

Jan 11, 1981 A.M. -
(Timmer) -

OPPORTUNITIES OF LIFE

Phil. 1:21-24

The greatest problem that confronts anyone in this world is that of his own life. To each one there is given a certain number of days and years to be spent on this earth.

I say that they are given -- for no one has acquired the right or the power to live. Each one lives because it has been given to him to live.

Jesus asked his Disciples, which one of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature.

Man's days and years are God given. And no man can add a single day or year to his life. Life rises out of an eternal past and merges in the future. And here we stand, with a great question upon our hearts -- what shall I do with this opportunity of life. What shall I do with these days and with this year which I have.

Paul, Verse 21 - for me to live mean opportunities for Christ. And dying - well, that is better yet. But if living will give me more opportunities to win people to Christ, then I really don't know which is best -- to live or die. Sometimes I want to live - but other times I don't. For I long to go to be with Christ. How much happier for me than being here.

It was (Easter time) and the (man of God) had challenged the people to think. About the resurrection and he had challenged them to think about (their own dying.) This disturbed a man - the directness in the way that the man turned the honest conversation. He said why talk about death. That unsettles a man. And an Easter sermon, he says, I do not want to face my responsibilities. And then the question came -- "what if you were told that you were to die today. How would you feel about it."

Actually let yourself feel it - do you have the assurance of death - that it would only be a transition, in living for you. Do you know in reality that there would be a resurrection for you. That there was one for Jesus. Now this shocked one man into realization -- though he believed in Christ, yet he was afraid of dying. He could not say with the Apostle Paul in the text, to die is gain. And fear about death and dying are evident every where.

A preacher one day in the Mid-West, in talking to his congregation, asked the members to provide him with data for the Pastor's personal file - on how each one of them would want to celebrate his life in a Christian (memorial service). The whole church was thrown in turmoil. Because most of the people had never thought or felt that they were going to die. For all the preaching, praying, singing hymns, about eternal life - they did not think about death.

We cannot really live until we come to grips with death. And Paul's statement here to the Philippians about death was based on a previous phrase about life. He had died unto himself. And his own willful design for his life. Therefore, death

was not an ending for him - but a beginning. "I have been crucified with Christ. ⁺⁺
It is no longer I that live - but Christ that liveth in me." Once we face that fact,
because I live, you shall live also. Then Paul turned to his responsibilities which
he had out before him.

I think every man's life is controlled by one simple thought. We may call it
life's purpose, or the controlling truth in our lives, but it is something like a
large stream of water that makes its way out to the sea. You can stand on the banks
of the river and look across - and you will notice all of the water from bank to
bank are moving. Out yonder, somewhere in the middle of the stream, you will see
a portion of the moving waters which we call the current, the channel, and it seems
to be rushing more swiftly, than any other part. It is the central current. And
that determines the course of the stream. All of the other water moves, but it follows
that central current. That is true with your life. There are a thousand things that
go to make up your life. But there is one main purpose - that you put your life in
the main stream. And there is one great center, and you allow you life to follow
that channel, in your life. There is one master thought that controls. Now the wisest
of all men here - next to Jesus Christ, said as the man thinketh in his heart, so is
he. The life is like the thought that is behind it.

There was a very wealthy man who lived in a town - he owned much real estate that
brought him a large income. He did not live in the best kind of house - or on the
most popular street. But he lived in a dirty, dingy room, in one of the old stores
which he called home. There he lived all alone. He cooked, he ate, he slept in that
one room. It was said that he would go out at certain times of the week. Collect his
rent and come back to the filthy room, and sit down. And feast his greedy eyes upon
the money that he had gotten. For long periods of time he would count and dream of
the time when he would have more coins. He cared not for companionship. Or for good

clothes, or for dainty food. He cared only for gold and silver. For him to live, was money. The one mastering thought of that man's life was money. He planned, he centered it all in that main stream.

I read the story of a woman living in Paris. It was told in the newspapers, that she had offered a thousand dollars to a person who would invent some new form of pleasure. She lived in a beautiful house. She had all that money could buy. She had enjoyed all the pleasures that gay Paris had offered her. And she was not satisfied. And there sat a beautiful woman endowed and blessed of God with talent, and how much she might have offered to a suffering city, or to some poor child. But she thought only of herself. And she longed for some new pleasures that she might plunge her life into. For her to live was pleasure. All that she hoped -- the main stream of her life was centered in that one purpose.

