

THE ILLUSION OF EARTHLY MORTALITY

I. INTRODUCTION. Read Genesis 3:1-6.

- a. The Serpent (Satan) craftily approached Eve with questions about which trees God had permitted Adam and her to eat. When Eve answers, explaining that they would die if they ate of the tree in the midst of the garden, the Serpent disputes, claiming, "You will not surely die!" and implies that God didn't want them becoming like Him, knowing good and evil.
- b. Despite God's simple and clear instruction, the Serpent's deception was enough to convince Eve to eat of the fruit and share it with Adam.
- c. Eve must have either been convinced that what God had said either wasn't true, or she put it out of her mind long enough not to worry about the promised consequences.
- d. Notice her rationale for eating of it:
 - i. The tree was good for food, i.e., it was edible.
 - ii. It was a delight to the eyes. i.e., it looked delicious.
 - iii. It appealed to her because it was something that would make her wise, as the Devil had claimed.
- e. When Adam and Eve violated God's instruction and received the penalty of death, sin and death entered the world. The reality of death is now a part of everyone's life, because everyone sins. Romans 5:12.

II. OUR EARTHLY LIVES ARE BRIEF.

- a. James 4:14 compares our lives to that of a vapor, (mist, fog) that appears for a short while then fades. Think of the fog that appears at certain times of the year, particularly after a damp night. It is very thick for a few hours in the morning, but by late morning, is typically gone.
- b. Psalm 103:15-16 is one of several passages that compares our lives to grass and flowers of the field. It grows and looks pretty for a short time, then wilts and fades and is caught by the wind. Afterward, there is no evidence that it was ever there.
- c. Psalm 90 discusses the everlasting nature of God, the short duration of our existence, the dread of us facing His wrath, and our great need to seek His favor. Even a lifespan of 70 or 80 years is short.
- d. Comparison of average life expectancy: Worldwide is about 67 years, United States 78, Mexico 77. The highest is the nation of Monaco at about 90 years, with the lowest being the African nation of Angola, at about 38 years. Note that these are averages, meaning that some live to be much younger, and some much longer. Statisticians say that the lifespan (longest time people live) of humans is 120 years, and that has been constant for over 2,000 years. Even at 120 years, that is a relatively short time.
- e. In late December of 1984, I was with a friend on a Saturday Night at the McDonald's on Highway 31 not far from here. I don't remember

the exact time, but it was not early in the evening. A mutual acquaintance of ours drove through and stopped to talk to us for a short time. We finished talking, he drove on, and my friend and I went on home thinking little more about it. I went to church services the next morning as always. After services, an elderly gentleman came up to me and asked, "Do you know _____," calling the name of the acquaintance my friend and I had spoken with the night before. I said, "Yes, I just talked to him last night." The man responded, "He got killed in a car wreck last night" or something of that nature. It was a very eye-opening experience that really shook me up. The young man was only 19 years old. It's possible that my friend and I were the last two people to whom he ever spoke. When we were talking with him, he had no idea that he was only a few hours from dying. He was not a Christian. He has now been dead for nearly 31 years.

- f. To illustrate the brief nature of life, consider the following example from President Thomas Jefferson and two of his children. President Jefferson lived to the age of 83. One of his daughters, Mary, died at age 25. Another daughter, Lucy Elizabeth II, died at the age of 2 (she was preceded by another daughter also named Lucy Elizabeth, who died at the age of 1).
 - i. If we draw lines scaled to represent the lifespans of Thomas, Mary, and Lucy II, it seems as though Thomas lived a very long time when compared to his two daughters.
 - ii. But let's make a further comparison by noting the time since Thomas' birth and the present year. It can be seen that Thomas lived quite a bit longer than his daughters, but the difference is not quite as pronounced.
 - iii. If we compare their lives to the time since Columbus arrived in the new world, the difference isn't nearly as obvious.
 - iv. And finally, comparing their lives to the time since Christ was born (approximating Christ's birth at about 4 BC), the differences between Thomas', Mary's, and Lucy's lives aren't that great. And as we go further back or forth in the comparisons and compare their lives to longer spans of time, we see that in terms of eternity, even what we consider to be a long life isn't really that long.
 - v. Yet God does speak in relative terms, of some having long lives with numerous Bible characters being described as having lived to be old and "full of days."
 - 1. Long life is considered to be a reward. Psalm 91:14-16.
 - 2. Wisdom is associated with long life. Job 12:12.

