

Using Time for Eternal Things (In the Context of Marriage)

by Tim Conway

Tim Conway emphasizes the importance of understanding one's current state in life--whether single or married--and how it relates to serving God amidst worldly pressures.

Duration: 1:05:14

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 7:1-29

Topics: "Eternity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the certainty and importance of time. He states that nobody in this world can live happily ever after, as the end of time is certain and will bring judgment. The speaker warns that death is approaching and hell is moving. He urges the audience to recognize the shortness of time and the need to prioritize eternal matters over worldly concerns. The speaker also highlights the value of time and encourages the audience to make the most of it, as it is not guaranteed tomorrow.

Transcript

I want to begin reading in v. 25. I assure you that what we have to look at today has everything to do with God, church, and family, which is where we're at. The tenth sermon in our series.

V. 25, now concerning the betrothed. Now, I want to say right off, the ESV that I am quoting is one of the few translations that actually uses that term, betrothed. Most translations use the term virgin.

With the idea of betrothal, although not exactly, it has similarities with our present-day engagement. Now why would the ESV pick the term betrothed when the fact is that the Greek word there is really one that has to do with virgins? Obviously, in ideal cases and in typical scenarios, probably in Paul's day, young ladies that were betrothed, they were virgins. I realize there would be exceptions to that in our day, definitely.

But there's more to it than just that. If you look down at v. 36, you'll see that if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his virgin, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes, let them marry. And so, basically, you can see why the ESV might use that terminology, betrothal, because we're given the idea that this isn't just any virgin.

This is a virgin that somehow belongs to a man. You see that. His virgin.

In other words, there's a man attached to this virgin somehow. Either he's got his eye on her, he's betrothed to her, he's engaged to her, but if the young man... Basically, you see that there. If anyone, he's referring to a young man or to a man.

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his virgin... So you see there's an identification there of this virgin with the guy. I think that's why the ESV takes the further liberties to actually speak about betrothal, because we are definitely talking about somebody here who it seems is giving consideration to marriage. And so whether you want to look at them as not quite to the engagement state or being engaged or actually being betrothed in a biblical fashion, you can see that this is more than just a virgin.

And the context basically reveals that. That does not play a huge part of what we're going to deal with here, but I wanted to make that plain because I know not everybody is here with the ESV today. Paul goes on to say concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord.

Now, he's not saying that he's not writing under inspiration. He's just saying that the Lord did not specifically address this in his teachings in the Gospels or that Paul knows of. He doesn't know of any command that the Lord specifically gave, but obviously being an inspired apostle, he is giving very authoritative language here.

He says, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress, and I want you to notice that, in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is. You remember last time we talked about the fact that one of the principles Paul's really heavily laying down here in 1 Corinthians 7 is remain as you are.

Basically, when you're saved, remain. Now, he says it's not an absolute rule. It's not the ultimate absolute requirement of your life.

But he just says as a good principle, it's good to remain as you are when the Lord saves you. If you're single, don't think like you have to get married. If you're married, don't think like you have to not be married.

If you're circumcised, don't think like you have to be circumcised. Or if you're not circumcised, you remember what he said, if you're free, don't think you have to be a slave. If you're a slave, don't think you have to be free.

But remain as you are. Verse 27, are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife.

You see it. It's that remain as you are principle. But what he's saying is this, it's not absolutely necessary to change your situation to improve your ability to walk with God.

Now, if you determine that you want to, he says it's not that big a deal. If you do marry, you have not sinned. And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned.

Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles. Lay that down as a rule. There's nobody here that's married that doesn't understand that reality.

Your marriage may be happy. Your marriage may be good. Your marriage may be exemplary.

But the truth is if you're married, you're going to have worldly troubles that you wouldn't otherwise have. And Paul says, I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers.

The appointed time has grown very short. Basically, what he's saying there is the time is short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods.

And those who deal with this world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. Now stop right there.

I'm going to read more in a second. But I want you to see something. You go back up and look in v. 26.

You see those two words present distress? You guys see them there. I think that in view of the present distress, it is good for a person to remain as he is. What I want you to do is get a feeling for that word.

Look, some people have come along and said, well, I've heard this before. I have heard people say today, everybody should get married. But bottom line is, Paul was arguing from a situation that was 2,000 years ago where there was certain persecution and maybe, maybe even if we could find someplace in the world today that had persecution like they had back then, then you might want to think about not getting married.

The present distress, they look at it that way. I want to clarify something to you. That word distress is exactly the same word found down in v. 37.

Whoever is firmly established in his heart being under no necessity... Every translation I believe uses no necessity. You see the word necessity? That's the same term. Exactly the same term.