Many, many years ago in Europe, there was a man by the name of Napoleon. He gathered a great Army around him. He swept across the country and from one to another. And he had the ambition and the dream that he might conquer it all. He planned - he thought - and all of this, for me to live is power. And it all centered within himself.

How different it was with Paul. And he said, to live was Christ. The thought and the purpose had mastered his whole life, was Christ. He centered it all in Christ.

There was a time when he could not make that declaration. He did not have Christ

at the center of his life. He was a young Pharisee and outside the gates of Jerusalem, Stephen was martyred and stoned. And Paul stood by holding his garments. And he approved of this bloody deed. And you ask him what his life meant to him at that time. Paul would have said to you -- for me to live is persecution of Christ and his people! I am dedicating all of my strength and all of my talent to blot out the name of Christ from the earth.

Then we see him as he starts out to execute his purpose. He goes into Christian homes in Jerusalem. Into towns. He lays hands on men and women and drags them to prison and death. What does life mean to you, Paul. For me to live is to persecute Christ and his people!

Now see him years later - he starts out for Damascus. He has some letters in his pocket from the chief priest. He has authority to bind all Christians that he finds in that city. And he goes on this mission of blood - but just before he gets there -- something happens to him. He sees a bright light, he falls on his face. And a voice says Saul, Saul - why persecuteth thou me. And he says, who art thou Lord. And again the Lord says, I am Jesus whom thou persecuteth. Arise and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do. With blinded eyes he arises from the sand and begins his way to the city. How different was that experience, he was led as a beggar. And when he enters that city - his whole life is changed. And from that time on, you might go and ask Paul -- what does life mean to you now. And he would say my life has changed. To live is Christ. I have dedicated my life and service to him.

✓ I want us to understand that it is a serious thing to live. I believe one of

the greatest needs in the world today is for men and women like you to be brought into a deep abiding conviction about the seriousness of your life. I am not saying that earth does not have some pleasures for you. Or suffering. I never really ceased to thank God for the joys of the earth and the pleasures, that he has given each of us. But the thing that challenged me today is -- what are you going to make out of your life. What about these opportunities that you have in your life.

Now I hope that you will not think that what I am saying to you is common place. And that it is too simple for you to think about. But I want to mention some things to you and bring them to thought. That I think will help you about the opportunities in life. And what are you going to do with them.

I. LIFE IS BUT FOR A SHORT SPAN

Individual life on this earth is very, very short. Why, the older you get - the more you look back and the more you think about how quick life has gone by. I read about an old preacher once, who talked about as a boy he went to church. And there he noticed old men of the church. And then, he mentioned, the older women of the church. And he said, I sat there and I looked at those older people. Their gray hair and their wrinkled face, and their stooped forms. And their slow step. And he says, I used to think -- my, how long people do live here on this earth. And he said, as he got older, more and more he realized that life at its best was but a fleeting year.

When we turn to the ages that have passed and gone, and we think about this nation which we have lived in, and the generations which have come and passed. What is one little life, crowded into so many passing years. And then when we turn our faces toward

the future, with its endless eternity - when there will be ten thousand years - and still no end. What is one life compared to that. And then we begin to think. There is the shortness of life. It seems to me that this is one of the great facts that stares us in the face right now. If we are ever going to make anything worth while out of our life -- we must do it very quickly. There are no days to be wasted. There are no years to be wasted.

The short span of life - your opportunities are gone.

II. THE UNCERTAINTIES OF LIFE

Now this is another point of reason that I want to bring upon your minds. And God may let you live to reach a good old age -- but he may not. And if you do, there is always uncertainty. There is the message, the city of the dead, brings back to me. As I go out there from time to time with the sorrowing loved ones. I find in the cemetery - there are long graves that are marked by a monument. And I can read on the face of the inscription which says - about the body of the one who lies there. Who lived to be (four score years old.) But I pass on to another grave. And here is another monument and I read -- here is the body of one that lived to be (50 years old.) And then I go to another grave, and there is a stone, and says beneath it lies one who was on this earth (25 years). And then I move on to another - and there is one that says, this young person lived (15 years). Cut down in youth. And then I go to a shorter grave, and the message here is a child. Whose body lies sleeping - waiting for the resurrection morning. Just (12 years old). In the tenderness of childhood. And then there is a tiny grave, just a span long - with a little stone marked. And it says here lies the body of a baby, which breathed its life away in just a (few short four or five days.)