III. ADVANTAGES OF YOUTH

- a. God recognizes youth as a time for pursuing interests and things that please us. Eccles. 11:9-10. And though God recognizes that youth can be a time for rejoicing and cheer, the implication is not that we are at liberty to do whatever we want. The author of Ecclesiastes (Solomon) reminds us that God will bring us into judgment.
- b. One great advantage of the time of youth is that you are not as susceptible to the physical pains and problems that will come as you grow older. Eccles. 12 contains several figurative, but beautifully written analogies that illustrate how our bodies age and fail as we grow older. So youth can be a time when life can be enjoyed in ways that are not as easy to do when you are older.
- c. Another advantage of this time is that you probably do not have the financial obligations that will come later. 1 Timothy 5:8 discusses the need for a man to provide for his family. Since most of you do not have children, and many of you do not have parents old enough to be in need, this is likely a time in which you will not have that financial obligation.
- d. At this age, you are not as likely to resist change as much as those who are older. 2 Samuel 19:32-39 tells us of Barzillai of Gilead who had assisted David when he fled due to his son Absalom's insurrection. Upon returning, David asked Barzillai to come back with him to Jerusalem, and promised to provide for his needs. But Barzillai, citing his old age and inability to enjoy life as he once could, resisted accepting David's request, preferring to live out the remainder of his life in his own city. The older we get, the more resistant we become to change. Take advantage of this time of your life to explore new avenues of serving God, gaining a more thorough and deeper understanding of His word, and by taking advantage of opportunities to teach others about God.
- e. One other thing to remember is that if you have made mistakes in your youth, you can re-devote yourself to living in a way that pleases God. You can rebuild your reputation. It is far better not to have to do that, because of the consequences associated with sin. But please don't give up and think it's impossible. There are many people who have made tremendous mistakes who have turned their lives around, and you'd be surprised at how people forget about those mistakes and respect someone who turns their life around.

IV. THINGS THAT MAY CAUSE US TO FORGET THE BREVITY OF LIFE

- a. Pursuit of Money and Material Things.
 - i. Hard work, planning for the future, and making an effort to prosper are not in and of themselves sinful and in fact are

encouraged by God. Riches are blessings of God. Several great Bible characters were rich (e.g., Abraham and Job).

- ii. But an improper desire for riches leads to many problems, temptations, traps, wickedness, and sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:8-10.
- iii. If we become wealthy, we are often deceived into placing our trust in our riches. It is easy for us to lose focus on what is really important and not trust in God. Luke 12:13-31; 16:19-31; Proverbs 11:28. As you enter and complete college and enter the work force, you may find yourself falling into the mindset of wanting others to view you as rich, so as to make an impression on them. You will see this happen quite often when you attend a class reunion. Many will want to put on a show of prosperity. This is a dangerous mindset and trap to fall into. It puts emphasis on things that are merely temporary, and that don't provide any long-term satisfaction, and that won't be of any benefit to us beyond this life. Proverbs 5:10.

b. Focus on our physical bodies, appearance, and recreation.

