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“If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come,” Job 14:14.

The Brevity of Human Life

Lesson Aim: To realize the limited time for serving God, and of winning others to Him.

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LIFE! All people hold it as being of great importance, but what is it? A few years ago a college paper offered a prize for “the best definition of life.” Here are a few of the suggestions received; “Life is a bad joke which isn't even funny.” “Life is a disease for which the only cure is death.” “Life is a jail sentence which we get for the crime of being born.” Do you think such definitions were written by Christians or non-Christians? Is that the concept of life which is set forth in the Holy Bible?

Life is never really understood or valued aright until it is seen in the light of God's presence and purpose. Apart from Him, life dissolves into nothing but living death. God is the Source of life and the Goal of life; He alone gives meaning to life.

This lesson deals with two outlooks upon life. It sets forth a principle: life is full of trials, verses 1-2. Then it interprets that principle apart from active faith in God, verses 3-13. Finally, it interprets that principle through the eyes of faith in God, verses 14-15.

How do you look upon life? Is it a burden to be borne or a blessing to be shared? Your answer to those questions will be determined by your personal relationship to God. The aim of this study is “to realize the limited time for serving God, and of winning others to Him.” The lesson should be pursued with the prayer, **“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,”** Psalm 90:12.

I. THE FRAILITY OF MAN, 14:1-2

God made man; he is of great value. God made man of the dust of the ground; he is marked by frailty and temporariness. The decree of God covers each human being, “. . . **dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return,**” Genesis 3:19. Therein lies the explanation for the feebleness of man.

A. Man's frailty is due, in part, to his origin. He is “born of a woman.” Woman is weak and delicate. She brings forth her children with pain. Even the process of childbirth brings her near the portal of death. How can the offspring of one so frail be anything other than frail himself? His mother lives a few years and dies. His fate is to live a brief span and follow her into death. If man came from the skies, being the direct creation of heaven, he might expect to endure; but born to so lowly an estate, being so helpless in infancy, he is born to die. His entire life is affected by the frailty of his origin, Job 15:14; 25:4.

B. Man's frailty is revealed in his brevity. He is here but a “few days.” Jacob the patriarch had lived one hundred thirty years when he testified, “. . . few and evil have the days of the years of my life been . . .,” Genesis 47:9. After one hundred thirty years he counted his days to have been “few and evil!” How much more limited should we feel when the Bible says that the days of our years have been limited to “threescore and ten” (seventy years) though some live a little longer because of their strength, Psalm 90:10. Compare man's longevity with that of the hills. How temporary he is. Some trees now growing in the national forests of our land have been here through many generations. A man is upon the earth but briefly at best.

C. Man's frailty is evidenced by his troubles. Not only is he here “a few days,” but each of those days is declared to be “full of trouble.” Was Job exaggerating the trials of man? Not at all. There is something about man which will never be satisfied with the world. Jacob had gone from being a refugee from his brother's anger to a very wealthy man with a large family and many servants, yet he described his days as having been “few and evil.” Why is man not able to overcome his troubles and live in peace and joy? He cannot because he is so frail. For that reason, if for no other, man needs God in his life. You feel that need, do you not?

D. Man's frailty is illustrated in nature. Man is no permanent resident upon earth. Instead he is as a perishable flower. He is not a shining light. He is rather a fleeting shadow. “A shadow moves on gently and silently, and is soon gone. It leaves no trace of its being, and returns no more. They who have watched the beautiful shadow of a cloud on a landscape, and have seen how rapidly it passes over meadows and fields of grain, and rolls up the mountainside and disappears, will have a vivid

conception of this figure. How gently yet how rapidly it moves. How soon it is gone. How void of impression is its course. Who can track its way; who can reach it? So man moves on. Soon he is gone . . .”—Albert Barnes.

Look about you. There is abundant evidence of the frailty of man. Consider the hospitals, homes for the aged, and the memorial gardens where your beloved dead are buried. Man is here but temporarily. All his skill and all the wisdom of his science cannot remove the temporariness which God has put within his human frame.

II. THE PESSIMISM OF MAN, 14:3-12

Apart from God, man has no hope. He lives out his brief span of life, enduring whatever fate may bring upon him, then dies and goes to his grave with no hope of life hereafter. That is the condition of man apart from God's revelation of life beyond death. Job echoed the pessimism of man without God. Examine his complaint in verses 3-12, noting these observations.

A. Does God really keep watch over lowly man? The question has been proposed by man whose pessimistic spirit has shrouded his mind with doubts, verse 3. Man is so weak, so lowly, so frail, so short-lived. Surely God does not keep watch over him, does He? The answer of revealed religion is a positive, “Yes!” The man who does not know God personally has no such hope.

B. It is not fair that the sovereign God should stand to judge a finite man, is it? The unbeliever complains, “It is unfair that God would seek a trial with one who is so much His inferior. A contest of parties so wholly unequal makes it unworthy of God to maintain a controversy against man.” Such might be the complaint of one who does not know Jesus Christ, but the New Testament revelation makes it clear that He is the Advocate of each who trusts Him. Any man who rejects God's provision in His Son should have to stand in judgment without a defender. The unequal relationship between God and man is man's fault, not God's.

C. Why should frail man be judged for his faults? Job raised the question, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one,” verse 4. He admitted that he had faults. He questioned, “How could it be otherwise since I was born to frail mortal parents?” Why, then, should man be judged for weakness which is not of his own doing? Many people have asked the same question. The Bible makes it clear that God does not condemn men because they are weak. Men are condemned because they refuse to repent and receive forgiveness. It is still true that the offspring resembles its parents. It is still true that every human being is born depraved (warped

toward sin). It is still true that each person must receive forgiveness and cleansing from God, or die in his sins. Each person will be judged. It is wise for one to make preparation against that dread day.