I can stand in the midst of these - and they lift their faces to the sky with one message. It comes to them all. And it is my message to you today. That life is uncertain.

God may let us live to old age. But he may call us hence as we stand in the midst of life's strength. And when the hand falls - there is no power. There is no wealth. No skill, no medicine that can lift up our hand.

You remember the story of Queen Elizabeth. That matchless woman who ruled England's throne. Surrounded herself with all that she thought made life worth living. She had wealth. She could buy servants. She had a tremendous court, to sing her praises. She had luxuries, to make life easy. But one day, the hand fell and she was sick. And as the days began to pass and she realized that this sickness was unto death. And as the shadow of eternity began to come, she cried out. Millions of money for one inch of time. With all of her money - she could not buy one inch of God's time. As we think of the uncertainties of life, it seems to me there ought to be a truth that comes to your heart like a hammer. And says to you - if you are going to make anything worthwhile out of your life, you must do it now.

Life is so uncertain that we cannot control it. In Richmond, Virginia, a professor at Union Seminary was speaking on Rom. 8:28. A student said to him, professor - you don't believe that all things work together for good. He said, yes, I do. But things in themselves may not be good. But they will work together for good. Before the going down of the sun, that day - the professor's wife was killed in an automobile accident. And he was injured and left a cripple. When the President of the Seminary called upon him, he told him - go back and tell my students that Rom. 8:28 still holds

good.

Before a year had passed, death had taken him away, to the Heavenly Father. The class was so impressed - that that was the text that they put upon his tomb. One great preacher said -- each year I go and visit that tomb and prayerfully drink in what that professor said. He was crippled, he was conquered, physically beaten - and yet, he was spiritually released.

III. WE CAN LIVE OUR LIVES BUT ONCE

As we have considered the short span of life. The uncertainty of life. And now, there is the possibility that you (live but once.)

While we have been together in this service - this hour has passed by and will never return again. God may give us many more hours to live. But never can we live this hour. It has just lifted away. It is gone. And some day, we will realize that every day passes the same. We live it but once. And this whole day will be gone. And the shades of night will settle down upon this day. The day will come to a close. God may let us live many other days. But if we have the privilege of living 10,000 more days -- we cannot live this day again. When it shall have closed - it is but a day in the history of the past.

I am saying to you that your opportunities for today will be gone forever. You cannot bring them back. The opportunities of this past year - they have gone. The weeks, the months slip away. And soon we will be ushering in another new year.

And when this year has come to an end -- it will be gone forever. Now God may let us live other years. But we can never live this year over again. When once it has passed - it has passed forever. And it is true with our lives. When once we have lived - the days and the years which God has allotted to us here -- we can never live them again.

The ageless eternity lies before us. When once it has gone - it has gone forever. Gone are the opportunities of service. Gone are the days and the years. With all of their failures and mistakes. As we think of these things again - if we are going to make anything worthwhile out of our lives. What I am trying to get across to you - we must do it, while we have them.

When once they come to a close - they will come to a close forever.

IV. WE ARE BUILDING OUR ETERNAL ESTATES WHILE WE ARE HERE ON EARTH

Now this is the final thing that I would like to say about the opportunities of your life. You are living right here on earth. And Jesus said, in eternity, he shall render to each one of us according to what we have done with life down here.

vel It is like the picture of the old cotton plantation -- the fields are white and the laborers are in the fields working. It is late afternoon - the sun is sinking in the West. The (headman) on the farm called the laborers in. And they come in out of the field and they bring their day's work with them. And there, under a spreading tree - a large steel scale is set up. When the laborers are all there, the man opens

his book. In which he records the names of the workers. One by one he calls the names. Each man comes forward and places his day's work on the scale. It is weighed and he receives his pay according to that which he has done. Those who have been diligent and have made the best use of their hours of the day - receive a reward. Each one received according to what he has done.

