

"WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?"

"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 4:14.

The New Testament is a book about life. It opens with the picture of a babe in a manger, and it closes with the assurance of life triumphant over sin and death. Some of the most familiar and best loved passages in it center around the word. For example, Christ said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). But what is meant by this word which is used so frequently in the New Testament?

Perhaps I should point out what the word does not mean, and then tell you what it does mean.

1. Life does not mean an abundance of things.

Many live for things, but they make a great mistake in doing so, for Christ said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). God's Word teaches that not only is it impossible to identify life with things, but that things may become a serious hindrance to life. William Jennings Bryan said, "Those who live for money spend the first half of their lives getting all they can from everybody else and the last half trying to keep everybody else from getting what they have got away from them, and they find no pleasure in either half." Somebody asked Mr. John D. Rockefeller, "How much money does it take to satisfy a man?" He answered, "Just a little more." A small coin will shut out from our vision as large a thing as the sun, and as small a thing as money can shut God out of your life. Therefore, life must not be confused with things.

2. Life does not mean an abundance of time.

Life cannot be identified with length of days. Methuselah held the long distance record so far as length of days is concerned. God's Word says "The days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years; And he died." One wonders if that was not a waste of time! Christ lived approximately thirty years on earth, but the quality of His life was such that He changed the course of history. One glorious hour of a crowded life may be more significant and meaningful than years of mediocre existence.

Life, as the New Testament used the word, is not simply a biological phenomenon. The startling teaching of the New Testament is that one may be alive physically and yet not have life. Length of days, then, is not life. Philip James Bailey put it this way:

"We live in deeds, not years;
in thoughts, not breaths;
in feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs.
He most lives who thinks most,
feels the noblest, acts the best."

3. Life does not mean an abundance of thrills.

There are those who live primarily for thrills. In this connection God said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6). A colored man alighted from a merry-go-round and was met by this rebuke from his wife: "Now, look at you; you spent your money, you got off right where you got on, and you ain't been nowhere!" That is not a bad description of modern living, a senseless whirl, which can be spelled in three words -- Hurry, Worry and Bury. The most miserable people today are those who rush around in cars looking for a good time and never finding it, and who argue that "variety is the spice of life," but not having sense enough to know that people can't live on spice.

4. Life does not mean an abundance of theories.

Those who would estimate life in terms of theories need the scriptural reminder, "The world by wisdom knew not God" (I Corinthians 1:21). Josh Billings used to say, "I'd rather know a few things for certain than be sure of a lot of things that are not so." It is glorious to be able to say truthfully, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (I John 3:14). "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (II Timothy 1:12). "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1).

It is good for all of us to pause amid the hectic round of events and to take stock of ourselves. Every wise business man has an annual stocktaking. Every navigator has his chart and compass, and frequently checks his bearings. Wise people have a physical check-up; and our text calls upon us to check ourselves in relationship to God and eternal things. "What is your life?" Is it all that God desires it to be?

1. This is a personal question.

It is the personal pronoun in the question that invests it with value and arrests our attention. You are the person addressed, as if you were the only one that mattered. After all, what is the value of preaching if it is not made personal and applied to our individual hearts and lives? You can make your life a thing of honor or of shame, a blessing or a curse, a fountain of joy or a burden of woe, a center of light or a source of gloom. You are free to make your life high or low, fine or coarse, full of love or full of hate.

2. This is a present question.

It does not ask, "What was your life?", but "What is your life?" A boy was asked, "Is your father a Christian?" "Yes," he replied, "but he hasn't been doing much about it lately!" There are plenty of people like that. Their Christian experience is in the past. It isn't up-to-date. I am not asking you, "What was your life ten years ago?" I am asking you about your present relationship to God. "What is your life" now, at this moment?

