

“LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.” (Psa 39:4)

When the idea fell on me to speak to today’s topic, it became very apparent to me that today is a sermon to the young people. Now, everyone who isn’t young, feel free to listen, too, but I especially want the ears of the young people opened to hear what I have to say today and consider it closely.

While I am not what many of you would consider young, I don’t generally feel old yet, and I still wake up every day loving my life. Not because I’ve done anything that is outstanding or I am deserving of anything I have. I am so immeasurably blessed with the wife and children the Lord has given me; I am so happy to be here, at this time, in this place with these people that words fail me to describe it. Add to that, I’m at this really interesting place in my life where some days I still feel young enough to conquer the world, but I’ve got enough experience to know the world will chew me up, spit me out, stomp on me a couple of times and repeat the cycle if I were to try. I’ve gained enough understanding that conquering the world doesn’t have any interest for me anymore, either – it’s not what I’m here to do. I’m not quite old enough to have forgotten what it feels like to get out of bed on a day and feel like I could climb Mt. Everest in my running shorts and without oxygen tanks. I’m still close enough to my youth to remember that feeling of raw energy and indestructability. And don’t, for one second, young people, deny it. I know it’s there. You might not let it manifest in the foolish ways the children of this earth frequently do, with wild hedonistic behavior centering on drugs, alcohol, sex and other reckless behaviors, but it’s there.

The strength of youth is an amazing thing, and as I grow older I am frequently ashamed at how much of mine I wasted. Solomon tells us

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”
(Ecclesiastes 11:9)

Rejoice in the days of your youth. This is not an encouragement to “sow your wild oats” or to build some false doctrine like the Amish *rumspringa*, where they entice their children into sin with the false idea that you can work it out of your system. No, no. This is an encouragement to enjoy the fact that your body has not yet gone into full rebellion against you such that every physical act requires great effort. Rejoice in your mind and its power, the ability to learn anything you want to put your mind to learning without effort. This is an encouragement to learn good, proper, useful ways of serving God, and to put your physical energy and strength to as much as you can while you’re young. As you age, those strengths depart from you, and every day becomes a greater challenge to maintain contentedness with your physical state. As you get older

and older, you begin to see the end of things more and more clearly for yourself. You contemplate death and mortality more readily.

That's what we will focus on today, the contemplation of death and your mortality. I want to discuss why it's a thing you should be doing, and doing regularly, especially while you're young.

Contemplating death and mortality isn't a philosophical thing you do around the fire pit. This isn't a chapter in one of Plato's dialogues I'm talking about here. This is a spiritual activity that we ought to be doing to properly set our daily perspective. For us old folks, it's not a thing we should be doing out of a sense of dread or fear, per se, but for the same reason that the young folks should do it – it gives you perspective.

The world around you is at war with your spiritual contemplations. It wants to keep you from considering things of God, of heaven, hell, eternity, etc., and saturate your every thought and action with earthly things. Fred talked recently about our need to consider eternity and the value of it, and how can you ponder eternity without acknowledging and pondering the finite nature of our current existence. Eternity is forever. This life is not.

The world around us is especially at war with one key consideration –

“The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.” (Psa 94:11)

If the thoughts of man are vanity, the best of him, what could anything else of his life be? The world hates this idea as it doesn't feed man's pride, making him the center of the universe; instead it flattens and debases it, reducing man's pride to nothing.

This idea that our lives are vanity is found throughout Scripture, and it is at complete odds with this notion that our lives matter, that we somehow make a difference, that each of us leaves the world with a “legacy”. This is what the so-called “great men” of the earth talk about more than anything – what legacy they are leaving behind. When you aren't hearing about tweedle-evil1 and tweedle-evil2 on the news, you're hearing about “Obama's legacy”. Just think about all the buildings with people's names on them, the foundations, the honorary days, memorials, statues, park benches, etc., all designed to establish some permanence to a human life, some continual tie to the life lived and this earthly existence. From great to small, men want to be remembered, and for people to think that they've never left after they are dead. Think about how whole mortal lives are spent trying to undo, in any way we can, this simple declaration from God

