

WHY NOT LIVE NOW?

"And as thy days, so shall thy strength be." Deuteronomy 33:25.

Most of us plan to settle down to life and live with a purpose when we find the time. We think we are going to begin to live when we finish school, when we get married, when our children grow up, when we have a larger house, when we retire and have time to do all the things we have dreamed about doing. We are like a friend who is a "traveling salesman." He and his wife live out of their suitcases and in hotels or motels wherever they happen to be. They usually do not completely unpack for they will be going on in a few days. They plan for the day when they can stay in one place and really begin to live. Most of us who do not have to travel in our work are like this couple. We will "unpack" after a while; meanwhile, we've not really started to live. One wonders why we should not live now.

Parents frequently delay the realization of the dreams of youngsters by saying: "You can drive the car when you are sixteen. When you're grown up you can do that. You can go where you please. You can stay out late at night. There are a lot of things you can do when you are older." So the ideal and ambition of the youngster is to get through with this stage as quickly as possible and be a "grown-up."

Then we go away to college and are constantly told when we want to read some books that we have selected for ourselves that they must wait until after graduation. The books the professors assign all seem so dull and uninteresting. So we say, "When I finish college, I am going to read what I want to read." But we never seem to get around to this reading after we get out of college. Or, "I'm going to travel when I get out of college." Or maybe we say, "When I get married and have my home, I'm really going to live." But it is always in the future -- not now. Why is it that we do not unpack our suitcases and begin to be at home in the world?

What we do not have always looks so very attractive. The days gone by -- they were such happy, carefree days, especially if they are far enough in the past. The days ahead, too, are going to be so wonderful. That is the outlook which was reflected in the history of the Hebrew people. For a short period of a hundred years there was a united kingdom. It was only during that era that there was any greatness to the political life of the Jewish people. Thereafter, they looked back to the glorious when they were a free and united people and ahead to the wonderful days that were going to be some day when the Davidic kingdom was restored. They never found much significance to the present.

The work we do now seems so dull, monotonous and routine. An interesting story was told about President Eliot of Harvard University. He is the man who selected the five-foot shelf of Harvard Classics to educate people who couldn't go to college by using fifteen minutes of their time each day in communion with great minds through books that have stood the test of time. People often said to Dr. Eliot, "Your work is so interesting; it is not dull and monotonous like being a carpenter or a plumber, a salesman or a banker." He would reply, "As a matter of fact, my work gets to be just as routine as anybody else's. The only difference is I'm so in love with it and so interested in everything I do that I keep myself alive." The work we do is seldom the work we want to do. We want to do something more exciting. Whatever we do not have seems so very, very attractive.

The same is true of a vacation. A vacation is such a wonderful thing when you look forward to it, but not too much fun when you are on it. You're always glad to be back home when you're through with it. And if you are on a permanent vacation, life is very miserable indeed.

Whatever we do not have seems to be the most attractive thing we could possibly possess. Some of you may think that, if you had another companion, things would be different. Well, maybe so, maybe not! That might depend on how much you changed. Others of you may think, if I could just live where the outlook of people was different from what it is here, how wonderful it would be.

Each stage of life offers tremendous possibilities for enjoyment, growth, learning and service. Live in the present stage and then be able to forget it without any regret, looking forward to the next stage for which to some extent the present one is a preparation.

Childhood, when we've left it far enough behind, seems to be a period when individuals are carefree and happy. We remember it as a time when we had few responsibilities. Children often feel insecure. They crave affection but do not always get it. Some parents think that they have done all that is necessary if they provide for the material welfare of their children, send them to school, to summer camps, and provide someone to take care of them. Children need more than that. Children need love, attention, affection and instruction from mother and father.

It is easy to believe we were happier in the past than we were, and that we are going to be happier in the future than we are now, for we are endowed with imagination and memory. Memory is very kind: it tends to blot out most of the unpleasant things and helps us to remember only how much fun and joy we had in the past. And imagination may play a trick upon us and cause us to believe that the future will be carefree, regardless of what the present is. When the future becomes the present, it is usually just as commonplace as the present, and it will be unless something happens inside of us to make it different.