- i. Physical attractiveness is not sinful. After Job endured the many tragedies and problems the devil brought upon him, his riches and health were restored to him. Among the many blessings he received were daughters that were more beautiful than any in the land. Sarai (later Sarah) was so beautiful that Abraham rightly feared for his life because of her. As he anticipated, the Egyptians after seeing her brought her into Pharaoh's house to be one of his wives. Note that she was about age 60 when this took place! It is not unreasonable to assume that these women probably did some things to arrange themselves (hair, face, clothes) to be attractive. But that is not what Sarah was known for. I Peter 3:1-6 tells us the characteristics of a godly woman (one whose emphasis was on the hidden woman of the heart, rather than on the external). Sarah, though being beautiful, is cited in this context as an example of one who embodied these godly characteristics.
- ii. Bodily exercise is described in I Timothy 4:8 as being of little benefit. On more than one occasion, the athlete is used as an example by the Apostle Paul in analogies to spiritual applications. So it seems reasonable that we can enjoy participating in athletics.
- iii. But the benefits of bodily exercise pale in comparison to the benefits of godliness. No matter how well we take care of ourselves, our bodies will deteriorate.
- iv. Physical attractiveness will not last. Proverbs 31:30.

- v. Having lived fifty-one years, I can think of so many people that I've known over the years that have overemphasized this aspect of their lives.
- vi. There is the example of a girl that I grew up knowing, who put more emphasis on her outward appearance than she did on her spiritual person.
- vii. Focusing more attention on these things than on our spiritual lives is unwise. Their benefits are only temporary.
- viii. Even today, there will be many people on ball fields with their children, playing numerous games on Saturday and Sunday. These games are in addition to several practices during the week, so they end up spending much more time on secular things than on spiritual things. Don't be deceived into the mindset that puts so much emphasis on these temporary things.
- ix. Many people are very passionate about their looks, keeping their bodies in shape and healthy, sports success, etc. They will exercise, eat strict diets, devote much time to special training, etc. None of this is wrong in and of itself, but the satisfaction and enjoyment attained from this is only temporary. No matter how much we work out, our bodies are still going to deteriorate.
- x. Some of these same people don't have the same passion for their spiritual lives, which pays off eternally.

c. Poor choices of companions and influences.

- i. God plainly tells us that bad company corrupts good morals. 1 Cor. 15:33. This includes those that we easily recognize as wicked and evil. If you choose to spend time with wicked people, you are deceiving yourself if you believe you won't be affected.
- ii. But bad influences may also come from those with similar backgrounds as you. In 2 Chronicles 24 and 2 Kings 2, we see that King Jehoash was positively influenced by Jehoiada the Priest. He even led efforts to repair the temple. But after Jehoiada died, the princes of Judah (who had rejoiced when the temple was repaired), influenced Jehoash to abandon the temple, and to engage in idolatry. Beware of those who claim to be Christians who have some good characteristics, yet do not live lives of deep conviction and devout principles in keeping with God's word. They can have a very deluding effect on you.
- iii. Romantic relationships can lead us into accepting things we might not initially believe to be possible. Despite two appearances and numerous blessings from God, Solomon's

relationships with pagan wives led him to participate in the worship of detestable idols.

- iv. In this day and age, be very careful about the influences from the internet, television, movies, radio, and social media. Apps like Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, and others may expose you to photos and discussions that are sensual and evil, and will pull you away from God. Just as we mentioned with Eve, it is easy for us to disbelieve or push God's truths out of our minds, and to willingly expose ourselves to things we know to be wrong.
- v. Bad influences can cause us to forget what is really important and that we will be judged after our lives are over.

d. Emphasis on worldly wisdom, education and career advancement.

- i. Acquiring knowledge, skills, and/or an education isn't necessarily evil. It is often a necessity for getting a job, which is encouraged in scripture. 1 Kings 4:29-34.
- ii. But keep in mind that too much emphasis on education can bring grief, sorrow, and weariness. Eccles. 1:16-18; 12:12.
- iii. Remember also that God tells us that not many people who are wise or important by worldly standards will be called to be Christians. 1 Corinthians 1:18-31.
- iv. When we obtain an education, it is very easy for us to become arrogant, and to think that the wisdom of the Bible is foolish.
- v. Men of every age have foolishly trusted in their own wisdom and intellectual understanding.
- vi. As with the other things we have considered, it is very easy for us to focus on this life, and not consider the brevity of our lives and what will come after.

