

The Only Good Life

by James Blaine Chapman

The Christian life is the only good life, bringing peace, joy, love, and hope both in this world and in the world to come.

Scripture: Matthew 25:14, Luke 12:16, John 14:27, Romans 15:13, 2 Corinthians 1:22, Philippians 4:7, 1 Timothy 4:8, 1 Peter 1:3

Topics: "Christian Living", "Eternal Life"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the contrast between a life focused on worldly pursuits, which ultimately profit little, and a life centered on godliness, which is beneficial in this life and the one to come. He emphasizes the importance of investing one's life wisely, either in pursuing bodily exercise without Christ or in embracing godliness through a faithful Christian life. Chapman highlights that true fulfillment and lasting joy come from being a Christian, experiencing peace, joy, love, and hope that surpass worldly pleasures and possessions. He concludes by pointing out that being a Christian not only brings blessings in the present world but also offers the assurance of a heavenly home and eternal life.

Transcript

For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8).

Every man must think of his life as capital to be invested. Or, to use Bible imagery, he must think of his life as talent to be used. In the process of use, one's talent will bring increase or else in the end he will lose even the capital itself. It was like that with the steward who received a talent and went and hid it in the earth. And so the idea of losing and gaining must enter into every man's mind whenever he asks himself the question, "What kind of a life shall I live?"

In reality there are just two kinds of lives: one is the Christian life and the other is the life without Christ. The term "bodily exercise" stands for all that anyone can have and leave Christ out, and the other word, "godliness," stands for what one will have who gives his heart to God and becomes a faithful Christian.

We have therefore really just two propositions before us, namely:

Bodily exercise, or the life with Christ left out, profits little.

The Christian life is the good life both here and in the world to come.

Suppose we go out tonight and ask, "What is the good thing in life?" Well, we shall receive many answers to such a question. I go to the worldling and ask, "What is the good thing in life?" and he answers me, "Pleasure is the good thing. There is nothing better than that one should eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow we shall all perish anyway. But this man's conclusions are wrong, and they are wrong because his premises are wrong. We shall not all utterly perish tomorrow. We were all made in the image of God and we shall exist somewhere forevermore. Tomorrow we shall be either happier or else more sorrowful than we are today, depending upon the choices we make today and the manner in which we live between now and tomorrow. At any rate, we shall not perish as do the beasts of the earth beneath us, and since we shall live tomorrow, eating and drinking and being merry is not the highest good for .today. In fact, pleasure becomes pain when we pursue it as a thing within itself or pursue it too far even on legitimate lines. Nothing is more desolate than the old age of the pleasure lover. He has come to the place where his palate no longer enjoys flavors; he has come to where his eyes can no more feast upon the beauties of nature about him; he has come to where desire has failed him; and, being desolate of inner joy, there is nothing left that is really worth while. Belshazzar, the king of ancient Babylon, is an example of a pleasure seeker who was cut off in the midst of his wine and pleasure, and he died amidst blood and fear and misery.

I go to the miser and ask, "What is the good life?" He answers, "Riches is the good thing in life." But this man is mistaken, because a man's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses, but in the inner beauty of the mind and soul. Surrounded with all that money can buy, a man may yet be miserable and lonely and cursed with despair. Think of the things money will not buy -- good things like health and friends and peace of mind! Think of the uncertainty of one's ability to keep riches which causes many a rich man to be uneasy by day and by night lest rising prices or falling markets shall take away his holdings. There are more suicides among the rich than among the poor. If riches were the good thing in life, the rich would be happy and would want to live as long as possible. The founders of one of the earliest millionaire families in America lay dying. He called his lawyer to his bedside and willed away everything he had, even to the house in which he lived. Then he turned to his Christian wife and asked her to sing, "Come ye sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore; Jesus ready stands to save you, full of mercy, love and power." The consolations of Christ are as available to the poor as to the rich; therefore the good life is not in money.

If I ask the scholar, "What is the good thing in life?" perhaps he will say, as Plato did, that it is speculation -- just thinking. But men have never found God just by pursuing wisdom, and there is no more rest for the mind outside of God's Word than there is rest for man's heart outside of God's love. When Huxley was old, he regretted that he found himself just a machine for gathering facts and classifying them for the use of other men, while he, himself) was discouraged and bitter, void of love, having few friends, and was entirely without appreciation for poetry, music, art or any of the finer things of human existence.

If men say the good of life is labor, then let us remember with Solomon that there is work and labor everywhere; that the water which descends upon the mountains makes its way to the sea and then must go back again in mist and clouds, and that labor does not bring peace and rest either to nature or to the mind and heart of man.

If a man says that ambition, position, is the good thing in life, then let him think of Alexander who died in a drunken debauch at the age of thirty-three, having lost interest in life because there were no more worlds to conquer. A man's ambitions will always keep in the advance of his accomplishments, so that the highest honor can never soothe the spirit.

Turn where you will, seek what you may, there is not much difference between men except that some are Christians and others are not. The rich and the poor will both alike die. Neither the wise nor the ignorant know very much, considering what there is to be known. No man who lives for the days during which his body prevails -- that is, for this world -- can gain very much. "Bodily exercise profiteth little."

But now we come to the high claim that being a Christian brings the best there is for you, both in the present world and in the world which is yet to come. "What!" exclaims one, "do you claim that the Christian life is the best life for here and now? I thought Christianity was to prepare men to die and that it is a burden to be a Christian while you live." Well, there are many who think just that, but they are mistaken. If there were no hell to shun and no heaven to gain in the future, it would even yet pay to live the Christian life right here in this world.

