

Could This Be the Last Day of Your Life?

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Whenever someone mentions the idea that this life may come to an end, there is a certain uneasiness that most of us begin to feel. We are not alone in that feeling; in fact, there is always a kind of fear involved in discussing the subject.

Many people become absolutely terrified at the thought of this life ending. Louis XV, king of France, was so afraid of dying that he ordered that the word “death” should never be mentioned in his presence. He also ordered that every effort should be made to keep him from even seeing statues or other works of art that might remind him of this subject. But for all his fears, Louis XV died of smallpox on May 10, 1774.

Most of us can identify with the feelings of the king of France. On one hand, we see the tremendous scientific and medical accomplishments of the last few decades. It has been said that the average person in his home today can treat diseases better than doctors could fifty years ago in hospitals. But we are beginning to sense that science and technology will not bring us the answers to our problems and certainly will not allow us to live forever.

In spite of the uncertainty that we feel about the future, there is still the idea in the minds of most people that they will be alive for many years to come.

They just cannot bring themselves to consider the possibility that their lives will end someday. Why not? Maybe it is because people get too busy with other things. They get too busy making money, buying land, building houses, raising children, and generally trying to keep the bills paid. They get so busy, in fact, that they forget to pray and study the Bible and go to church and live godly lives. The result is that many individuals around us today exist without any sense of direction, without any purpose, and without any notion of living more acceptable lives in the eyes of God.

If they could ever slow down long enough to think about it, they would certainly admit that the time is coming when we all are going to die. Human experience tells us that this is so, and every time we drive past a cemetery, it is further emphasized.

People may go to a funeral and hear the preacher read the words of Job from the Bible:

Job 14.1-2 - Man, who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil. Like a flower he comes forth and withers; he also flees like a shadow and does not remain.

People know all this, so why are they still rushing through this life without making any plans for the next one? Maybe in all of their

activity, they have placed too much faith in the word “tomorrow.” Yes, they may lose their jobs...tomorrow. They may get sick...tomorrow. They may even die...tomorrow. But as far as today is concerned, those are things that only happen to other people.

It would do us all good to slow down and think about the question: Could this be the last day of my life? The hourglass is running out for every person. Could it possibly run out for you today? Could there really be just a few more grains of sand left in your hourglass? Could this be the last day of your life?

We Cannot Avoid Dying

There was a man in the Bible who forgot that fact, and the Lord told a parable about him; we call it the Parable of the Rich Fool. It was the story of a man who owned a big farm. God sent sunshine and rain, and this farmer had a very successful season. In fact, at harvest time he had so much grain that his barns could not hold any more, so he decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. After all, he had plenty of money stored away and plenty of security for the future:

Luke 12.17-19 - And he began reasoning to himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?” And he said, “This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.”

But Jesus Christ called that man a fool:

Luke 12.20-21 - But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you

have prepared?” So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

The Rich Fool had forgotten that death is real and that it is an absolute, certain fact of life. He had also forgotten that the God who gives life has the power to take it away. So this prosperous farmer did not live to enjoy all of that prosperity. We must not be that foolish!

People today can hide their fear of dying very well. They can cover it up with the pursuit of “success.” They can say to themselves, “I’ll show the world what I’m worth. I’ll get money. I’ll buy everything I want. I’ll go to all the parties. I’ll rise to the top of the company and be king of the mountain, and nobody is going to stop me!”

But people should listen to the words of those who have reached success in the eyes of the world. One of the most famous movie stars of our generation looked back on her career in entertainment and wrote these words:

“I am just a piece of meat. I fulfill the ambitions of other people to make money out of me.... I thought it was very peculiar that I had acquired everything I wanted as a child – wealth, fame and accomplishments in my career. I had beautiful children and a lifestyle that seemed terrific, and yet I was totally and miserably unhappy. I found it very frightening that one could acquire all these things and still be so miserable.”

Let us never believe Satan’s lie that death will not touch us. He wants us to forget about the passing nature of life, and he tries to convince us that happiness comes from making more money, going to more parties, and enduring the latest thrill.

Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us that all of these things will fade in time, and then we must face God in judgment.

