

Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

26 November 2023

What is Your Life?

Text: "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." *James 4:14*

Do you like the book of James?

Do you read it often?

Most people do not read it by choice.

It shows you where you need improvement.

It is called the most practical writing of the New Testament.

It is supposed that the author is the half brother of Jesus.

In his writing he stresses conduct and behavior as the true test of whether one is a genuine Christian.

It might be called the "Proverbs" of the New Testament.

It has also been compared to the Sermon on the Mount.

These words of truth were written to the scattered Christians throughout the Roman Empire.

James emphasized the necessity for patience, especially as related to the tongue, warning that one of the worst sins Christians can commit is that of failing to carefully watch their words.

In this particular section of scripture, James emphasized the uncertainty of the future, which was certainly a relevant fact in the lives of the Christians who lived in a world that was hostile to the members of the new faith.

A worldly goal.

People have always sought to further their own interests.

First, of course, is self-preservation, but most of us pursue an added security sufficient to protect us from possible setbacks.

Of course, we too often think of security only in material terms.

When we adopt this philosophy, we are never quiet certain that we have enough financial resources to protect us from the hidden dangers in our capitalist society.

James pictured a man as planning a business. Confident that he could secure enough gain from it to immunize himself from any misfortune.

Such an attitude begins with materialism but leads to a complete Epicurean approach to life.

Self-indulgence becomes the order of the day, and all goals are based on enjoying the things of life that appeal to the lower nature.

The materialist heaps up gains for security and at the same time begins to indulge in things opposed to the Spirit.

This may sound contradictory at first, since people are supposed to provide for themselves and their families, but this lifestyle usually emerges in those who set their goals primarily in terms of things rather than the deeper and more meaningful values.

A timely truth

James flashed a warning much needed by all people and especially needed by those who make worldly goals their aim in life.

He compared human existence with a mist, joining the many other figures of speech in the Scriptures that describe our pilgrimage on this earth.

For instance, various writers refer to life as a handbreadth, a thread cut by the weaver, a dream, a shadow, water spilled on the ground, and wind.

All of these indicate the idea of brevity.

When David complained to Jonathan that "there is only a step between me and death" 1 *Samuel*

20:3, he expressed a truth that applies to all of us, even though an evil king is not chasing after us with intent to kill.

Life has been called “a little gleam of time between two eternities” and “scarce the twinkle of a star in God’s eternal day.”

What is life all about?

Since no one can be completely sure of the purpose of our stay on earth, those who are wise will endeavor to make the most of their days.

The old cliché “The best of life is to invest in something that will outlast it” contains tremendous truth.

Those who dawdle through life, shifting from one goal to another, will end up with no accomplishment because they had no real purpose in living.

Those who continually try to exploit others will become cynical and distrust everyone else because they have unconsciously transferred their own character to the ambitions of others.

The best approach to life is to live it with what the old-times called “an eye single to God’s glory,” which means exactly what James said: “You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’”

In days when the emperors were crowned at Constantinople, a royal mason came to the new ruler and set before him a number of marble slabs.

The emperor was asked, at that time, to choose one for his tombstone.

Those who have already selected cemetery plots and made prearrangements for their funerals testify that it is an unsettling experience.

Yet we each need to keep before us the fact that our time is in God’s hands.

Stewardship steps in at this point and says, “All that you have comes from God.

To rejoice in your own boastings is evil.

If you know to do a good thing and refuse, it becomes sin.

Whether in the realm of material possessions or other investments of life, we daily face the matter of how we will use our resources.

Setting goals can be a dangerous thing, because most of us will probably come close to reaching them.

Therefore, we should be certain they are worth the effort.

The only aims in life that are worthwhile are those related to the advancement of God’s work in this world.

When we come to the end of our way, will we be glad about how we have lived?

Have we used our possessions for more than our own self-interests?

Have we despised nothing in the world except falsehood and wickedness?

Have we feared nothing except cowardice?

Have we been governed by our admirations rather than our disgusts?

Have we coveted nothing that belongs to our neighbors except their kind hearts, gentle manners, and compassionate attitudes?

Have we sought to spend much of our time in personal communion with the Lord but never forgetting the practical world that needs our help?

Life is for the living!

True living, however, means service, which has been called the “rent we pay for living on this earth.”

When we live our lives in harmony with God’s principles, we find a little heaven here on this earth.

This life gives us the peace that passes understanding.

How do we live at peace with one another?

Peace can never be forced.

Christians can be at peace with one another because we are all equal.

Peace is a living thing, positive and dynamic, fruitful and productive.

Peace comes from a faithful and consistent walk with God.

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” *1 John 1:7*

Peace comes from an undivided heart.

“Blessed are the pure in heart.”

Matt. 5:8

Peace comes from knowing that you have done your best for Christ while serving others.

We must be at peace before we can grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

We must have peace to have an effective witness to the world about who we are.

We must have peace to be effective soul winners of others.

Love brings peace to our hearts and in what we do.

“Be of the same mind having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” this brings peace.

We can be at peace through a common loyalty to the supreme head, Christ.

As far as it depends on you, be at peace with one another.

The greatest gift you can give of your life is love that brings peace to yourself and others.

Be lost in Christ and committed to others and see what happens.

God’s blessing is upon that life!