D. Is man the helpless victim of fate? Job declared of man, “. . . **his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass,**” verse 5. Job believed that man's days were numbered, the time of his life was determined, and there was no way by which he might extend the length of his sojourn upon the earth. Helplessly, he will live out a certain time upon the earth, and then he will die. He does not know when he will die; he only knows he will die when the time comes. What a hopeless and dreary outlook upon life. That is exactly the prospect of the person who does not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He sees himself as the helpless victim of a blind fate. How much better it is for one to know God personally and to know himself to be His own dear child. He knows God that way when he trusts Jesus as his Savior.

E. Would man be better off, if God left him alone? That is the question which underlies the statement recorded in verse 6, “**Turn from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.**” Unbelieving men seem to think that the eye of God upon them makes life more miserable. They often say that it would be best if God would look away and permit them to spend their lives in whatever comfort and peace they can find. At best, they believe, life is like a hireling's working out the hours of the day. God's presence only adds to life's burdens, they believe. How different is such an idea from the Christian's assurance that God's eyes are upon the righteous and His ears are attentive to their prayers! Observe how faith swallows up pessimism.

F. Is there really no hope for man beyond death? Verses 7-12 are a gloomy, though beautifully stated, philosophy of hopelessness for man after death. Consider a tree. (1) Even though it is cut down, life still remains in its roots, and other shoots can sprout out from it and grow into full maturity. (2) Even when a tree stump seems to have dried up, the presence of water will make it spring forth into life again. It is not so for man. He leaves no roots behind at death in which seminal powers might reside. Once his body dries up in death, there is nothing that can awaken it to life. Observed from the physical point of view, man entirely vanishes at death.

Examine the situation under another analogy. When a lake of water dries up, there is nothing left to produce more water. “**So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep,**” verse 12. Such words indicate no hope of

resurrection nor idea of transmigration of the soul. It is a simple statement that man, once dead, will never appear again in the land of the living. That is the hopeless pessimism which enslaves the minds of those who do not know God's revelation.

III. THE DESIRE OF MAN, 14:13

Man does not want to die and dissolve into nothingness. There is in every man the desire for existence beyond death. Job spoke for all mankind when he cried, **“Oh that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me,”** verse 13.

A. Man desires to be spared from the wrath of God. There is an instinctive awareness in each person that God will surely judge the world. Even in ancient times, Job recognized that truth. He wished to be shut up in safety in order that the fury of God's tempest might not reach him. The same idea is expressed with assurance in Psalm 27:5, **“For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavillion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock.”**

The prophet Isaiah pictured a time when men would seek protection from God's wrath against sin. **“And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth,”** Isaiah 2:19.

The Christian has a blessed assurance. He has fled for refuge to the “Rock of Ages,” Jesus Christ. Christ is the believer's security!

B. Man desires to be remembered and delivered from death. Job longed for a time when God would visit him again. He wanted a new term, a new opportunity to live beyond death. He desired an appointed time when God would revisit him and deliver him from death.

The desire of man has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He has abolished death and brought immortality to light through the gospel. One day all believing men will cry, **“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”** I Corinthians 15:55. Death will have no more dominion. In that blessed day, **“Death is swallowed up in victory . . . But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,”** I Corinthians 15:54, 57. Man's desire will at last be realized.

IV. THE HOPE OF MAN, 14:14-15

“If a man die, shall he live again?” The question is of greatest importance. Will there really come a time, on the other side of death, when God will call and we will answer? The answer to those questions will give hope or despair to the children of men. What is the answer? Examine Job 19:25-27.

There is hardly a passage in the entire Old Testament which is more disputed in interpretation than Job 19:25-27. The reason for the dispute is that the Hebrew words, in which the passage was first written, are subject to various interpretations and shades of meaning. The following is an interpretation based upon the fuller light of the New Testament.

A. Man's hope rests in the reality of a living Redeemer. Job testified, **“I know that my Redeemer liveth . . .”** We have a like assurance. Jesus said, **“I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore,”** Revelation 1:18. If He is not a living Saviour, we are yet in our sins, and our faith is empty and meaningless, I Corinthians 15:12-20. Reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we are saved because He lives, Romans 5:10.

B. Man's hope depends upon reality of a coming Redeemer. Job declared, **“. . . he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.”** We believe in the personal return of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:11) when His feet shall stand upon the Mount of Olives, Zechariah 14:4. Believers everywhere are **“Looking for blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ,”** Titus 2:13. He is coming again.

C. Man's hope includes the restoration of the body which has perished into dust. Though skin, flesh, and bones be consumed, **“. . . yet in my flesh shall I see God.”** The body, buried corruptible, dishonorable, weak, and natural, shall be raised incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual. God will give us bodies as it pleases Him, I Corinthians 15:35-54.

Therein is the Christian hope of the resurrection. It is expressed in germ in Job. It is expressed clearly in the New Testament. The hope is the same. The hope of man is that death is not the end. The spirit goes to God at death only to return to the body in the resurrection. We believe in a literal resurrection of the dead, just as the Bible teaches.

Life upon earth is so very brief. There must be more to human existence than what is experienced here. Indeed, there is! Life here is but the dressing room for a fuller life in eternity. Take advantage of every opportunity to render service to men in the name of Christ. Make the most of today. Its opportunities for service will never return.

Today's study has aimed “to realize the limited time for serving God,

and of winning others to Him.” Has such a realization motivated you to a committed ministry?