Recently, the newspapers carried an article about three hikers who got lost in a snowstorm on Mt. Washington in New Hampshire. Conditions became so bad for them that they had to start burning their money in order to keep from freezing to death. This is a great lesson for all of us. In the final analysis, money is just paper with ink on it. If we place our faith in it, we will be sadly disappointed. We cannot use our money to extend our lives indefinitely, any more than the Rich Fool's money could have kept him alive for another day.

There are people who are very successful in the eyes of the world, but one day they will die and be buried in fine caskets with many flowers. Then Christ will say to them: "You fool."

The real question that we should all be considering is: Do I fully understand that death is coming for me? The Rich Fool somehow missed that fact. Whether we admit it or not, the truth is that life will end one day for all people, with the one exception that some may live until the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Even when a person lives a normal lifespan, the time passes so quickly. Job said,

Job 7.6 - My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to an end without hope.

Have you ever seen an old-fashioned loom? The shuttle shoots back and forth across the loom, and each action takes only a second or two. The most common statement that we hear from older people is, "How did life go so fast? What happened to all the years?"

They will often speak of things that happened a half-century ago as if they took place yesterday. Let us all make sure that we understand that we cannot stop time – we cannot even slow it down. It will truly go faster than a "weaver's shuttle."

Life Can End Very Suddenly

The story of the Rich Fool should also teach us that life can end very suddenly. God said, "*This very night your soul is required of you*" (Luke 12:20). The Rich Fool was a very successful farmer and was obviously a good businessman. There is no evidence that he was dishonest or was a bad citizen in the community. He just did not realize how abruptly life could be taken away. He could steer the plow through the fields, but he could not steer his feet clear of the grave that night. He had not planned on meeting God within the next twelve hours.

Many people today think that they will be ready for death. They think that they will call the family members around the bedside and read the will and say good-bye to everyone, but it will probably not be that way. In fact, all preachers will tell you that most funerals are for those who had not expected to die. Most have no warning that it is going to be the last day of their lives.

It would do us good to read the obituary column in the newspaper for several days, and, if possible, try to see if the deceased knew that death was coming. We will find out just how arrogant it is for anyone to say, "I have the power to keep my life going for another day." We must live our lives realizing that only God knows what each day is going to bring.

The Bible tells us this is very forceful language.

James 4.13-15 - Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that."

We may have the most sophisticated watches and clocks that money can buy, but we are not good at telling God's time. For the Rich Fool, there was a big difference between "many years" and "this very night." It is important that we set our watches by God's time, which means that this life is very temporary.

Too many of our friends put off becoming Christians until they can get everything just perfect in their lives. They are always planning on that new house, or a new job, or getting the children through college, or retirement. They work and dream and save for some future event. But, as James said, life is like a vapor – it is here for a little while, and then it is gone. Planes crash, cars wreck, houses burn down, diseases strike, and the vapor of life suddenly disappears.

In Peshtigo, Wisconsin, there is a very interesting museum devoted to the Great Peshtigo Fire that took place October 8, 1871 (ironically the same night as the Great Chicago Fire). More than eight hundred people lost their lives as a wall of flames swept through the town from nearby forests. It holds the record of having the greatest loss of human life from any one fire. Within three hours, the damage had been done. The museum has newspaper clippings from the next day, and one article had the headlines: "Day Began Calmly, But City Destroyed by Evening." Headlines like that will make us stop and think about life.

There is a Greek legend about a young man named Damocles who wanted to be king. He thought that it would be an easy job and would give him the kind of power he liked. The king decided to teach Damocles a lesson, so he invited him to a feast and let him sit in the king's chair. But then the king asked Damocles to look up. To his horror, he saw that right above him there was a sword suspended by one human hair. It could fall at any moment and kill him! We now have the expression that the "sword of Damocles" is hanging over someone, but really it is hanging over us all because of the fragile nature of this life.

What will our "success" be worth tomorrow if this is the last day of life for us?

How Then Should We Live?

Our goal should not be to make anyone become obsessed with the thought of death. There is no way that we would want to spend every waking moment thinking about the possibility of dying the next moment. In fact, once we understand what the Bible says on this subject, we should no longer be terrorized by the thought of dying.