V. DON'T BE DECIEVED INTO FORGETTING THAT OUR LIVES ARE LIMITED.

- a. The decisions, and your level of commitment to God at this point in your life, may likely continue into your older years (assuming you are spared more years). Your future faithfulness, and likely the faithfulness of your children and grandchildren, may be directly impacted by the level you choose to commit to God at this point in your life.

VI. ALL OF OUR DECISIONS AND GOALS MUST BE GUIDED, SHAPED, MOLDED, ETC. WITH THE REALIZATION THAT WE WILL NOT LIVE FOREVER.

- a. What will I choose for a career/job? That dream-career path may not allow you to worship God as you should. It may require you to go places or do certain things that are not in keeping with God's will.
- b. Who will I choose for my friends and who will I choose to marry? The more popular people may be the ones who pull you down spiritually

and influence you to adopt the world's principles. That beautiful girl may not be the one who will help you remain true to God throughout your life. The great-looking guy, who has a great career ahead, may not be the one that leads your family to be faithful to God. Choose someone that will help you make it through life with a deep conviction for God and His word.

- c. What will my priorities be in life? Will career, sports, pleasure be more important to me than God? Will my priorities reflect my belief that I will die one day and be judged according to my works?
- d. What kind of entertainment will I choose? Will I be very careful in what I choose to expose to my eyes and mind? Will it reflect my belief that I will be judged when my life is over, according to my works?
- e. What clothes will I choose to wear? Will I dress in a way that reflects godly principles found in scripture? Will I wear only those things that I would be comfortable wearing when my life ended?
- f. How will I treat others? Will I love my neighbor as myself? Will I be willing to forgive, knowing that I will stand before God and be judged? Or will I seek revenge, or to portray myself better than, or take advantage of others?
- g. What kind of congregation will I choose to attend? Will it stand for truth in terms of the doctrine that is taught, practices, use of its money, discipline? Or will I choose to attend where my friends or mate wants me to attend, or where it is convenient and comfortable?
- h. Ultimately, if you lose your soul, it won't really matter if you obtain fame, money, popularity, a trophy wife, a PhD, a pro sports career, become President, or coach football at Auburn or Alabama. None of that will matter because none of that can do anything for you beyond this short life. Only your relationship with God during this life will really matter then.

VII. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- a. Example of a man that was raised by godly parents with strong convictions who has allowed things in this life to affect his spiritual life and faithfulness to God.
- b. Poll the audience to see how many years different attendees have been Christians. Some have only been Christians for a few years. But some have been Christians for 5 or 6 years, and some upward of 10 years. This is sufficient time to mature as a Christian. Hebrews 5:12-14.
- c. All of us need to live with the understanding that life is indeed short.
- d. The time to establish high standards of principles and convictions is now! Some are letting their guard down and are steadily drifting from the godly standards they were taught from the scriptures. Hebrews 2:1.
- e. Choose to serve God even while you are young. Don't wait or think there is a time, somewhere down the road when you are older, that

you'll get your act together, totally devote yourself, and eliminate the things that are not godly.

- f. Yet, for many that time has never come. Some died before they could change. But often, it is because they have become so charmed by the world, and established in a certain way of living, they never wanted to change. And for many of these, their lives or their children's lives have become spiritual disasters.
- g. If God lets time continue for 5 – 10 more years, by that point, it is likely that many of you will be married, and some of you will have your own children. This will come more quickly than you may realize.
- h. Your soul and the souls of your children, and your children's children, and so on, may and perhaps will depend greatly on the decisions and principles you establish now.
- i. Each of us has an appointment with death, after which we will be judged according to our works. Hebrews 9:27; Eccles. 11:9.
- j. Never forget our true purpose in life. Fear God and keep His commandments. Ecclesiastes 12:13.