

BREVITY AND FLEETING NATURE OF OUR LIVES

**LORD, make me to know my end
And what is the extent of my days;
Let me know how transient I am.**

-- Psalm 39:4

**Teach us to realize the brevity of life,
so that we may grow in wisdom.**

-- Psalm 90:12NLT

Brevity simply means shortness of time while **eternity** is unending time. God desires that we grasp this simple but vital truth while we still have breath in our lungs and a beat in our heart. And so His Spirit goes to great lengths to give us many vivid [similes](#) and [metaphors](#) to help us understand just how short our lives really are in relation to eternity. Let me encourage you to not just take a cursory look at the passages below alluding to brevity, but to take some focused time and [truly meditate on them](#), asking your Teacher, the Spirit, to open your eyes to behold wonderful, life transforming truths in His Word. Notice that both of the preceding quotations from the psalms are prayers, which prompts a thought...

THOUGHT - What would my days look like this next year if I sincerely and persistently prayed these prayers to my Father in Heaven? That is a rhetorical question, as I have no doubt He would reveal to us aspects of our use of time which while not sinful per se are of no value in light of eternity. As I write this note we are on the eve of 2023. Who knows what this year will bring, but we can implore the One Who is in full control of 2023 (or whatever year you happen to be reading this note) to open our eyes and give us eternal vision during our brief stay on earth even as Paul describes in 2Cor 4:18+ writing "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Praying these two psalms would be like asking the Lord to "stamp eternity on our heart and mind and eyes!" See also Vertical Vision which empowers horizontal living.

In the Scriptures below, note the emphasis on the brevity of life in Job, keeping in mind that he may have lived as long as 200 years, and yet to him it was short! Of course, he suffered a completely unexpected loss of his children (Job 1:18, 19), which may explain some of the focus of this book on the fleeting nature of our lives. God could have just said "Life is short," but instead He gives us a plethora of pictures (shadows, breath, grass, flowers, etc, things we are all familiar with) to help us get a genuine grip on just how short life really is in light of the (endless) length of eternity! The brevity of life presents a dramatic contrast with the permanence of eternity! My [acronym](#) for the importance of recognizing the brevity of life is **T.I.M.E.** which simply says "Time Impacts My Eternity!" [See a talk I gave to a men's group](#) on the subject of **T.I.M.E.** See also Redeem the Time.

Billy Graham wrote that "The Bible has much to say about the brevity of life and the necessity of preparing for eternity. I am convinced that only when a man is prepared to die is he also prepared to live....There is for each man a day, an hour, a minute. The Bible talks in many places about the brevity of life, and the Bible warns that we should be prepared to meet God at all times." (1Jn 2:28+)

James Smith wrote a thought provoking article entitled [What is Life](#) ([see below](#)) and in it he draws four vivid pictures of our earthly life relative to our eternal life...

Our life is the bud of being — the flower will not open on this side the grave.

Our life is the youth of existence — we shall not be full-grown in this world.

Our life is the seedtime of eternity — what is sown now — will be reaped in an eternal, changeless state.

Our life is the introduction to immortality!

Again James Smith wrote a pithy article entitled [The Time is Short](#) in which he said of the shortness of time ...

Then our opportunities to be useful must be few and brief. A short day, at least, is all that is allotted to us, to do good below. Therefore we are admonished to work, while it is called today, for the night comes when no man can work....

Time is the limit of your trials, temptations, and troubles.

Time is the limit of your conflicts, doubts, and fears.

Time is the limit of your pains, privations, and griefs.

Here is a quote from **Charles Haddon Spurgeon's** powerful sermon "[The Time is Short](#)" (see full sermon below) -

The time is short. THIS INSPIRES us. It ought to fire us with zeal for immediate action. The sun hastens on, the sands run down. "How is the accepted time." Let those who love the Lord be prompt. The time to do the deeds that thou must do, or leave them undone, flies swiftly past. Say not, "I will do this by-and-by." Do it at once!

J R Miller writes

"If you saw a man standing by the shore, and flinging gold coins and diamonds into the sea — you would say that he was insane. Yet God sees many people continually doing something very like this. Not gold and precious stones, do they this throw away — but minutes, hours, days, weeks, and years of time — possessions which are of greater worth than any gems of earth!....Think how much most of us **would really add to the length of our life**, if we had learned to use every hour and moment. We talk seriously of the **brevity of life**. We are often heard complaining about the **shortness of the days**, wishing they had many more hours in them. **Probably the majority of people waste one-half of their time, and have made only one-half as much of their life as they might have done** — if they had only used their time with wise economy, and had not squandered any of it. There are many ways of wasting time. Many people waste a great deal of time in little fragments — five minutes here, ten minutes there, half an hour today, and an hour tomorrow. Those who understand the true value of time, and have learned the secret of using it, always have something worth while to fill up all the little interstices.....Much time is wasted in useless activities — in doing things which are not worth while. There are things which are not regarded as sins — but which are of no value to anyone, and bring no benefit to him who spends his time in doing them.....No problem that comes before us is more important than this — what to do with time. In youth, we learn how to live. The habits we form then, will go with us to the end of our days. If we learn then the value of moments, and form the habit of giving every minute something worthy to do — we shall have found a secret of successful living. ([Flinging Gold Coins and Diamonds into the Sea](#))

Here is a pithy excerpt from puritan **Thomas Watson's** treatise entitled [Time's Shortness](#). Ponder the practical application of the following question/answer segment...

QUESTION. What advantage will accrue to us, by often thinking of our short stay here?

ANSWER 1. Meditation on the shortness of time would cool the heat of our affections for the WORLD.

These visible objects please the fancy—but they do not so much delight us—as delude us. They are suddenly gone from us. Worldly things are like a fair picture drawn on the ice—which the sun quickly melts.

The time is short, so why should we overly love that which we cannot keep over long? 1 Corinthians 7:31: "The fashion (or pageant) of the world passes away." Time passes away as a ship in full sail. This, thought on seriously, would mortify covetousness. Paul looked upon himself as ready to loosen anchor and be gone. His love to the world had already died, Galatians 6:14: "The world is crucified to me—and I unto the world." Who would covet that which has neither contentment nor continuance?

Peter had the same view in 2 Peter 1:14: "Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle." Among the Grecians, the city of Sparta had a king for a year and then he was to lay down his crown—which made everyone strive not to be king. Why should we so toil about the world as if we were to live here forever? What need is there for a long provision—if it is for a short way? If we have enough to bear our charges to heaven, that should suffice. Suppose a man's lease were ready to expire and he should fall to building and planting; would not he be judged to be foolish? When our time is so very short now, to follow the world immoderately, as if we would fetch happiness out of the earth which God has cursed—is a degree of madness. We shall soon have no need of the earth—but to be buried in it!

ANSWER 2. Meditation on the shortness of time should be a means to HUMBLE us.

Augustine calls humility the mother of the graces. Balm sinks to the bottom of the water. A good Christian sinks low in humility. And what can sooner pull down the flags and banners of pride—than to consider we are shortly dropping into the dust! The priest was to cast the feathers of the fowls by the place of the ashes (Leviticus 1:16). Just so, all your feathers of honor must shortly lie in the ashes. Shall not he who is clothed with mortality—be clothed with humility? The thoughts of the grave—should bury our pride.

ANSWER 3. Meditation on the shortness of time, would hasten our REPENTANCE

Repentance is as necessary, as heaven. As moisture and natural heat preserve life—so repenting tears and a heart burning with love preserve the soul. It is natural to delay repentance. We say with Haggai 1:2, "The time is not yet come." But, the text says, the time is short. Our life is a candle, which is soon blown out.

The thoughts of time's uncertainty and swiftness, would keep us from putting off our repentance. There is no time for us to delay. It is observed of the birds of Norway, that they fly faster than the birds of other countries. By the instinct of nature, knowing the days in that climate to be very short, they therefore make more haste to their nests. The consideration of short abode here, will make us avoid delays and fly faster to heaven upon the wing of repentance.

ANSWER 4. Meditation on the shortness of time would give us an antidote against the TEMPTATIONS of Satan.