As the Apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 15.55-57 - O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The answer to the fear of death is to obey the gospel and live a life that is faithful to that gospel. Obeying the gospel means humbling ourselves to the will of God and obeying His commands. To become a Christian, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ (*John 3:16*), confess our faith to

others (*Matthew 10:32-33*), repent of our sins (*Luke 13:3*), and be baptized (*Acts 2:38*). At the point of baptism, our sins are forgiven, and we are added to the New Testament church, which is the body of Christ.

Once we have obeyed the gospel, then the blessings of God are showered upon us. The Apostle Paul was even able to say that departing from this life would be a joyous event for the faithful Christian:

2 Corinthians 5.1, 8 - For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heaven. We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

But many people really do not want to change their lives by obeying the gospel. They begin to make excuses, such as, "I'll have to think about it." Suppose a person is starving to death and crawls up to the front door of your house and says, "I haven't had any food for days, and I don't think that I can live any longer unless I get something to eat." You say to him, "Come into my house; we have plenty of food for you to eat." But then he answers, "Well, I really appreciate it, and I know that you are interested in my welfare, but I'll tell you what I am going to do: I'm going to think about it." Would that person be sincere in wanting to save his life?

Suppose we see a man in a little boat, and he is approaching a dangerous waterfall. We shout to the man and tell him that he should get out of the water immediately; otherwise, he will be killed by the falls. He shouts back, "Thanks for the warning, but I'll have to think about it for a while." Would such a man be considered sane?

The only problem with "thinking about it" is that there may not be much time left for that thinking.

Could this actually be the last day of your life? Dear friend, not only could it be the last day, it could be that last hour, or even the last minute! It is very possible that someone reading these thoughts at this very moment will not see tomorrow.

Tomorrow does not exist in reality! It is just a hope, a figment of our imagination. It is not yet within our grasp. We dare not wait until tomorrow to make plans for our eternal destination!

Every Person Must Make a Decision

The gospel of Christ forces each of us to make a decision today. That is the radical nature of the Christian faith. A person does not become a Christian by accident or by default or by coincidence. One does not stumble into being a Christian. Rather, it is a conscious decision that each person must make.

The Christian faith calls for a major change to take place from the old life to the new. Christianity is not just another self-help program or just a case of a person pulling himself up by his own bootstraps, and it certainly does not offer salvation based just on doing good deeds in this life.

But we must be willing to receive the grace that God has extended to us, obey His conditions of salvation, and then walk in His footsteps toward heaven. Are you willing to accept those terms of salvation?

When most people fall asleep tonight, they will be thinking about many things. What will the weather be like tomorrow? What

bills have to be paid tomorrow? How will the job go tomorrow?

But the real question should be: If the Lord calls me away from this life tonight, will I be ready to meet Him in judgment? The Rich Fool made a tragic mistake by placing his faith in his own ability to survive and take care of himself, rather than in God's mercy and grace. If we had told him that his life was about to come to an end, he would have laughed at us and would never have believed that it was possible. Yet it happened, and no one could stop it. We would be very wise if we could learn from this man's mistake.

Whether we depart from this life tonight or not, the truth is that a hundred years from now, we will all have died. One hundred years from now, we will all be in one of two places – either in that place of safety in the arms of Jesus, or in the place of punishment away from the presence of the Lord.

Recently, there was a program on television about the few remaining stonecutters in our country. One of the stonecutters was interviewed and made the comment that working with stone is much different from working with clay. He said, "I must work very carefully and get it right the first time – because I can't go back and do it over." That certainly should be our attitude as we live our lives from day to day. We must begin today to plan for that eternal life offered to us in the Bible. When

someone decides to build a new house, he doesn't expect it to be completed in one day. But once the decision is made, he begins. There is that first brick that is laid. There are those first few boards that are nailed together. There is a starting point. Since this life is all that God has given us to see if we will obey Him and have faith in His word, it is so important that we use our time wisely and remember that our days are numbered. We begin by taking the first step.

Are you ready to begin today on that road that leads to heaven? Decide now that you will obey the gospel of Christ today. Lay that first brick. Put those first few boards together. Receive forgiveness of sins by being baptized (immersed in water) into His kingdom and get into a right relationship with God.

May God bless you as you make that decision, and may you not delay another moment.

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