And it's the exact same one that Paul uses two chapters later in 1 Corinthians 9-16 where he says, for if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting, for necessity is laid upon me. Let me tell you what this necessity is. When Paul talks about a present distress, that word in context in the very same chapter in only two chapters later has the idea of an urge.

Something that compels you. If you have no necessity to marry. In other words, if you don't have that compulsion, if you don't have that drive to be married.

That's what he's talking about later in this chapter. And then over in chapter 9, he's talking about the pressure, a force to preach the Gospel. Listen, this present distress he's talking about, it could have easily been translated this present necessity.

Paul was under necessity. The distress, the pressure he's feeling as to what he's called to. Brethren, I'll tell you this, you just look at the immediate context here.

He is not talking about something that is specific to his day. How do I know that? Just look there. He says the time is short in v. 29.

The appointed time has grown very short. And then you look again in v. 31. The present form of this world is passing away.

Brethren, you all see that, right? I mean, basically, when he's talking about the present distress, he's talking about his present day situation. He's talking about right here in this letter, necessities, urges, compelling. He's talking about being compelled to preach the Gospel.

He's talking about our time as being short. He's talking about this present world passing away. When he's talking about distress, brethren, he's talking about what he's called to do, what he's called to accomplish in this very short time and it's passing away.

And that's the pressure of the moment. That's the context of the situation. He's not talking about persecution here.

That's not where he's going. That's not what he's talking about. Brethren, that's very important.

Because what I want you to see is that our time is short. And this present world is passing away. The present distress he was talking about then is the same kind of situation we are in today.

It's not like he was in a situation that's different from ours, and so the circumstances change as though all of a sudden this is all irrelevant to us. Brethren, this is just as relevant to us today as it was to him back then. When he talks about what was present then, he's talking about what is present now.

The time is short now. The present world is passing away now. The distress is here now.

We are compelled as the church of the living Christ to proclaim that Gospel that Ryan talked about in the first hour now. It is our responsibility, brethren, now. Let's continue reading in verse 32.

I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife.

And his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband.

I say this for your own benefit. Not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. I mean, you see his purpose.

His purpose is to free us from anxiety. His purpose is that we be in a place of undivided devotion to the Lord. If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong and it has to be, let him do as he wishes.

Let them marry. It is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart being under no necessity, but having his desire under control and has determined this in his heart to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well.

So then, he who marries his betrothed does well. And he who refrains from marriage will do even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives, but if her husband dies, she is free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord.

Yet in my judgment, she is happier if she remains as she is, and I think that I too have the Spirit of God. And so you see it there. The same thing we hit on last week.

Remain. Remain. I think she is happier if she remains as she is.

Brethren, the last two times that I've dealt with 1 Corinthians 7, I've sought to emphasize to you that I believe the ESV has it exactly right. If you go back up to verse 1, I think they have it exactly right where they have the last half of the verse in quotation marks to signify that those words are a quote from the letter the Corinthians wrote to Paul. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, and the ESV starts quotes right there, it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." In other words, apparently there was a movement among the Christians at Corinth that was saying that celibacy was the standard if you're a Christian.

They were saying that if God saves you, it's good to avoid sexual intimacy. So good in fact, that it's good to even change your circumstances in whatever way necessary to avoid sexual relationships in order to become celibate. You can hear that in the way Paul answers them.

I mean, you can hear these people saying that we all need to be like Christ. We all need to be like Paul. We need to be celibate.

We need to be avoiding sexual relationships altogether. And you can hear that Paul is resisting this thinking in how he answers. He resists that.

The fact is, Paul says, hold it. That's not right. He does not agree that celibacy... Look, the fact is he does agree celibacy is wonderful, but only if you're single and only if you have a gift from God to be celibate.

Paul totally rejects the notion that as Christians we should seek to change our present situation in order to become celibate. That's why he keeps saying remain, remain, remain, remain, because they were saying there, change, change, change, change. If you're married, stop having sexual relationships.

That's why he deals with it. And he says, do not do that. You need to give one another your conjugal rights.

You do not need to deprive one another. And people were saying, and not only avoid those sexual relationships, even divorce if you have to. And he goes right there and he says, do not divorce.

Stay as you are. Remain as you are. Well, what if I have a lost wife? So be it.

God has assigned you to that situation. He'll sanctify the situation. Don't think you have to get to the single celibate life to find the true spiritual path to victory and to closeness with God and to holiness.

He says stay as you are. Remain. It is not more spiritual to be a slave or not a slave.

It is not more spiritual to be celibate or not celibate. Yes, there may be advantages to it. But he says it is no higher spiritual plane.

And God has assigned, the Lord has assigned right where you were when you were called if you're a Christian in this place. And he says God is sovereign of that. You stay right where you are.