Temptation is Satan's eldest daughter, who woos for him. Satan does more mischief by his wiles—than his darts. He knows how to suit his temptation, as the farmer knows what seed is proper for such a soil. Satan tempted Achan with a wedge of gold; and David with beauty. It is hard to keep up the banks of grace against the sea of temptation. I know no better remedy against Satan's immodest solicitations than this text: "the time is short."

"What, Satan, do you tempt me to vanity—when I am going to give up my accounts at the judgment? Shall I now be sinning—when tomorrow I may be dying! How shall I look my judge in the face!" Christian, when Satan sets sinful pleasure before you, show him a death's-head. This will make temptations vanish.

ANSWER 5. The consideration of the shortness of our stay in the world would be a help to TEMPERANCE.

It would make us sober and moderate in the use of worldly comforts. By excess, we turn lawful things into sinful things. The bee may suck a little honey from the flower—but put it into a barrel of honey—and it is drowned. We may with Jonathan dip the end of the rod in honey—but not thrust it in too far. The flesh, when pampered, rebels. The best preservative against intemperance is this—the time is short!

The Egyptians at their great banquets, used to bring in the image of a dead man, and say to their guests, "Look upon this—and proceed in your banquet." An excellent antidote against excess. Joseph of Arimathea erected a sepulcher in his garden—to spice his flowery delights with the thoughts of death.

ANSWER 6. Meditation on the shortness of time would much mitigate our grief for the loss of dear RELATIONS.

It is observable that when the Apostle said, "The time is short," he immediately added. "Let those who weep be as if they wept not."

No doubt the loss of relations is grievous to the fleshly part. It is like pulling a limb from the body. When God strikes us in our right eye—we weep. It is lawful to give vent to our grief. Joseph wept over his dead father. But though true religion does not banish grief, it bounds it. We must weep—as if we wept not. Rachel's sin was that she refused to be comforted (Matthew 2:18). If anything can stop the issue of sorrow, at least assuage it, it is this, "The time is short." We shall shortly have our losses made up and enjoy our godly relations again in heaven!

ANSWER 7. Meditation on the shortness of time would make us highly value GRACE.

Time is short—but grace is forever. 1 John 2:27: "The anointing which you have received from Him abides in you." Grace is a blossom of eternity; it is an immortal seed (1 John 3:9). Grace is not blasted by death—but transplanted into a better soil. Grace is not a lease which soon expires—but an inheritance entailed forever. He who has true grace can no more lose it—than the angels can, who are fixed in their heavenly orb. Grace shall outlast time—and run parallel with eternity. (Read full message [Time's Shortness](#)).

Now, let us take a few moments and meditate on the pure milk of the Word, that by it we might grow in respect to salvation (1Pe 2:2+), observing the following six classes of word pictures as delicate morsels to feed our soul and gird our minds for action (1Pe 1:13+)...

- Job 8:9 "For we are only of yesterday and know nothing, Because our days on earth are as a shadow.
- Job 14:2; Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.
- Ps. 102:11 My days are like a lengthened shadow, And I wither away like grass.
- Ps 109:23 I am passing like a shadow when it lengthens; I am shaken off like the locust.
- Ps 144:4 Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.

[Dictionary of Biblical Imagery \(borrow\)](#) on **shadow** - At other times shadow can be an image of the ephemeral nature of life. Associated especially with "evening" shadows (Ps 102:11; 109:23), the ephemeral nature of life is depicted as a shadow (1 Chron 29:15; Job 8:9; Eccles 6:12). It is uncertain whether the image is based on the nonsubstantial nature of shadows (Job 17:7) or on their transitory nature (Job 14:2; Ps 144:4). See also the sense of lost opportunity suggested by evening shadows in Jeremiah 6:4. Evening shadows may, however, represent the peaceful end of the righteous (Eccles 8:13) or even a time for romantic repose (Song 2:17). The ephemeral nature of shadows is applied in the NT to the institutions of the Mosaic covenant (Col 2:17), which are but a shadow of the heavenly realities to come (Heb 8:5; 10:1).

(2) A BREATH

- Job 7:7 "Remember that my life is but breath; My eye will not again see good.
- Job 7:16 "I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath (Hebrew = Hebel = vapor, breath, vanity in Ecclesiastes)
- Ps 39:5 "Behold, You have made my days as handbreadths (equivalent to the width of four fingers = one of the smallest measures used by Israelites), And my lifetime as nothing in Your sight; Surely every man at his best is a mere breath. Selah (Ponder this Passage!)
- Ps 39:11 "With reproofs You chasten a man for iniquity; You consume as a moth what is precious to him; Surely every man is a mere breath. Selah.
- Ps 78:33ESV So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror.
- Ps 144:4 Man is like a mere breath; His days are like a passing shadow.

(3) A CLOUD

- Job 7:9 "When a cloud vanishes, it is gone, So he who goes down to Sheol does not come up.
- Job 30:15 "Terrors are turned against me; They pursue my honor as the wind, And my prosperity has passed away like a cloud.

(4) A FLOWER/GRASS

- Job 14:2; Like a flower he comes forth and withers. He also flees like a shadow and does not remain.
- Ps. 103:15-16 As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes. 16 When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer.
- Ps. 102:11 My days are like a lengthened shadow, And I wither away like grass.
- 2 Ki 19:26 Therefore their inhabitants were short of strength, They were dismayed and put to shame; They were as the vegetation of the field and as the green herb, As grass on the housetops is scorched before it is grown up.
- Isa. 40:6-8 A voice says, "Call out." Then he answered, "What shall I call out?" All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. 7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the LORD blows upon it; Surely the people are grass. 8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.
- 1 Pet. 1:24 For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
- James 1:10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

(5) VANITY

- Eccl. 1:2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."
- Eccl 1:14; I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
- Eccl 11:10 So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting. (Same Hebrew word *hebel* - translated "vanity" above)
- Eccl 12:8 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

THE UNIVERSAL DESTINY (excerpt from Gray Preston's article "The Great Spoiler" in Discipleship Journal 1984) - Many of us are uncomfortable with the subject of death. Our hesitancy is expressed well by Walter Kaufmann in [The Faith of a Heretic \(borrow\)](#): "We regularly emphasize the accidental cause of death, the mishap, the disease, the infection, the advanced age—and thus betray our eagerness to demote death from a necessity to a mere accident."

Then there are those trusting souls who go beyond a mere hesitancy toward death. They scoff at it altogether. C.S. Lewis told of an occasion when his wife asked a friend whether she had ever thought of death. The friend replied, "Oh, no. By the time I reach that age, science will have done something about it."

Ecclesiastes says that we must neither be hesitant about death, nor scoff at it. Rather, we should talk about it forthrightly, for it is the inevitable prospect we all face, and its effects will be devastating if we are unprepared. "The same destiny overtakes all" (Ecclesiastes 9:3), he warns, and that destiny is death. As George Bernard Shaw noted with pallid realism, "The statistics on death are quite impressive: one out of one people die."

One of the films from my teenage years is *Who is Harry Kellerman and Why is He Saying Those Terrible Things About Me?* It begins with the main character, Harry Kellerman, sitting on the roof of a dilapidated building, writing a suicide note. He writes, "There was a time when I thought I would live forever. But I found it necessary to change those plans."

Far too many of us are like Harry Kellerman. We tend to assume we'll live forever. Death is seldom on our list of things to think about, especially if we're young and in good health, with lofty goals for the future. Ecclesiastes wants us to change, however, and to recognize that we all live under the ubiquitous umbrella of death. As we do, he wants us to ask, What meaning does life really have? Does death cancel even the possibility of ultimate meaning? Why should we struggle and toil if it will all end in death anyway?

In light of what Ecclesiastes has said, I think it would not be contradicting him to suggest that twice a week for the rest of our lives we ought to begin the day by looking in the mirror and saying, "I am going to die someday—maybe today." What a difference that could make in our lives!

As we have come to expect, Ecclesiastes doesn't leave his questions unanswered. His resounding response in Ecclesiastes 9:7–10 is an insistence that the expectation of death should produce certain enduring attributes in our lives. The fact that we will die should affect the way that we live. Ecclesiastes employs the brevity of life as a spur to coax us onward.