“. . . till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen 3:19)

The natural man spends his waking energies trying, desperately trying, to find a way around that simple maxim “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return”. He

wanders through life believing that if he has some kind of permanence, some kind of thing that outlasts the dust from which he is made, then that maxim is no longer true. The temptation of Satan in the garden still rings in our ears, as though he were saying it to each of us every day

“ . . . ye shall be as gods” (Gen 3:5)

Men go out of their way to make themselves permanently remembered and present. Look at the pyramids of Egypt. All about wiping away the vanity of their lives. From the beginning it's been like this:

“And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” (Gen 11:4)

In complete defiance of God, right after the global destruction of The Flood, men decided they were going to create for themselves a legacy, a tower that reaches to heaven so that they don't have to worry about death and destruction. This is a great example of considering your mortality in the wrong way, that is trying to undo it, working to prevent it or undo that which God has declared will happen to all mankind, indeed all the earth, as David said

“I go the way of all the earth” (1 Kings 2:2)

Which brings me to a critical point – everyone dies. That might seem kind of obvious, but think about what I've been saying. The men of this earth spend an inordinate amount of their effort and resources trying to make it seem like they aren't dead by keeping their name alive and building a so-called legacy. The media spends a great deal of time filling young people's heads with the notion that they are invulnerable, they are strong, they don't need help from anyone, much less God. They are given heroes that routinely attempt to defy death and encourage them to “live on the edge” and live a life with “no fear”. The only reason not to have any fear is if you don't believe you are going to die and face the judgment. Which of course is what they seek to avoid.

“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:” (Heb 9:27)

And unless anyone should say “what about that part where Paul said we won't all die”

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,” (1Co 15:51)

I say to Mr. Anyone – hush up. The end result is the same for the purposes of this conversation in that you cease to exist in this corporeal form.

Death is discussed in Scripture from the very beginning to the very end. Our parents are warned of it in Genesis and it is discussed throughout the Revelation. To be clear,

I'm focused not on the second death, but the death of the body. The separation of this mortal body we know now from the spirit. It is the cessation of physical existence, after which there is no ability for you to repent of your sins and get right with God. This Truth is so stark and opposed to the natural and prideful nature of depraved man that not only do we seek to immortalize ourselves by putting our names on buildings and monuments, etc., but we do everything we can to make our minds forget the truth of death. Look at the drug and alcohol abuse that is rampant in this world, all the ways that people try to block out that truth from their daily thoughts with psychiatry and prescription drugs. Men seek to silence that metaphorical ticking they hear in the back of their mind, that sense that the sands of their own personal time are individually sinking, as it were.

Now, you young folks who've grown up in our way of life, being raised "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4), here is the caution. Don't get caught in your own pride thinking that you aren't susceptible to these ideas and this wanton ignoring of your mortality. Nothing makes us different than the children of the earth in this regard. We can forget our own mortality the same as anyone else, and we get consumed by pride when that happens.

When we don't see ourselves as finite and working from a limited amount of time to get our house in order, we work ourselves out of time. We start to think we have nothing but time to do whatever we need to and put off doing things that need to get done for our souls and for our situation with God. Of course, this isn't about a works righteousness position, but as the two thieves on the cross show us, there is a last breath that you draw, and if you die as the one thief in an unrepentant state, then your time has run out. There is no more time to repent after that last breath! That's the danger, my especially young friends, you do not have infinite time to address your sins! My older friends, the growing sense of our physical mortality should be a poke with a sharp stick to us daily that our time is running out. Not only in a physical way, but in a spiritual way.

So when you wake up in the morning, and you think you're going to conquer the world, you're indestructible, and you're going to go do some good work, check yourself. Think about the fact that you just survived a night when you didn't do anything to keep yourself alive. You took roughly 5,000 breaths without so much as a single thought or controlling so much as one of them. How was that possible without all your might and power and world conquering? God kept you alive. You didn't do bupkis to keep yourself alive overnight, and the first thought you have is to how you're going to demonstrate your strength, not to the fact that you're alive? Reverse those.