Now that brings to mind, a picture when some day - earth's day is going to come to a close. The sun is going to set. And Jesus is going to blow his trumpet. And out from the fields of earth, his workers shall come. And the scales of God's justice will be set. And in the books in which the names of the workers shall be opened. In response to the roll-call of the Almighty, each one shall come forward and cast his life's work on the scales of justice. Each one will receive his reward according to the life that he has lived on earth.

We shall find that our eternity will be just that -- by the grace of God and the help of God. We are making out of life down here.

I think it would be wrong today if I did not call this to your attention. And did not use them emphasis that the life apart from Jesus Christ is a failure. And that your life as the great Apostle Paul says here, that his life was made up of opportunities for Christ. And he goes on to say I want to live - and I long to go to be with Christ. But he says how much happier for me than even living on. That I might be with Jesus Christ.

So everyone has to face this - and this is a realization. Of what we must face up to in our lives. We can all find something in being alive in Jesus Christ. I think Paul

was saying, what one old man of God said as he fulfilled his responsibilities to God. I am a happy man on Monday. I have a blessed Tuesday. A joyful Wednesday. A delightful Thursday. A good Friday. A glorious Saturday. And a Heavenly Sunday. Indeed, Paul wished that his glory might literally overflow in Christ Jesus. How marvelous.

GLB
Many, many years ago, this true incident happened in the Broadway Baptist Church, in Louisville, Ky. The meeting was about to close. And just before the congregation stood, a man came forward and said, I would like to say a few words before this meeting closes. It was an old man - the best part of his life was behind him. He twisted his hands and his watch chain. And he spoke with hesitating speech. But he told a story. And this is something of what he said.

I have one of the best Christian wives that God ever made. For years she has pleaded with me that I give my heart to Christ, and has prayed every day that I might become a Christian. I have only laughed at her pleadings and her prayers. And told her that I was a good honest man, and did not need her Christian beliefs.

Two weeks ago, my work called me to Texas. When I was there - it became necessary to go out into the country and spend the night, at a country home. The next morning I was sitting on the porch with the man of the house. When a sweet little golden haired girl climbed up into his lap. Lifting her beautiful face and said - Papa, what is the verse for today. He explained to me that it was the custom in the home to begin the day with a verse of Scripture. Which was to serve as a kind of motto for the day. He repeated a verse to the little girl and she repeated it after him and then soon ran away to play. The incident passed and I thought no more about it at that time.

A little while later, I went out and sat down in the shade of a large tree. In a few minutes, that same little golden-haired girl came and climbed up in my lap. Lifted that beautiful face and said, mister, tell me a story. I told her that I had no little folks in my home and that I didn't know any story. But she insisted. Just tell me a story. I remember the little story that I had heard somewhere and I told it to her - just to please her. When I had finished, she lifted up her face, up to mine again -- and this time, she had a look of disappointment. She said, your story didn't have any Christ in it. My Papa tells me stories and his stories always have Christ in them. That is a simple childish word - but it went home to my heart like a dagger. I realized that my story had no Christ in it - because my life had no Christ in it.

I arose and went back to the town and plunged into the business of the day. Like a great hammer, the child's message seemed to be beating against my heart. No Christ in it. No Christ in it. I went harder to work. But it seemed the harder I worked - the harder the message was beating in my heart. No Christ in it. No Christ in it. I spent a miserable day. And that night hastened to my room and threw myself on the bed - trying to go to sleep. There I lay in the darkness - the awful words throbbing in the depths of my heart. No Christ in it. No Christ in it.

At last, I could stand it no longer. I arose from my bed, knelt there in the darkness, lifted my face to Heaven and said - Dear Jesus, I have tried to live without Thee. And I have made a miserable failure of life. I have spent the best of my years and the best of my strength in sin. And I am ashamed to come with this shattered and broken, and blighted life. But if you will come into it - and cleanse it - that which is left of it - shall be thine and thine alone. And there in the darkness and stillness, the peace of God that passeth all understanding, came into my heart. Now I am hastening

back to my own home to put my arms around my saintly wife and tell her - that her
Christ is my Christ. And her God is my God.

There is no life worth living that is apart from Jesus Christ. Can you say with
Paul today - for me means opportunities for Christ. And dying, well, that is better
yet.