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible - In a number of poetic passages vanity is used to describe the brevity of human life and the transitory nature of human concerns compared to the eternity of God and the durability of God's concerns (cf. Job 7:16; Ps. 39:5, 11 [MT 6, 12]; 62:9 [10]; 78:33; 94:11; 144:4).

(6) OTHER PICTURES OF BREVITY OF OUR LIVES

- James 4:14+ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.
- Job 7:6 "My days are swifter than a **weaver's shuttle** (See [James' Smith message](#)), And come to an end without hope.
- Job 9:25 "Now my days are swifter than a **runner**; They flee away, they see no good.
- Job 9:26 "They (my days) slip by like **reed boats**, Like an **eagle that swoops on its prey**.
- Job 14:1 Man, who is born of woman, Is short-lived and full of turmoil.
- Psalm 39:4 "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how **transient** I am.

- Psalm 90:4-6; 9; 10 For a thousand years in Your sight Are like yesterday when it passes by, Or as a watch in the night. 5 You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; In the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. 6 In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; Toward evening it fades and withers away. (90:9) For all our days have declined in Your fury; We have finished our years like a sigh. (90:10) As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, Or if due to strength, eighty years, Yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; For soon it is gone and we fly away.
- Psalm 102:3 For my days have been consumed in smoke, (Literally "for my days come to an end in smoke.") And my bones have been scorched like a hearth. (The English of the Septuagint has "my days have vanished like smoke.")
- Isaiah 38:12 "Like a **shepherd's tent** my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me; As a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom; From day until night You make an end of me.

What Is Your Life?

James Smith, 1865

"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!" James 4:14+

If God asks a question — we should listen to it, think of it, and prepare an answer. Here the Lord puts a question to us; it refers to the brevity of our mortal existence; he asks each one of us, **"What is your life?"**

- We think much of it.
- We make great provision for it.
- We spend much thought upon it.
- We are very careful to preserve it.

But what is it? Let us ponder this question. Let us give it the attention it deserves. It is especially suitable to us when shut up in our sick chamber, when afflicted and tried with losses and crosses, or at the commencement of a new year.

Our sufferings may be great, our trials may be many — but they must be short — for what is our life? Let us look at the DURATION of our life. It is exceedingly brief. **No one figure can set forth its brevity, or sufficiently affect our minds with it — and therefore many are employed.**

Our life is like a flower, which springs up under the influence of an eastern sun, which blossoms for an hour, and then fades and dies.

Our life is like a shadow, which lessens and lessens until in a few minutes it is gone.

Our life is like the shuttle which flies in the weaver's hand, and passes before the eye so swiftly, that one can but just see it and say — it is gone!

Our life is like the wind which rushes by us; we hear it, we feel it — and it is no more.

Our life is like the dried leaf which is made the sport of the breeze, and soon carried out of sight.

In one passage in the book of Job, we have figures taken from three elements, to represent its rapid flight.

"My days are swifter than a runner; they fly away without a glimpse of joy. They skim past like boats of papyrus, like eagles swooping down on their prey!" (Job 9:25, 26).

My life is like the swift ships, with all their sails spread, which, with the canvas crowded, glide along the watery way. My life is like the eagle hastening to its prey, compelled by hunger; with strong pinions it cuts the air, and is soon at the point where it would be!

What then, is your life? "You are a mist that appears for a little while — and then vanishes!"

What is your life in retrospect? Look back over the past ten or twenty years; how swiftly they have passed away, and every year appears to pass more quickly than the last!

What is your life in comparison? What are your thirty, or forty, or even seventy years — if compared with the age of the antediluvian patriarchs — Methuselah, for instance? But what are they in comparison with eternity? Think of endless duration, of interminable ages; and while you think of them, ask, **"What is my life?"** Ah, what? No comparison can be drawn — but the thought may be improved. May the Lord help us to improve it.

This naturally leads us to inquire —

- What is the DESIGN of our life?
- Why was life given us?
- Why is it continued to us?

Our life has reference to three parties:

First, to ourselves — the design is to prepare us for eternity. We must live forever; but how depends upon the present. If we live in sin here — we must live in suffering forever. If time is spent in folly — eternity will be spent in bitter, unavailing remorse and sorrow. But if we believe in Jesus, exercise repentance toward God, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and devote our lives to God's service — then eternity will to us be an endless existence in pleasure, satisfaction, and unspeakable delight.

In reference to God — the design of our life is to glorify him, which we can only do by believing his promises, embracing his Son, observing his precepts, and consecrating our time and all our talents to his praise. Here we should live for God — and then in eternity we shall live with God. Here we should aim in all things to honor God — and then in eternity God will honor us.

In reference to our fellow-men — the design of our life is to benefit and do them good. No one is created for himself. Each one is bound to his fellow, and every one should aim to benefit the whole. We should serve our generation by the will of God.

- Our life is misapplied,
- it is squandered,
- it is wasted in folly.....

if we do not use it to secure our eternal salvation, to promote God's glory, and to advance the holiness and happiness of our fellow-men.

What is the CHARACTER of our life?

Looking at its natural character — it is a gift conferred upon us by our beneficent Creator. **A gift which, if rightly used, will prove invaluable; but which, if abused, will be an occasion of eternal regret.** God gave us life; He placed us highest in the scale of His creatures; He made us capable of serving, enjoying, and glorifying Him for ever; He has given us also the means of grace, set before us the way of salvation, and promised his Holy Spirit unto those who ask Him. Having given us life, He has crowned that life with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and has pointed out the way by which we may obtain everlasting blessedness.

But let us look at its moral character.

- What is our life in reference to others?
- Is it exemplary?
- Is it convincing?
- Is it useful?
- Is it likely to make a good impression?
- What is our life in reference to ourselves?
- Is it holy or profane?
- Is it godly or ungodly?
- Is it befitting an immortal being, one who must live forever?
- This view of the subject is not sufficiently attended to by many. Is it attended to by us?

What is the IMPORTANCE of our life? Ah, who shall say? Who can describe, what language can set forth — the importance of our present life?

Our life is the bud of being — the flower will not open on this side the grave.

Our life is the youth of existence — we shall not be full-grown in this world.

Our life is the seedtime of eternity — what is sown now — will be reaped in an eternal, changeless state.

Our life is the introduction to immortality!

What then is its importance?

Ask the dying sinner, whose eyes are just opened, whose soul is just awakened to the solemnities of the eternal world. What reply will he give? Look at his death-struck countenance, mark the expression of his half-glazed eye, hear the accents of his tremulous

voice; but he fails, he tries in vain to set forth the importance of the present life. He exclaims,

"Oh, that I had my time over again! Oh, that I had one year — but one month, one week, of the time I have squandered! But wishing is in vain! The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved! The importance of life I cannot describe. The value of time I can never declare."

Ask the lost soul. The soul which, like the rich man, lifts up its eyes in Hell, being in torment. Despair now rules over the immortal spirit. Agonies, beyond description, torture the never dying intellect. What is the lost soul's estimate of the importance of life? It would require a new language to describe, unearthly figures to illustrate, and a voice such as we have never heard — to set forth its estimate of the precious gift of life! **Only in the depths of Hell, or in the highest Heavens — is the value of life really known!**

The glorified saint, while he tunes his golden harp, sings his never-dying song, and drinks in pure and celestial pleasure, can estimate — but not fully describe, the importance of this present life!

Unsaved sinner — what is your life?

- Is it sin?
- Time spent in opposing God?
- Time squandered upon folly?
- Time dreamed away to no useful purpose?
- Is it trifling?

On, how many trifle away their precious time! They despise their own souls. They live as if existence were bounded by time — and all beyond were annihilation. Is it folly?

How many live as fools!

They provide for the body — but they neglect the soul.

They live for time — but they lose sight of eternity.

The allotted time passes away unheeded.

The day of salvation is spent in sin!

They only lay a foundation for everlasting self-condemnation, and open in their own hearts a source of never ceasing agony!

Believer — what is your life?

Is it Christ?

Can you say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ!" Does Christ live in you?

Are you spiritually minded — and do you find it life and peace?