I don't think many people think this way about death. I believe, in fact, that most people don't give death so much as a direct thought unless they're confronted with someone they know having died. I think death is treated so nonchalantly by the

entertainment industry and mankind as a whole that it has become like background noise. People, in general, do not put death in the proper perspective and have proper thoughts about it, hardly ever.

I'm not going to carve out some exception for the people in this house, either. While we probably think about it more than most, and certainly put it in the proper frame in ways worldly people won't ever do, I challenge each and every one of you to put yourself to a close examination over this. When the last time you properly framed up your mortality in your own mind and thanked God for your life, and asked Him to help you maintain a proper viewpoint of it? If it's been a while, think on that.

Young people, this message is particularly directed at you because in your youth, these thoughts and perspectives are particularly difficult to get to, much less actively maintain. If you aren't feeling close to death physically, you feel good, strong, energetic, mentally sharp, etc., why bother thinking about the things that are far away?

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." (Psa 90:10)

Why should I expend energy dwelling on something that is so, so far away like 80, when I'm in my prime at 18 or 20? Isn't that just a waste of time and, like, totally depressing? Who wants to think about being old and walking around with a cane or feeling every movement of our joints scraping against each other when we can run, and jump and leap without hindrance today? Why would we think about the weakness and decay of the body when it is strong and (for now) getting stronger?

David gives us a bit of perspective on this matter of keeping our mortality in our view:

"LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am." (Psa 39:4)

David clearly wrote Psalm 39 when he was in a distressing situation. Some expositors say it was when he was dealing with Absalom, some when he was occupied with Saul's persecution. Either case is wonderfully instructive to us, when you consider how he begins the Psalm

"I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me." (Psa 39:1)

He is focused on keeping his mouth from driving him off a cliff of sin, so he is going to bridle it. That includes the thoughts of his heart, too. He wants to keep himself in check, and that includes regarding his mortality. He is asking the Lord to keep him mindful of the fact that he is NOT immortal, he is NOT indestructible, that he IS frail.

I say it doesn't matter to me whether he wrote this under the oppression of Saul or in the heat of the rebellion of Absalom, because they are both instructive. If under the oppression of Saul, here we have a young man who is absolutely in his strength and could use that strength to his advantage over the older, weaker Saul, but is asking God to keep him mindful of his frailty so that he doesn't get out over his skis, and commit some grievous sin against the Lord's anointed. If this is written during the time of Absalom's rebellion, we have an older man who while not as physically strong as he was, is still great and powerful, who has many at his bidding who will do whatever he bids them. He is still a mighty man of valor in his own right, but has no desire to commit sins against God in these later hours that may shortly have him brought before His throne for judgment. He exercises wisdom and discernment of his position in his life and with God.

When David says "make me to know mine end" he isn't asking for the Lord to tell him how he will die, or even when. It is not for man to know those details. He's asking the Lord to work on his heart to understand what it means to be mortal. To keep him focused on the fact that we are frail and won't live forever. That's not about being careful for his physical life, it's about being careful for his soul. Knowing that, as Christ taught in the parable of the rich man

"But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?" (Luk 12:20)

The admonishment "[T]his night thy soul shall be required of thee" isn't just to evil men, my friends. It is an admonishment to all men. Who of you knows the day of your death? Who of you can prolong your days by even one minute? Who can say with absolute assurance that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life and you have nothing to worry about?

That's the point, my friends. If you aren't pondering your own mortality as an absolute, as a thing that you have no control over, cannot change, and cannot influence, you are a fool. You are hurtling down this path of life with no sobriety or understanding of its fleeting nature, and that is sure to end up in a bad way for you.

Moses tells us more specifically why it is good to consider our fleeting nature when he says

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."
(Psa 90:12)

This is not a consideration of death in some morbid way, this is a numbering of our days, keeping in our minds and hearts the reality that they are numbered, even if we don't know the actual exact number.