How tragic not to live now, whatever stage of life "now" is! The wondrous truth about the way of life that Christ taught and exemplified is that being a Christian not only prepares one to die, but equips one to live here and now, as well as hereafter. Frequently one says, "If I had my life to live over, I would do thus and so." Then follows some well-intentioned but untruthful declaration that all sorts of circumstances would be different. No one has his life to live over. It is a one-way street for all.

Most of us think that we are going to begin really living when we can find the time. We know we ought to live now, but we just cannot find the time to do all the things we know we want to do, or ought to do.

Why not "unpack" and live now? Not live just for the moment, of course, because then life would lose its purpose and direction. Live with a thought to the future, but do not defer living. Develop interests that will serve as security against disintegration when we really come to the point where we need them. Parents know that their children are going to grow up. They should not want to keep them small and dependent forever. The tragedy is that some parents try to do just that. They build their lives so completely into the lives of their children that they are unwilling to turn the children loose. They are not willing to let their children grow up, stand on their own feet, and make their own choices.

The purpose of life is to live it in all of its richness and fulness. Life can be lived in such a way that the heart is filled with wonder at the

possibilities wrapped up in it. The tragedy is that we may exist through years and never discover the meaning of life, never know the joy of loving people, sharing their problems and sorrows, and leaving the world a little better because we journeyed through it. We can drift through life, or we can live it all our days. Life is the goal, not just a means to something else.

Life is a journey in which everyday experiences, relationships and opportunities are prized for themselves. The sources of happiness, joy and satisfaction in life lie close at hand, not off somewhere else. We find them every day along life's journey or our eyes will be blinded to them forever.

There is the joy of friendship. We cannot have many intimate friends in life, but even a few friends can make life worth while when otherwise the journey would become routine, and we would lose interest in it. A friend does not have to say much, he does not have to do much. He must be there at those times when we need the encouragement of somebody's presence or when we are strongly tempted to turn our backs on what we know is right. At such times a friend may merely put his hand on our shoulder and we cannot let him down.

Live today. Stop living in the past. Many of us have never learned how to forget those things which are behind. Mulling over the mistakes of yesterday paralyzes the efforts of today. Some of us need to give ourselves a good talking-to along this line, and say quite bluntly to ourselves, "The past is gone -- utterly and irretrievably gone." It is now completely beyond your control. In the closing scene of Shakespeare's THE TEMPEST, Prospero says to Alonzo: "Let us not burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone." That is excellent advice, and increasingly we must learn to heed it.

If you are really going to live now, you must stop living in the future. Don't expend your resources of body, mind and spirit bearing tomorrow's burdens in advance, and solving tomorrow's problems before they arise. The way to live is just a day at a time. Leave tomorrow with God until it comes. No strength is given today for tomorrow; tomorrow will bring the strength for the day, and the day after will bring the strength for that day. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." Each day we are given spiritual manna sufficient for that day's needs; no more and no less.

Christ said, "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). Therefore, let us continue to look to the Lord each day for the strength which we need. Power is not one of those things we can store up. Power comes into our lives only as we use it; it flows in and flows out. If it is not used, our lives become like the Jordan River --- ending in a Dead Sea. We must seek power to live victoriously now, "not for tomorrow and its needs" but just for the day. Live like God wants you to live today. Don't worry about tomorrow or next month, but live today. Remember the words of Carlyle, "Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand." Live now. If you will cultivate and develop the habit of living a day at a time, you will find that God will give you the strength to do what you know you ought to do for twenty-four hours. More than that, none of us has any right to seek.

The decisive matter is not that God has given some of us ten talents and others five and still others one. Many people with ten talents have done very little with them. The man who has one talent and learns how to release

the power and possibilities that come into his life through that talent is the man who deserves admiration and commendation.

Start living now. If you are going to have any future happiness, it will be because you have learned to be joyful now. That is the wisdom expressed in the familiar "Salutation of the Dawn" from the Sanskrit:

"Look to this day, for it is life, the very life of life. In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence; the bliss of growth, the glory of action, the splendor of beauty. For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision; but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Look well, therefore, to this day! Such is the salutation of the dawn."