Is it a wise preparation for eternity?

Are you living now — as you will wish you had lived by-and-bye?

Life is at best but short....

let us improve it.

Life is uncertain....

let us make sure work for eternity.

Life, if rightly viewed, is very solemn....

let us spend it as intelligent and accountable creatures should.

And when tempted to trifle, when inclined to squander away a day or an hour — let the question influence our decision, "What is your life?"

If it is brief — should it be spent thus? And let the Savior's question be seriously considered by all who make gain the end of life —

"What shall it profit a man — if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36, 37+)

Reader! the time is short,
eternity is near,
salvation is of infinite importance!

Let us therefore decide, and accept the Savior's glorious invitation at once, and so shall we be saved forever!

The Time is Short! **James Smith, 1860**

"But this I say, brethren — the time is short!" 1 Corinthians 7:29

Our time on earth is short — and it is daily growing shorter! Life quickly glides away — and death and eternity quickly approaches. In a little while — we shall close our eyes on all the scenes of earth, and be done with all the concerns of time. Few things fly swifter than time, or teach us more solemn lessons. Yet we slight them, and forget them, or fail to improve them. O for grace to derive comfort, reproof, and stimulus from the brevity of time.

"The time is short!"

Then our troubles must be short, for they are all limited to time. They are the offspring of sin, and will not out-live their parent! Every trouble, leaves one the less to be endured. Soon the last trouble will arrive! Let us therefore bear them with patience, endure them with fortitude, and rejoice in the prospect of bidding them an eternal farewell. Our sharpest, severest trials — will soon be ended! And then, all that will remain, will be eternal peace and joy.

"The time is short!"

Then the pleasures of time will soon terminate!

As sweet as they are, they are fleeting.

Prize them as we may — we must soon part with them.

Not one of them go with us beyond the dying bed.

Let us not, then, value them too highly, or set our hearts too much upon them. Earthly comforts, worldly distinctions and honors — will soon have passed away. The rich and the poor will soon meet together in the graveyard. The peasant and the prince, the beggar and monarch — will alike slumber in the dust.

Let us then, if tempted to think too much of the worldly distinctions, or value too highly the comforts of life — remember that time is short!

"The time is short!"

Then our opportunities to be useful must be few and brief. A short day, at least, is all that is allotted to us, to do good below. Therefore we are admonished to work, while it is called today, for the night comes when no man can work.

If I write for God — I must do it now.

If I speak for Christ — I must speak now.

If I try to save souls from eternal death — I must do it now.

If I would comfort the sad and sorrowful — I must do it now.

Whatever your hand finds to do — do it with all your might; for there is neither work, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave to which we are fast hastening!

[Ecclesiastes 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, verily, do it with all your might; for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol where you are going.]

"The time is short!"

Then Jesus will soon be here. He is coming, and his people are crying, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

He is coming, and his Word assures us, "He who shall come — will come, and will not tarry."

How will many things appear, which now occupy our time, engross our attention, and steal away our hearts — when Jesus comes?

On this astonishing event, we should fix our eye (ED: SEE VERTICAL VISION). On this glorious manifestation of Christ, we should set our hearts. For this majestic appearing of the Son of God, we should prepare and watch. A few short days, or months, or at the most years — and Jesus will be here. He will come, and gather His saints to Him, make all His people like Himself, and so they shall be ever with Him.

Lost sinner, "the time is short!"

- Are you saved?
- Are you ready for the coming of Jesus, or the day of death?
- What will the end of time bring you?
- Where will it land you?
- How will it find you?
- Will it find you a new creature in Christ Jesus?
- Will it find you pardoned, justified, and sanctified?
- Will it find you prepared — ready — waiting, for Heaven and glory?
- Or will it find you dead in sins, without Christ, unsanctified and unsaved?

Look into the matter now, attend to your soul and its salvation at once, for it is of the greatest importance. O flee from the wrath to come! O seek, seek the Lord, that you may be hid in the day of his fierce anger, and stand accepted before Christ at his coming.

Backslider, "the time is short!"

Repent and do your first works.

Go and return to your God, from whom you have so deeply revolted.

Seek afresh the application of the atoning blood, and the cleansing operations of the Holy Spirit.

Beware, O beware, lest coming suddenly, your Lord finds you sleeping!

Beware, lest you be found naked, and so be ashamed before him at his coming!

Rather, seek to be found without spot, unrebukable, and blameless in the day of Jesus Christ.

Your conduct has been base, your sin is grievous — but there is merit in the blood of Jesus, there is mercy in the heart of Jesus, and there is a full warrant in the Word of Jesus for you to return, and be fully blessed.

Discouraged Christian, "the time is short!"

Go on with your work. Do not look too much at the clouds, nor pay much attention to the winds — but plow in hope, sow in hope, and watch in hope for a harvest. You are not able to command success — but you can be **faithful**; and your master has promised to reward your **faithfulness** at His coming. Yield not to fear, listen not to unbelief, give not way to Satan, for "the time is short," and your work, however feeble, however imperfect, however unproductive it may now appear — shall be fully rewarded.

Believer, "the time is short," lift up your head with joy. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for tribulation will soon cease, sorrow will soon flee away, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.

Time is the limit of your trials, temptations, and troubles.

Time is the limit of your conflicts, doubts, and fears.

Time is the limit of your pains, privations, and griefs.

Beyond time —

- all is peace and pleasure,
- purity and perfection,
- happiness and rest!

Lift up then your head with joy, for your redemption, your eternal redemption draws near!

The New York Observer of the 6th of March, 1851, contained obituary notices of ten people, the aggregate of whose ages was more than 885 years. The youngest of the ten was 79 years old. The average of their ages was over 88 years. Of these people, seven were males, and three females. The habits of all are not particularly stated, but so far as they are noticed, they seem to have been simple and temperate. In reflecting on such a record, one of our first thoughts is—How long they lived! The average of their lives surprise us. Such a record shows that in the divine plan respecting human life there has been no considerable change since the days of Moses. The average of human life will probably not be lower until the end of the world. And as these ten people are confessedly rare exceptions to the usual course of things, we have no reason to suppose that the maximum of human life will hereafter be greater than it is at present.

The increased virtue of mankind would no doubt considerably raise the average of human life, but the maximum will not materially vary in future ages. But when we compare the present with the first ages of the world, our thoughts take quite a different turn. Adam lived 930 years—or 45 years longer than all the above ten combined. Seth lived 912 years, Enosh 905 years, Kenan 910 years, Mahalalel 895 years, Jared 962 years, Enoch 365 years, Methuselah 969 years, Lamech 777 years, Noah 950 years. The aggregate of the ages of these ten men was 8,575. Had Enoch not been translated until he was as old as the youngest of the other nine, the aggregate of the ages of these ten antediluvians would have been more than ten times as great as that of the ten first mentioned.

Compared with the life of man before the flood, how short are our days! If any ask the reason of this change, let them know that it is the sovereign will of God, who holds all second causes and all human affairs under his control. To infer from this difference in human life that we and the men before the flood belong not to the same race, is as illogical as to argue that a child dying a year old is not of the same race with its parents, who live half a century. The whale is said to live a thousand years, the elephant four hundred, the swan two hundred, the terrapin one hundred and fifty, the eagle one hundred, and the donkey eighty. But human life is still shorter. Man has more enemies, dangers stand thicker around him. Seventy years only are appointed to him.

Let us not repine at this state of things. As this world ever since the fall of Adam has been under the mediatorial government of Jesus Christ, whatever has been done to the race has been merciful. The abbreviation of human life was unquestionably a kindness to the world. When men lived nearly a thousand years, human wickedness became intolerable. Except when renewed by God's grace, human nature is the same in all ages; and if the wicked lived nine hundred years, earth would again be like hell. Even now we find blasphemers and murderers in their teens. Men are often deeply practiced in crime, and fearfully hardened in atheism before they have lived out half their days. Some men have committed more murders than they were years old. If men should live as long as the patriarchs before the flood, and wickedness should grow, as it now does, personal hostilities would be dreadful, and family feuds and national quarrels would find no termination. How could the world endure for seven or eight centuries the tread of a ruthless Nero, or an Alexander? In one century the scholars of vice would acquire such proficiency as to make their names dreadful.