We're numbering our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. What is the wisdom we're applying our hearts to? This isn't the seeking of earthly wisdom but spiritual. By looking to the numbered nature of our days, we look to gain a deeper understanding of the state of our souls, their condition, the hope we have of their salvation. By considering the fleeting nature of our lives, we are forced into directly considering our sins, where we may end up because of them, and the need we have for Christ. If there's no end to our days or we don't consider that end directly, there is no consideration of the wages which are owed

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23)

I believe you should walk through every day with these words in your ears

". . . this night thy soul shall be required of thee. . ." (Luke 12:20)

Are you suffering some sin to own you? How would it fair with you if your soul were required of you this very day? Would you be able to stand before your God? Have you spent your days considering your earthly state, those things that occupy your vanity rather than the fact that your soul may be required of you in the very next second, and if you have not repented of those sins that own you, you will have no place at the right hand of God?

Are you walking through your life with a spirit of discontentment, focusing your thoughts and energies on those things you think you deserve and do not have, or bemoaning the hardships the world puts you under? Consider that you do not have an unlimited amount of time to come to peace with your lot and find how it is your life can be used to serve God. With a proper perspective of the shortness of your life, those things that trouble your spirit or bring you sorrow today will have much less significance.

Consider your life-long opportunity to serve God, with its limited scope, and compare that to the life and service of the Angels. By my understanding, Angels do not suffer from a mortal life. Whether good or evil, they are an immortal creature. They have no pressure of time, but they stand at the ready, at all times, to go forth performing the commands of their God. We do not have the luxury of immortality, and yet we dally around at repentance, behaving as if, since the sun rose on us today, it will certainly rise on us tomorrow. That is a fool's thought and a fool's behavior.

Do you have some grudge against a brother, or refuse to make peace with someone because you're too busy? Do you look at that person and think to yourself that the conversation you need to have can wait until tomorrow? Are you so steeped in your own self-importance that you can't just forgive a person and move on without some apology framed just the way you want it? When you think these ways, ask yourself "what if there is no tomorrow?" Can you claim to your God that you have served Him

and His people properly in your life if you wait until a time you don't even know you have available to you to repent and recover your friend? Get it done while there is still time!

As humans we walk through life believing that since things were a way today, they will be that way tomorrow. Especially those things that we believe we control. If we operate every day understanding that there is one less day for us to correct things, and one less day for us to repent, then things take on a much greater sense of urgency for us, and we are less prone to let things lie.

“And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.” (2 Peter 3:4)

And also

“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)

This is a natural, an earthly view of things. As I discussed some weeks back regarding faith, humans focus on the things that are right in front of them, that they can see, touch, taste and feel. We pride ourselves on being empiricists, able to discern the truth from the evidence in front of us. This ability to ‘reason’ is what separates us from the animals, we say. There is no evidence in front of us that the sun will not rise tomorrow, therefore we will behave as though it will and there is no risk of it not. We have too many things to do for it not to come up tomorrow, and therefore it must rise. The pride of man and his hubris bring us to the point where we ignore the plain simple truth that there will not always be a tomorrow, in the way we know tomorrow to be now. It is an inexcusable ignorance that will not always be “winked” at (Acts 17:30).

An even worse danger than being lax toward this knowledge is being pompous about it, tempting God

“And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die.” (Isaiah 22:13)

They mocked the prophet who told them that God called for weeping and mourning, and instead of fearing God's wrath, they flaunted their wantonness by declaring they didn't care if they died. They displayed the worst sort of callousness toward their sins and the consequences for them by daring the day of punishment to come, as it were. It is a shocking behavior that we are susceptible to, friends, just as all the world is. I say this again – your upbringing doesn't protect you from this disregard for your own mortality or from a likelihood that you will tempt God so.

“But,” you might say, waving me off with the impatience of your youth, “we’ve got all this stuff to do that keeps us busy, we’ve got people to preach to and Vines to publish and songs to sing. We don’t have time to think about dying and death and all this morbid stuff”. Therein lies the real danger. In this world, I do not possibly see how you can NOT think about death and see your own mortality, but I know it doesn’t happen nearly enough. The fact is that in this day and age it can be very easy, and I think it is a real danger for us, that we become cold and impartial to death. Death doesn’t matter in the daily lexicon and in our daily conversation. I don’t mean cold the way the world thinks we’re cold when we stand outside a funeral and warn people to flee. I mean cold in our spirits and our hearts toward what every death we come across should remind us of.

