and fevered rehearsal for a concert we cannot stay to give. Just when we appear to have attained some proficiency we are forced to lay our instruments down. There is simply not enough time to think, to become, to perform what the constitution of our natures indicates we are capable of."**

So what is the answer to the brevity of life? It is to realize that we are aliens here, our citizenship is in Heaven, and we are travelers en route to our true home in the kingdom of God. It is to realize that this life is only a preparation for the next life, and that we are to use everything we've received from God in working for His glory and the extension of His kingdom.

You may say, "But I don't have much to give. My talents are meager. I'm not gifted as others are." Then I say to you, if you feel that you cannot minister out of your ability, then minister out of your inability. Our God's power is so great that He can use even our inability to make a difference.

I read of a man involved in a terrible accident. When they freed his body from the wreckage, using the “jaws of life,” he was almost given up for dead. He survived, but when the surgeons had finished their work there remained only a wreck of a man. Both legs were gone; the left arm was missing along with part of the collarbone. Only a finger and thumb remained on the right hand.

He still possessed a brilliant mind, however, enriched with a first class education and broadened with world travel. Was such a mind to go to waste, imprisoned as it was in a near useless body?

A thought came to him. It had always been encouraging for him to receive letters. Why not write them - he could still use his right hand with some difficulty. But to whom could he write? Perhaps there were shut-ins, or those who were incapacitated, as he was, who could be encouraged by his letters. He thought of men in prison - they did have some hope of release whereas he had none - but it was worth a try. So he wrote to a Christian organization dedicated to prison ministry. He was advised that his letters could not be answered - it was against prison rules.

Undaunted, he commenced his ministry of one-sided correspondence to the penitentiary. He wrote twice a week. It taxed his strength to the limit. Into those letters he poured his soul, his life experience, his faith in God, and all his Christian optimism. It was difficult writing those letters. They were often penned in pain and with the knowledge that he could expect no reply. He often felt discouraged and was tempted to give up. It was, however, a ministry, as well as his one remaining activity. He resolved to continue as long as he could.

One day he unexpectedly got a letter in reply. It was written on prison stationery by the officer whose duty it was to censor the mail. It contained only two sentences: **“Please write on the best paper you can afford. Your letters are passed from cell to cell till they literally fall to pieces.”**

This “wreck of a man” did what he could with the rest of his life. He served the Lord by ministering to others who needed the encouragement of his Christian witness. Where others might have given up, he redeemed the time, making every day count, by turning outward toward others. Unless we are worse off than he was, we, too, can do something for our Lord and for others.

My prayer is that the Lord will teach me and you to number our days, and to know that every one of them is a preparation day for eternity. Let us do for our Lord – and for others - all we can with all we have for as long as we live. The apostle Paul writes, **“Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”** (1 Cor. 15:58). This is how to spend the days of our brief life here on earth. This is how to reap the eternal destiny that awaits those who serve the Lord.

(I credit many of the ideas in this message to Kenneth Boa, some of whose thoughts in *Conformed to His Image* I have paraphrased. His ideas were so well presented that I felt compelled to share them.)