Though life is short, it is long enough to answer all the highest ends of existence. All people have more time than they profitably employ. Those who waste their lives in vanity and wickedness, have no right to complain of the brevity of their existence. From him, who misuses what is given him, may justly be withheld all further bounties. And the righteous "would not live always." They seek a better country, even a heavenly one. They have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better than any earthly inheritance.

God often takes first, those whom he loves best. Abel left the world, it is thought, at the age of one hundred and twenty years, while his fratricidal brother lived through centuries of guilt and remorse. Enoch seems to have been the most pious of the ten mentioned in Genesis 5, yet he did not remain on earth half so long as the shortest lived of the other nine. With the world so miserable, it is no loss for the godly to die and go to heaven. Nor can it ever be gain for the ungodly—to live and treasure up wrath by sin.

Unless we can lay hold on the gospel truths, it is painful to dwell on the brevity of our earthly existence. Of all people born into the world, one-third do not live two years, and one half do not see seven years. Of the remainder, more than half die before they are forty-five years old. But here and there one lives to be old. The habitable earth and the sea also have become vast grave-yards. If life be so short—let us defer no duty. Let there be a time for everything, and everything in its time.

In Christian countries, most men fail by wicked delays. Around that rock lie the bleached bones of myriads, who intended to live to God, but never did. Inch by inch their lives were stolen from them, and at the end all they could say was, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." A disposition to put off preparation for death would be greatly strengthened by a knowledge that we had centuries before us. We all know the strong propensity in men to say, "There is time enough yet." Beware of this dangerous practice. The next hour may usher any one of us into eternity.

To the godly man, an early death is not an evil. He thereby escapes much suffering. He is taken away from the evil to come. Tacitus, in his life of Agricola, seems pleased that he did not live to see the Senate intimidated by soldiers, courts of law shut up, and rapine and slaughter prevalent. "O Agricola, you are happy, not only by the excellence of your life, but by your opportune death!" Agricola

died at the age of fifty-six years. If a heathen could comfort himself for the death of so honored a father-in-law by such a consideration, how much more may we be cheered by knowing that our departed pious friends no more see, or hear, or feel those things—which were they alive—must vex their righteous souls from day to day.

Let us not be over anxious for long life. The failure of early hopes, the decline of usefulness, the neglect by one's children, the memory of past joys, the presence of many pains and infirmities—burden nearly all the very aged. Their senses are blunted, their strength is not firm, their fears have the ascendancy, the almond-tree flourishes, the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails.

Our advancing years bring increased responsibility. He, who has lived thirty-five years has had five full years of Sabbaths. He, who is seventy years old, has had ten solid years of holy time. Frequent interviews with distressed souls have painfully impressed the writer's mind that there are two sins which have a fearful burden and sting in them. The first is the slighting of gospel grace and mercy. The other is the neglect or abuse of holy time.

Most dying sinners seem to desire longer time only that they may spend it as they should have done their holy Sabbaths. Let us not waste our time in idle regrets on the shortness of life, but let us work while it is day." "The night comes when no man can work." "It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you." Let us do, even a little at a time. Despise not the day of small things. "It is not great talents God blesses, so much as great likeness to Jesus." Holiness is a greater means of usefulness than extraordinary natural gifts, or vast learning. "A heated iron, though blunt, will pierce its way even where a much sharper instrument, if it be cold, cannot penetrate." One of the best models of zeal among fallible men is found in Nehemiah. A perfect pattern was Jesus Christ. The zeal for God's house consumed him. Live and labor to be not only real Christians, but eminent Christians. Let us not sleep as do others.

Heaven or hell will soon receive all that now live. Let your standard be the word of God and the example of Christ. Forget past attainments, and reach after greater things. Live as seeing Him, who is invisible. Never count that you have attained until you have got your crown. "He, who is contented with just enough grace to escape hell and get to heaven, and desires no more, may be sure he has none at all, and is far from the kingdom of God." Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Fight the good fight of faith.

One reason, why some have so great a dread of the close of life, is that it is so rarely a theme of meditation. Men, who will not think, cannot understand. Mere thoughts of dying will make no one holy, but they have often led men to seek salvation. I have read of a man, whose conversion was traced to those words so often repeated in Gen. 5, "AND HE DIED." Live as you may, it will soon be said of you, "and he died." Are you ready for death? The grace of Christ is necessary to enable us to live well and to die well. His death was the death of death, because it was the death of sin. We may confidently plead with the Savior for all needed help. He can make goodness and mercy follow us when living; and glory and honor meet us when dying. His grace can moderate our love of life, and take away our fear of death. He can teach us that this present world is not our rest. He can make us willing to be chastened of the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. He can do for us exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. He is the good Shepherd. In him we may safely trust and forever rejoice. If this life is short, Christ's people shall the sooner be with him.

The Time is Short

Sermon by C H Spurgeon

"The time is short." — 1 Corinthians 7:29+

THE text does not say that time is short. That would have been a true statement. Compared with eternity, time, at the very longest, is but as a pin's point. But note what the text does say: "The time is short." It is the time of our life, the space of our opportunity, the little while we shall be upon the present stage of action, that is short. It is narrow and contracted, as the original implies. "Behold," saith the psalmist, "thou hast made my days as a hand-breath; and mine age is as nothing before thee." Brief is the season we have allotted to us, brethren, in which we can serve the Lord our God.

This is a truth which everybody believes, knows, and confesses. It is trite as a proverb on every tongue; yet how few of us act as if we believed it! We are conscious of the precariousness of other people's lives; but, somehow or other, we persuade ourselves that our own time is not quite as limited as theirs. We think we have "ample time and verge enough;" but we wonder that our neighbours can be so careless and prodigal of days and years, for we observe the wrinkles on their brows, we detect the grey hairs on their heads, and perceive the auguries of death in their mien, and we doubt not they will soon have to render in their account. "All men think all men mortal but themselves," is a "night-thought" that may well startle us, as we rest from the business and the bustle, or the waste and wantonness of each succeeding day. Why hide ye from yourselves the waning of your own life-work, the weakening of your own strength, the weaving of your own shrouds? As a creature, you are frail; as an inhabitant of the world, you are exposed to

casualties; as a man, there is an appointed time for you on earth. You must be swept away by the receding tide; you must go with the rest of your generation.

Ask an angel what he thinks of the life of a mortal, and he will tell you that he remembers when the first man was made, and since then the earth has been ever changing its tenants. Peradventure he is baffled to recall the races that have come and gone in countless succession. For a little while, they floated on the surface, then they sank beneath the stream. At first, they struggled on through centuries; but, after that, they failed, any one of them, to attain a tenth of that pristine age. "Short-lived!" saith the angel, "they seem to me as leaves upon a tree, as insects on the earth, as flies in the air. Like the grass that flourisheth in the meadows, scarcely have I gazed upon them ere they are cut down, withered, and gone." Or, if you never meet with an angel to interrogate him, talk familiarly with one of the trees of an ancient forest. Ask what it has seen; and, though it cannot speak in tones articulate, you can lend it a tongue, and it will tell you that hundreds of years have passed, and history has accumulated, from the time when it was an acorn, till now it covers a wide space with its far spreading foliage. Yes, the oak and elm can tell us that man is but an infant of today. Would you rather take counsel of your fellow-creatures? Then ask the old man what he thinks of life. He will tell you that, when he was a boy, he thought he had a vast length of time before him. So heavily did the days hang on his hands that he played the hours away, and was glad when birthdays told of the years that were gone. It was his strong desire, and his panting ambition, to break loose from the moorings of childhood, and launch out into the great wide sea of turmoil and enterprise; but now he looks back on these seventy years, that have been gradually accumulating, as a dream. Through all the fitful stages of life's journey, time present is always perplexing; it must be past before it is understood. It seems to him only as yesterday when he left his father's roof to be an apprentice. He remembers it distinctly, and fondly tells you of some quaint thing that happened in those olden times. How short a while since the bells rang out his marriage-peal, and now his children have reached their manhood, and his children's children climb upon his knee, and call him "grandfather." Yet he remembers when, as it were but yesterday, he was himself a little child, and his grandsire clasped him to his bosom. My venerable friends, you will bear witness that I do not exaggerate when I speak thus; my language is only the feeble expression of a forcible experience. You can realize more vividly than I can paint the sensation of looking back over the entire span of three-score years and ten; to the stripling, this appears a very long period, while to you it merely seems as a watch in the night.