Consider this and think on it seriously. How many days has it been since a headline rang out about some tragedy somewhere killing dozens or hundreds of people? How many days has it been since we heard of some cop shooting someone or being shot dead? How did you react to that story, that news? Did you just brush it aside, “oh, another one” or did you think about it soberly and seriously? Did you consider what it meant for that person’s soul, and how your soul would fare if that were your instant to be separated from your current earthly frame? Are you prepared to meet your God (Amos 4:12)?

There is the key. That is the reason we must consider our own mortality, minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day. It prepares us to meet our God. It forces us to acknowledge just how far from ready we are, and to seek His mercy and bring His righteousness to the forefront of our thoughts, and seek His forgiveness for our sins. It causes us to mourn for our sins. But only if we consider it, and consider it carefully and in a spiritual context. So. Much. Death. All around us, all day, every day. Have we become impervious to the message of it because we see it all around us? Have we become blind to what it portends for us when we see another funeral procession go by, see another obituary, hear of another person we knew pass into the grave? God forbid.

“And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” (Luke 13:2-3)

We focus a lot of our attention on ‘repent’, and rightly so, but we must focus an equal measure of our attention on ‘perish’, especially when we consider the application of these verses to ourselves. Not all will repent, but assuredly all will perish. The question is will you perish everlastingly, or only in the flesh? Have you prepared yourself to meet your God, and do you endeavor to walk in a way that has you constantly prepared? Do you think these Galilaeans or those on whom the tower at Siloam fell woke up that morning saying to themselves ‘today is a good day to die’? Of

course not! They awoke as they did every day, looking to the temporal business of the day, tending to their earthly tasks until they were no longer walking the earth!! That is one of the key warnings here! You do not know the day or the hour of your death! Act like you don't, for the love of your own soul!

If you don't want to hear me on this matter, hear The Preacher:

"It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." (Ecclesiastes 7:2-4)

The house of mourning indicates a funeral, the home of one who has recently deceased. These modern day funerals don't come within a country mile of the house of mourning, so don't think I mean that. I mean using the death of that dear friend or loved one as a prime time reason to consider God. That's what Solomon is talking about here. The end of all men, friends, is what we should consider as much as we possibly can if we want to have a proper eye toward God.

As in all things, there is hope in this posture. As Solomon also told us, there is

"a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

Which includes an appropriate time to laugh, rather than weep, and to dance, rather than mourn. The preponderance of our time ought to be spent in the more sober side of things, but there is a hopeful element to this consideration of our mortality:

Without death, there is no resurrection.

"I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." (Matthew 22:32)

If you paid one stitch of one iota of attention to Ben's sermon last week, you know the wonderfulness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and all it portends for His sheep and the abounding greatness of it. After this shell is put off, there is immortality awaiting. That is our hope. An eternity not having to think about our own frailty, but an eternal praising of God in His presence!

Without the passing of this mortal coil, we have no part in that resurrection. While not all will sleep, we cannot know who it will be that meets Him in the air, and to presume such a thing for yourself is foolish and unscriptural. One can hope for such a blessing, up until it perversely allows you freedom to ignore your mortality and it puffs you up into thinking you're something you're not.

We are surrounded by death and we must look at it properly. We must frame it up in such a way that it helps us to walk soberly, with gravity, not puffed up, but meek,

knowing that though we have some little light here while we walk this pilgrim way, are not special, are not exempted from the end of all Men. If you can embrace that line of thought and that perspective in your youth, your old age will be filled with much more wisdom, your life full of fewer hard lessons and the weight of your yoke as the weight of the air.

Our mortality is a thing to consider with gravity, not in ignorance or with un-Godly fear, but with a proper view toward our hope. As Paul tells us

“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (Romans 6:5)

Is that not reason enough to think upon and consider our own mortality? I believe it is and I encourage you all to do so daily.