In reply to the question, "What is your life?" our text does not so much tell us what life actually is as what it is like. It says, "It is even a vapour." Vapor is a visible diffused matter. It is something that can be seen. Therefore, your life is seen. Are you a Christian? Then people are watching you and judging the value of Christianity by you. Not only is life seen, but it is strong. Imagine a great factory where hundreds are employed suddenly engulfed in ruin. What caused the change? The boiler burst. It had been filled with steam or a vapor, but it got out of control, and the very thing that might have been a blessing became a destructive power. Some of us have never realized the influence of our lives. They are either counting for God or they are counting against Him. There is no such thing as a neutral life. You can be a blessing or a blot, but a blank you cannot be. You are influencing other lives.

Life is short. "It is even a vapour." It is here for a little while and then vanisheth away. Observe the steam coming from a kettle. It is just a vapor. One moment it is there, and the next it is gone. That is what life is like. We are only passing through this world. Let us not waste a single day. This life is our only opportunity for service. We cannot divorce life and service. Each of us is serving God or Satan. Your life should be spent in God's service. When a life is saved and

dedicated to the Lord for service it is sweet indeed. Only a genuine Christian knows the true sweetness of life.

Whatever your present condition and needs may be, there are three things that can be said truthfully about your life:

I. Your Life Can Be Cleansed.

Isn't that just what you need? Doesn't your heart need to be cleansed from the guilt and defilement and wretchedness of sin? Of course it does! Thank God, that great need has been met in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He came into this world to save sinners. He died on the cross to make it possible for people like us to be saved from all our sins. However sinful and soiled your life may be, there is perfect and present cleansing for you if you will bring your life just as it is to the Saviour.

There is only one thing to do with a soiled life and that is to bring it to Christ. We have a splendid illustration of this in the story of the leper who came to Christ begging Him for cleansing. In those days a leper was compelled to stand afar off from other people and cry, "Unclean! Unclean!" to warn them to keep away. Is that your condition? "Unclean!"? Well, such was the condition of this leper who came to our Lord and said to Him, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Christ put forth His hand, touched the leper, and said, "I will. Be thou clean." Immediately the leper was made clean.

If you will bring your life to Christ and say, "Lord, Thou canst make me clean," He will answer, "I will. Be thou clean." How is it done? "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7). Here is cleansing from the guilt of sin, cleansing from the defilement of sin, cleansing from the power of sin, yea, present and perfect cleansing for all who will trust the Saviour. Whoever you are and wherever you are, your heart and life can be cleansed.

II. Your Life Can Be Changed.

Of course, if a dirty object is made clean, there is at once a striking transformation. A cleansed life will soon be seen to be a changed life. Oh, the change that takes place in one who has been a terrible sinner and then has accepted Christ as his Saviour, and has been forgiven, cleansed and used in the service of the Lord. Before the transformation he was sin-stained, frustrated and broken, but since the Lord saved him he is radiant with the beauty of holiness, and is so satisfied and happy. Now, that is the purpose and provision of God for every one of us. Your life can be changed by the power of the risen Lord. Christ is able and willing to take our marred and broken lives and to change them into beautiful and useful lives that will bring great glory to His name. Won't you bring your life to Him so that He can cleanse and change it?

III. Your Life Can Be Controlled.

Have you ever noticed the rising of a full moon? If so, you know that it is a wonderful sight. Have you ever asked yourself, "Who controls that great moon? Who measures its movements across the sky so skillfully?" Have you ever stood on the seashore and watched the waves? Who controls the sea? Have you ever watched the setting sun? Who holds that mighty ball of fire in the sky? Who controls it?

You know the answers to these questions. The One Who controls the pathway of the pale moon, Who has His hand upon the swelling tides, and Who unfailingly measures the movements of the sun, is our Lord Jesus Christ: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible or invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

This same glorious Lord, Who controls the moon and the sun and the tides, is able to take your life and to master and control it. Oh, what a difference it makes when Christ is in control of the life! Those of you who are trying to run your own lives are not very successful. Why not hand your life over to Christ and let Him control it? What a difference it will make when He is in control of it! If you will yield your life to Him, He will cleanse, change and control it.