And yet, perhaps, there are among you some hoary veterans, some elderly matrons, who need to be reminded that "the time is short." Present health and activity may tempt you to forget that nature, in your case, stands upon the verge of her confines. What if your frame be strong; what if the bloom still lingers on your cheeks? You have nearly reached the goal, the allotted term that mortals I have seen fine days, in autumn, when the air was soft cannot as pass in balmy spring; but they gave no promise of another summer. I knew the season was too far advanced for winter to

delay its approach much longer. So, you, my aged friend, be sure that the hour of yours departure is drawing near. Should five, or even ten years more be granted to you, how quickly they must pass when seventy by gone years have so rapidly fled! The remnant of your days will surely cover little space when the whole compass of your life has stretched over so small an area. Be parsimonious of minutes now, though you may have been, at one time, prodigal of years. At the fag-end of life, you have no time to parley and postpone; to resolve, and yet to trifle with resolutions; to waste and squander golden opportunities. "The time is short."

But to estimate this truth aright, we may well turn from the cycles that angels have witnessed, the centuries that trees have flourished, and the seasons that have come and gone in the memory of our grandsires, to consider "the years of the right hand of the Most High." Enquire at the mouth of the Lord; take counsel of the eternal God. Remember how it is written, "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." "He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers," ephemera, insects of an hour, compared with him. Like the grass we spring up, and like the grass we are mowed down. Compared with the lifetime of the Eternal, what is our life? Nay, there is no comparison; it is almost too insignificant for contrast. "My days are like a shadow that declineth; and I am withered like grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations." I wish I had the power to impress this truth on every heart. As I have not, I shall try to point the moral it suggests, and pray that the Spirit of God may seal the instruction upon every heart.

"The time is short," so,

1. **first, it warns;**
2. **next, it suggests;**
3. **then, it inspires;**
4. **and, lastly, it alarms.**

I. First, IT WARNS. If ye knew the sterling worth of time, ye would shrink from the smallest waste of so precious a thing. Fools say that time is long, but only fools talk like that. They say that "time is made for slaves." He alone is a free man who knows how to use his time properly; and he is a slave indeed who finds it slavery to pursue his calling with a good conscience, and serve his God with

diligence, fidelity, and zeal. Knowing that "the time is short," you and I have not an hour to squander upon unprofitable amusements. There are some diversions which afford a respite from the incessant strain of labour and anxiety, and are profitable to strengthen the mind, and brace up the nerves. These are not only allowable, they are fit and proper; but while recreation is both needful and expedient to keep the mental and physical powers in working order, we can give no countenance to such dissipation as tends rather to enervate than to invigorate the constitution. Popular taste displays its own perverseness in seeking to extract pleasure from folly and vice. Fashion lends its sanction to many a pastime that ill becomes any wise, rational, intelligent person; but the Christian, in his relaxations, must seek healthy impulse, and avoid baneful stimulant. "The time is short;" we cannot afford to lose it in senseless talk, idle gossip, or domestic scandals.

Nor can we afford to plan a round of empty frivolities to while away an afternoon or an evening, as the manner of some is. Our time is too precious to be frittered away in formal calls and punctilious visits. Well might Cotton Mather complain of the intrusion of a certain person, who had called to see him, as people will call on ministers, as though their time was of no importance. "I would sooner have given that man a handful of money," said he, "than that he should have thus wasted my time." You count it a little thing to trespass on our minutes, but in so doing you may spoil our hours. Whether you think so, or not, it is often distracting to us to be troubled with trivial things in the midst of our sacred engagements. We may be called from an absorbing study, we may be rudely interrupted when our knees are bent, and our heart is being lifted up to God in intercession; we may have our minds drawn from the weightiest matters to listen to the most frivolous observations. It is said of Henry Martyn that he never wasted an hour. I wish it could be said of us, that we wasted neither an hour of our own time, nor an hour of other people's time. Brethren, the time is too short to make a desire for friendly intercourse an excuse for frothy conversation. It requires no stretch of imagination to picture to ourselves two men, who are both believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, "called to be saints," and accounted faithful, meeting in a room, and greeting each other as friends. They will surely have something choice to talk about. All heaven is full of God's glory, and the earth is full of his riches. There is range enough for thought, for speech, for profitable converse. Listen awhile. One observes that the weather is very cold. "Yes" says the other, "the frost is still very sharp." There they stick; they have nothing further to say till, presently, one of them remarks, "It will be rather slippery travelling to-night;" to which comes the reply, "I daresay many horses will fall down." And are these the men of whom Peter testifies that they are redeemed, with the precious blood of Christ, from their vain conversation, received by tradition from their fathers? Are these the men who have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost? Is this frivolity becoming to the heirs of heaven? Yet thus, often, is precious time squandered, and the faculty of speech abused. There is an ancient prophecy which I should love to see fulfilled in modern history. In "David's Psalm of Praise," (only one Psalm, the 145th, is so entitled,) he says, "All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom." By such converse as that, beloved, you might "redeem the time" in these evil days; but you are afraid of being charged with cant, or with pushing your religion a little too far. Brethren, it is high time we had a little more of such cant, and that we did push religion a little farther than has been our wont; for golden opportunities are lost, and profitable interchange of holy thought is lamentably neglected. In days of yore, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened, and heard it." Not much of this prevails now among professing Christians. Little enough is said that is worth men's hearing, much less worth God's hearing; and if he did hear it, instead of putting it down in "a book of remembrance," and saying, "They shall be mine," surely, in his infinite mercy, he would forbear to record the vain thoughts and empty words which could only be a stigma upon their characters. By the brevity of time, then, and by the rapidity of its flight, I admonish you to refrain from all abuses of the tongue. Do invest each hour in some profitable manner; that, when past, it may not be lost. Let your lips be a fountain from which all streams that flow shall savour of grace and goodness.

The time, moreover, is much too short for indecision and vacillation. Your resolving and retracting, your planning and scheming, your sleeping and dreaming, your starting up from slumber only to sink down into a drowsier state than before, are a mockery of life, and a wilful murder of time. Of how many of you is it true that, if ever you did entertain a noble purpose, you never found a convenient season to carry it out. On the verge of conversion, sometimes, you have halted till your convictions have grown cold. Ten or twenty years ago, you listened to the appeal, "My son, give me thine heart;" and you answered, "I will;" but, to this day, you have never fulfilled your word. "Go work in my vineyard," said the Master. "I go Lord," was your prompt reply; yet you have never gone. To-day, as aforetime, you stand idling. Some of you, indeed, were in a more hopeful condition thirty or forty years ago than you are at present. What account can you give of yourselves? What has become of those intervening years? The infinite mercy of God has kept you out of hell, but there is no guarantee that his long-suffering will shield you from destruction another instant. O sirs, "the time is short," the business urgent, the crisis imminent! 'Tis madness to be halting between two opinions. If God be God, serve him; and if not, take the alternative, and serve Baal. Let your mind be made up, one way or the other, without another moment's delay. How long halt ye between two opinions?

And you Christian people, with your grand illusive projects, how they melt away! Some of you would have done a great deal that is useful by now if you had not dreamed of doing so much that is imposing. Oh, what wonderful plans for evangelizing London, for converting the whole Continent of Europe to Christ, float in the brain, or evaporate in a speech, and nothing is done! We are like a certain Czar of Russia, of olden times, who always wanted to take a second step before he took the first. We are always projecting

some wonderful scheme that proves too wonderful ever to be carried out. So we dream of what ought to be, and should be; of what might be, and as we hope may be. Such “dreams are the children of an idle brain.” The dreamers grow listless, and nothing is done. In the name of the eternal God, I beseech you, if you love him, get to work for him. Better slay a single enemy than dream of slaughtering an army. Better that you sow a single grain of corn, or plant a single blade of grass, than dream about fertilizing the Sahara, or reclaiming from the mighty sea untold acres of fertile land. Do something, sirs, do something. It is high time to awake out of sleep, for “the time is short.”