"But," asks one, "what does the Christian have that others do not have?" Well, for one thing, he has peace with God through the forgiveness of his sins through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is aware, as all men are, that he has sinned and forfeited his right to call God his Father and to come into His presence without fear. But he has found by believing in Jesus Christ what no one has ever found anywhere else. He has found forgiveness for all the sins of his past and he can lie down at night with the blessed realization that if he should die during the night he would go to heaven. He can rise up in the morning with the consciousness that God is his Friend, and that wherever he goes he can count on God to bless and guide and protect him. He can take cognizance of his own heart any time in the day or night, whenever he is awake, and be aware that there is nothing between him and God to mar his peace and to make him afraid. This is a boon that millions have traveled to the ends of the earth to find and have come back disappointed. Many have visited shrines and bathed in holy water and sought to gain merit by doing good deeds, and yet they came away distressed and burdened and uncertain. But the Christian came to God confessing himself a sinner and there before God, either in the public meeting or in his place of private prayer, the place does not matter, he called upon God for mercy and pardon, and he believed that Jesus died to save him and that the blood that Jesus shed was able to make an atonement for his sins that God would accept, and at the end of his prayer he believed that God, for Christ's sake, forgave all his many sins, and God did so, and sent His Holy Spirit to witness to the believing heart that the work was done. Then the new Christian arose from his place of prayer, rejoicing in the knowledge that God had accepted him, blotted out his sins and made him His child. Ever since that blessed hour the Christian has enjoyed peace. Even when there was trouble all about him, the Christian had peace within. Can you tell me of anything that you would not gladly give to have such a peace as this?

In the second place, the Christian has joy that is deeper and more lasting than any joy that can otherwise come to one's heart in this world. Men without God may have fun and pleasure, but these all disappear in times of grief and sadness, bereavement and disappointment. The Christian has a joy that rises like a wellspring above his sorrows and disappointments. The Christian has sorrows and disappointments, just as others do, but he has a joy that rises above them and abides. "Sorrow and weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning." Happiness and pleasure are like the little stream that flows down the hillside when the monsoon is on, but entirely dries up when the dry, hot season comes. The joy that the Christian has is like the well or spring of water which does not fail, but continues to flow in the drought and in the heat. Jesus spoke of this joy to the woman at the well of Samaria, and she said, "Lord, evermore give me this water." Shall not that be the cry of every heart here tonight? Lord, give us the joy and inner bliss that only true Christians know.

Christians have a love, a tender, forgiving love that others do not have. And I am not thinking now of what hate and revenge may do for your enemies. I am thinking of what they do for the person who harbors them. They certainly destroy his peace and eat out the heart of his soul like a canker. If you hate your enemy, hate will poison the bloodstream of your body, injure your health, shorten your life and make you miserable. If you injure your enemy, you must then live out your days in dread of his vengeance. If you slay him, his ghost will haunt you in your dreams and make you a vagabond. The Christian finds grace and love to forgive his enemy; often this turns the enemy into a friend, and always it delivers the Christian from inner dread.

The Christian has hope as no one else in the world has hope. His hope covers all the future, and it is an assuring hope. He believes that even though he dies, he shall live again. He believes that if he does not get reward in this world it will yet come to him in the world to come. He finds assurance in the promises of God and the presence of God's Spirit in his heart that he will live forever in a world where no sorrow can ever come.

In the days of ancient Israel they used to transfer land from one man to another, much as we do today. In addition to giving parchments as deeds, and giving the purchaser possession, it was customary for the seller to take a small urn of earthenware and fill it with soil from the field and deliver it to the purchaser. This small urn of soil was called the "earnest." That is, it was a sample of the soil and was in substance an assurance that the purchaser should later have the whole field of which this soil was a sample. Moreover, by comparing this urn of soil with the soil of the field, the purchaser had additional proof of the justice of his claim. Well, the Christian has the earnest of heaven in the presence of God's Spirit in his heart now. This Spirit's presence is the immediate cause of the peace and joy and love and hope of which we have spoken and which is the substance of the Christian's heritage, but this earnest which we have now is the proof of the fuller heritage we shall have in heaven.

When Christopher Columbus sailed toward the west over trackless seas, his men became filled with doubts and fears as they sailed on day after day without sighting land. But one day they took from the water at the side of one of their little ships, a tree branch on which there were green leaves and green and ripe fruit. Their doubts were dispelled, and they were assured that land was near. Even though they could not see the land, they were sure it was not far off because they had found its fruits. The Christian is like that about heaven. We have not actually seen that fair land as yet, but we have some of its fruits in the peace and joy and love and hope which fill our hearts and therefore we know the land is near. And, what is more, we have found the preparation for that blessed land. We do not have to change our course to get there. Heaven is at the end of the Christian life, and the Christian life has promise of a home in heaven. The prospects of that blessed land cheer us even now, and every day brings us nearer.

Others speak of death as the close of day; the Christian speaks of it as the day dawn. Others account the grave the end; the Christian accounts the grave but a stage on the blessed journey to heaven and home.

I thank God that I can say I am a Christian tonight, and I am glad also that I can say with Paul, when he spoke before the king, "I would to God that all who hear me this day were not only almost, but altogether such as I am," in that I would you were all true Christians blessed with all that comes to the Christian in this and in the world to come. Let us pray.

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