This thought may serve to warn us against another folly; that of speculating upon nice points of controversial theology. You know how the schoolmen used to debate and wrangle about how many angels could stand on the point of a needle, and with many other propositions, no less absurd, did they weary themselves. Strangely indeed was the ingenuity of men taxed to find subjects for discussion in the dark days of those dull doctors of learning. There is something of that spirit abroad even now; ministers will devote whole sermons to the discussion of some crotchet or quibble that does not signify the turn of a hair to anybody in the universe. I have generally noticed that, the less important the point is, the more savagely will some persons defend it, as if the world might go to rack and ruin, and all the sinners in it go blindfold to perdition, and the work of salvation must stand still to have this point discussed. One brother, who meets me occasionally, can never be five minutes in my company, but what he attacks me upon the question of free agency and predestination; I told him, the last time I saw him, that I would have it out with him one of these days, but I must defer it till after the day of judgment, for I was too busy to talk about it just now. And I feel like that about a great many questions. There are brethren who can fully explain the Book of Revelation, though I generally find that they exclaim one against the other, till they declaim each other off the face of the earth. But I would sooner be able to proclaim the cross of Christ, and explain the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, than to decipher the imagery of Ezekiel, or the symbols of the Apocalypse. Blessed is he who can expound the mysteries. I have no doubt about his blessedness; but I am perfectly satisfied with another blessedness, namely, if I can bring sinners to Jesus, and teach the saints some practical truths which may guide them in daily life. It seems to me that the time is much too short to go up in a balloon with speculations, or to go down into the mines of profound thought, to bring up some odds and ends and scraps of singular knowledge. We want to save souls, and to conduct them to that heaven where God's presence makes eternal day. This seems to me to be the pressing demand upon us now that “the time is short,” and “the night cometh when no man can work.”

Let this also admonish us, brethren, to singleness of purpose. We must have only one aim. Had we plenty of time, we might try two or three schemes at once, though even then we should most probably fail for want of concentrating our energies; but as we have very little time, we had better economize it by attending to one thing. The man who devotes all his thought and strength to the accomplishment of one reasonable object is generally successful. My soul, bend thyself down, and lay thyself out for the glory of God; be this the one aim of thy entire being. Form your friendships, and order your occupations, so as to fulfil this first and highest duty of life. Be it your one sole motive to live for his honour, and, if necessary, even to die to promote his renown among the sons of men. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice.” Attune your souls to the great Hallelujah: “While I live will I bless the Lord; I will sing praises unto my God while I have my being. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.” O my brethren, this sublime enthusiasm will work wonders! You dissipate your strength and fritter away your opportunities by dividing your attention. You say that you want to be a Christian; meanwhile, your heart is set upon getting riches, you seek to store your mind with the learning and wisdom of the world, you wish to gain repute as a good talker in company, and a convivial guest at the social board. Ambition prompts you to seek fame among your fellows. Very well, I shall not denounce any one of these things; but I would use every persuasive to induce you who are believers in Christ to renounce the world. If Christ has bought you with his blood, and redeemed you from this present evil world, he has henceforth a claim on you as his servant, and it is at your peril that you take up with any pursuits that are inconsistent with a full surrender of yourself to him. You belong to him; so live wholly to him. The reason why the majority of Christians never attain to any eminence in the divine life, is because they let the floods of their life run away in a dozen little, trickling rivulets, whereas, if they cooped them up into one channel, and sent that one stream rolling on to the glory of God, there would be such a force and power about their character, their thoughts, their efforts, and their actions, that they would really “live while they lived.”

II. “The time is short.” THIS SUGGESTS.

Do you know what reflection this fact suggested to me? “Surely, then,” thought I, “I have some opportunity to follow out the work of faith, the patience of hope, and the labour of love, though not the opportunity I once had.” Then, picturing to myself an ideal of a short life all used, nothing wasted, all consecrated, nothing profaned, I seemed to see a boy giving his young heart to Christ. I saw the lad believing in Jesus while yet beneath his father's roof, and under his mother's care. No sooner saved himself than he began at once to serve God after a boy's way, and still increasing in intelligence and energy as a stripling, and afterwards as a young man, from the first he devoted himself, with all the intensity of his being, to his Lord's service. So diligent and persevering was he that he lost no time. So jealously did he watch his own heart, and so far was he from falling into sin, that there were no dreary intervals spent in wandering and backsliding, and retracing his steps in repenting of the evil, in getting lukewarm, and then rekindling former ardour. With my mind's eye, I followed that young man living a holy life through a succession of years, getting up to the highest

possible platform of spirituality, and keeping there, and all the while blessed with such abundance of the graces and gifts of the Spirit of God as should make him bring forth much fruit to the glory of the Father, do much for the honour of Jesus, prove a great blessing to the Church, bear a rich testimony to the world, and diffuse saving benefits to the souls of men.

This was my ideal of a vessel “meet for the Master’s use,” lingered lovingly upon it. The child became a man. His life was brief; it was soon over. Our days on earth are as a shadow; but happily, they may be radiant, and leave a trail of light behind them. Might not even God himself look down, with a measure of admiration, from his eternal dwelling-place on the career I have sketched? The slender threads of fleeting moments are worked up into the goodly fabric of a complete biography. Endowed with one talent, — TIME, — and that endowment sparse; the gift so prized as to be economized; so looked after that it is never squandered; so usefully employed that its judicious expenditure can never be vainly regretted: so profitably invested that the faithful steward welcomes the advent of his Lord, ready and anxious to give in his account. This is as I would wish to be. Some of you, who are unconverted, can never hope to receive the greeting that awaits such a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have lost your golden opportunity; you have wasted your substance in riotous living. But are there not children here to whom this is possible, and youths who might convert my day-dream into a narrative? Oh, for men and women with one ambition, and one enterprise, to glorify the Lord! Ardently do I desire that God should be glorified in me, and that not in a small measure. I have prayed, and I do pray him to make the most he can make of me, — to do it anyhow. What if, to this end, I must be cast into the furnace of affliction, and suffer for his sake? What if my honour should be trampled in the dust, and my name become a hissing and a by-word, and a reproach among the sons of men, while the witness of my integrity is on high? Here am I, O Lord, to do aught, to bear aught, that thou shalt bid! Only do get as much glory to thine own name as can be got out of such a poor creature as I am. Who will join me in this petition? Vows made in our own strength are vain; but I solemnly charge each Christian young man to foster this aspiration. In the name of him who has redeemed you with his blood, gird up the loins of your mind, and survey the course you have to run. Prepare for the good fight of faith, in which you are to engage. Live to the utmost possible consecration of your entire manhood in its triple nature, — spirit, soul, and body. Yield yourself up unreservedly to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do not stop to parley. “The time is short;” therefore, “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.”

III. “The time is short.” THIS INSPIRES us.

It ought to fire us with zeal for immediate action The sun hastens on, the sands run down. “How is the accepted time.” Let those who love the Lord be prompt. The time to do the deeds that thou must do, or leave them undone, flies swiftly past. Say not, “I will do this by-and-by.” Do it at once. Other duties await thee; brief is the space allotted thee for all. Are your children converted? Pray with them to-night. Let not to-morrow come without putting your arms about their necks, and kneeling down with them devoutly, and praying fervently that God would save their souls. It is the King’s business, and it demands haste. “The time is short” for others as well as for yourself. A clear brother told me, a week or two ago, that a man, who worked for him frequently, brought in goods when they were finished; and he thought that the next time the man came in, he would speak to him about his soul. When he came, however, business absorbed the employer’s attention, and the man passed away. He felt, he did not know exactly why, pricked in his conscience, and resolved that, on the next occasion, he would enquire as to his eternal interests; but he was too late. Instead of coming again, a messenger brought tidings that he was dead. Startled by the news, our brother could find no comfort in regrets, though he bewailed as one who could not forgive himself a hundred wasted opportunities in the presence of one keen self-reproach. Oh, that an inspiration would constrain you to serve the Lord now! Every time the clock ticks, it seems to say “now.” The time is so short that the matter is urgent. Do not wait, young man, to preach Jesus till you have had more instruction; begin at once. You, who mean to do something for the poor of London when you have hoarded up more money, spend your money now; do it at once. You, who mean to leave a large sum to charities when you die, defer it not; be your own executors. Lay out the capital at once; get some joy and comfort out of it yourselves. Now is the time to carry a good purpose into good effect. Before you were saved, the message to you was, “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.” After you are saved, the message to you is, “To-day, obey his voice, and serve the Lord your God with all your heart, and mind, and soul, and strength.” “The time is short,” so make the most of it.

“The time is short.” I want to ring this sentence louder and louder in your ear’s, that it may inspire you to pray for immediate conversions. I have met with many who are hoping to get converted some day, but not now. Is not such procrastination perilous? Dare any of you run the risk of wilfully abiding in unbelief another hour? Can you brook the thought of remaining month after month in jeopardy of your soul? Is it safe to tempt the Lord, and provoke the anger of the Most High? O sirs, while you flatter yourselves with pleasing prospects, you are beguiling your hearts with a reckless presumption! We want you to be converted, and no time can be more suitable than this present time. Forsake your sin immediately. Do not turn back to dally with it a little longer. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and lay hold on the promise of eternal life, without any further delay. You may never see another morrow, or the desire that whets your appetite now may fail you then. This is our prayer, that you may, this very hour, be brought into the fold of Christ.

Then seeing that “the time is short,” let us bear with patience the ills that vex us. Are we very poor? “The time is short.” Does the bitter cold pierce through our scanty garments? “The time is short.” Is consumption beginning to prey on our trembling frame? “The

time is short." Are we unkindly treated by our kinsfolk? Do our comrades revile, and our neighbours mock us? "The time is short." Have we to hear evil treatment from an ungenerous world? "The time is short." Do cruel taunts try our tempers? "The time is short." We are travelling at express speed, and shall soon be beyond the reach of all the incidents and accidents that disturb and distract us. As we travel home to our Father's house, the distance diminishes, and we begin to sight the city of the blessed, "the home over there." It is needless to murmur or repine; why trouble yourselves about what you will do a month or two hence? You may not be here; you may be in heaven. Your eyes will have beheld "the King in his beauty," you will have seen "the land that is very far off."

"The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;
So smooth it with hope, and cheer it with song."

Worldly-mindedness ill becomes us who have confessed that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." "The time is short" in which we can hold any possessions in this terrestrial sphere. Then, let us not love anything here below too fondly. We brought nothing into the world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Survey your broad acres, but remember that you will not long be able to walk across them. Look on your plenteous crops, but ere long another shall reap the profit of those fields. Count your gold and silver, but know that wealth, greedily as it is sought, will not give you present immunity from sickness and sorrow, neither will it secure your welfare when called to quit your frail tenement. Trust in the living God. Love the Lord, and let eternal things absorb your thoughts and engage your affections. "The time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

Are these gloomy reflections? Nay, dear brethren, the fact that "the time is short" should inspire us, who are of the household of faith, with the most joyous expectations. Do you really believe in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ? Do you really believe that your head is to wear a crown of life that fadeth not away? Do you really believe that these feet of yours, all shod with silver sandals, will stand upon that street of pure gold? Do you really believe that these hands shall pluck celestial fruits from trees whose leaves can never wither, and that you shall lie down in the spice-beds in the gardens of the blessed? Do you believe that these eyes shall see the King in that day when he comes in his glory, and that these bones shall rise again from the grave, and your bodies shall be endowed with an incorruptible existence? "Yes," say you, "we do believe it, and believe it intensely, too. Well, then, I would that ye realized it as so very near that you were expectant of its fulfilment. Who would cry and fret about the passing troubles of a day when he saw the heavens open, beheld the beckoning hand, and heard the voice that called him hence? Oh, that the glory might come streaming into your soul till you forget the darkness of the way! Oh, that the breeze from these goodly mountains would fan you! Oh, that the spray from that mighty ocean would refresh you! Oh, that the music of those bells of heaven in yonder turrets would enliven you! Then would ye speed your way towards the rest that remaineth for the people of God, inspired with sacred ardour and dauntless courage. But the ungodly are not so. It is to them I must address the last word, "The time is short."

IV. THIS ALARMS US; and well it may, on their account. Let me toll a knell. It is a dismal knell I have to toll for the unconverted man, to whom life has been a joy, for he has prospered in the world. You have succeeded in the enterprise on which you set your heart. You have bought the estate that you longed to secure. It is a fine place certainly; but you have only got it for two or three years! Would I have taken it for that term? No, I would not have taken it on a nine hundred and ninety-nine years' lease. Freeholds for me! Did I say two or three years? Nay, there is not a man, beneath the sun, who can guarantee that you will hold it for three weeks. "The time is short." Drive down the broad avenue; walk round the park; look into the old feudal mansion; but "the time is short," very short, and your tenure very limited. You have gained your object, you are possessed of real property; what next? Why make your will. The thing is urgent. "The time is short." But what have you not done? You have not believed in Christ: you have not embraced the gospel; you have not found salvation, you have not laid hold on eternal life; you have not a hope to solace you when your strength fails, and you pant for breath. How few the opportunities that remain! Some of you have attended my ministry all the while I have been in London; I wonder how much longer you will hear me. and yet remain unsaved. Your turn to die will come at length. You ail a little, your trifling indisposition does not yield to treatment; the symptoms grow serious, the disease is dangerous, your death is imminent. Pain unnerves you; terror distracts you. Your family and your friends look at you with helpless pity. The doctor has just left you in dismay. Send for the priest, or fetch the parson; but what can they do for you unless you believe in Jesus? 'Tis over, the last struggle! Then picture yourself to yourself, — a lost spirit, asking for a drop of water to cool your tongue! That will be your portion, sinner, unless you repent. Bethink you. sirs, there is but a step between you and death, a short step between you and hell, unless you believe in Jesus. Do you still imagine that there is time enough and to spare? I beseech you. do not cherish so vain a thought. It may be that you suspect me of exaggerating; that I cannot do in such a case as this. Time is rushing on, swiftly but silently. While I speak, the minutes pass, the hour is soon gone, the day is almost spent. I charge you, then, by the ever-blessed Spirit, listen now to the warning; escape from sin; get out of that broad road which leads to destruction: believe in Jesus; lay hold on eternal life. May the Spirit of God arouse you! May these words be blessed to you! They should be put more forcibly if I knew how. With all the fervour of my soul, I entreat you, for I know your everlasting interests are in imminent jeopardy. God grant that you may not linger longer, lest haply you linger too long, and perish in your lingering! "The time is short."

In a little while, there will be a great concourse of people in the streets. Methinks I hear someone enquiring, "What are all these people waiting for?" "Do you not know? He is to be buried to-day." "And who is that?" "It is Spurgeon." "What! the man that preached at the Tabernacle?" "Yes; he is to be buried to-day." That will happen very soon; and when you see my coffin carried to the silent grave, I should like every one of you, whether converted or not, to be constrained to say, "He did earnestly urge us, in plain and simple language, not to put off the consideration of eternal things. He did entreat us to look to Christ. Now he is gone, our blood is not at his door if we perish." God grant that you may not have to bear the bitter reproach of your own conscience! But, as I feel that "the time is short," I will stir you up so long as I am in this Tabernacle; and I do pray the Lord to bless the word every time I preach it from this platform. Oh, that some souls may be saved, that Jesus Christ may be glorified, Satan defeated, and heaven filled with saved ones!

"Tis not for man to trifle!

Life is brief; And sin is here.

Our age is but the falling of a leaf,

A dropping tear. We have no time to sport away the hours;

All must be earnest in a world like ours.

"Not many lives, but only one, have we, —

Frail, fleeting man:

How sacred narrow should that one life ever be, —

That narrow span!

Day after day filled up with blessed toil,

Hour after hour still bringing in new spoil."