Let God sanctify that thing. And on 1 Corinthians 7.20, Paul's whole note here rings clear. Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

Celibacy is not the height of spiritual existence that we all ought to abandon every other circumstance to try to get to, so brethren. But imagine this. Can you imagine at Corinth? Can you imagine if there's a young woman there? A young man.

Virgins. Wanting to be married. Possibly already engaged or betrothed to be married.

Can you imagine if they're there, the kind of influences they would have been getting from teachers and from people at Corinth? You know, you would have had people probably pulling them aside and saying, hey, after all, Paul, even our Lord Jesus, that's the life that they live? That's the life they're calling us all to? And look, if you go and get married to that guy, you'd basically be nothing but a second-rate type of Christian. I mean, you're taking the second-best path. Don't do it.

I mean, you can hear that that's the kind of thing that seems to be the kind of thing that was going on. People setting forth celibacy as a standard. Basically, a second-class Christian, if you go and get married, which is really kind of the opposite, I think, of today's pressure.

In our churches, there seems to be more of a pressure that when somebody's single to get married, probably the opposite pressure of what was taking place then. I mean, today we have to really show people, you know, lay off the single people. They don't have to get married to be complete.

They don't have to be married to be the full Christian. In fact, Paul would even say that if you've got the ability to stay single, it is preferable that you do so. There are certain entanglements you simply will not have if you can be content to be single.

That's just reality. So today the pressure seems to be opposite of what we've got to really press people with, but apparently in that day, there were some people in exactly that situation that were considering marriage in an atmosphere where people were saying they shouldn't. And Paul comes to their rescue.

And you see that starting in verse 25. Now concerning the betrothed. It is good for a person to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But in verse 28, he says this, but if you do marry, you have not sinned.

And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. But brethren, this poses a question. Why would anyone even think that it's sin? Well, probably precisely because somebody at Corinth was saying that it was, right? I mean, Paul doesn't respond in a vacuum.

You know, he doesn't give his answers just because they sound good or feel good. Paul is very pastoral. He deals with the situations that he's confronted with.

I mean, the reason he's talking about whether or not it's sin is because undoubtedly, somebody was saying that it's sin, and Paul has to say, no, it is not sin. Yes, marriage does come with its share of problems and anxieties, but it's not sin. So, Paul goes on to develop this more thoroughly there in verse 34.

The unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord. He's telling us about some of the snares here. This unmarried woman, betrothed woman, is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit, but the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her

husband.

Verse 36, he says, if anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his betrothed, if his passions are strong, it has to be, let him do as he wishes. Let them marry. It is no sin.

But, verse 37, whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. Verse 38 is kind of a conclusive statement. So, then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

Let me ask you this. Is it better to stay single? Or is it better to get married? What's that? That's a safe answer. It depends.

That's exactly right. If we were to ask which is better, somebody might say, well, hey, verse 38 right there at the end, he who refrains from marriage will do even better. So is it better to marry? Is it better to stay single and celibate? Right there at the end of verse 38, it says it's better to not marry.

But, that's not the first better that shows up in this chapter. If you go back up to verse 9, it's up there too. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7. It is better to marry.

Wait a second. So is it better to marry? Or is it better not to marry? Is it better to marry, like verse 9 says? Or is it better to refrain from marriage, like verse 38 says? It almost sounds contradictory. But of course, it's not.

How can it be better to marry and better not to marry? Well, it all has to do with the God-given gift that either you or I have. I mean, we see that in 1 Corinthians 7. I wish that all were as I Myself am. Paul's talking.

He's saying I wish you were all single and celibate like I am, but each has his own gift from God. One of one kind, one of another. I mean, that's what we need to notice carefully.

In verse 9, it says it's better to marry only if what? Only? Brethren, it says it's only better to marry if you don't have self-control. If you can't exercise that kind of control. In verse 38, it's only better to refrain from marriage if you meet the conditions of verse 37.

And what were those? Whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity, having his desire under control, determine this in his heart. You see, that's the difference. We each have a gift when it comes to pursuing marriage or remaining single.

What is better for you has to do with the gift you have. If you have the same gift Paul has and you have no necessity to get married, it's better to stay single. However, if you don't have that gift and the self-control that comes with it, Paul says it's better to get married.

Paul certainly is not saying that if you go and get married because you lack the gift of celibacy that you're somehow second-rate. There's a better way for each one of us. That's what we need to be aware of.

What is better for you is always what is consistent with the gift the Lord has given to you. Okay, brethren, that was introduction. Now let's get to it.

Brethren, can you imagine me coming into marriage counseling with a couple? And they're saying, you know, Pastor, we're really here because we think you know something of the Scriptures. In the past, we've been to worldly counselors, and we don't want that kind of counsel. We don't want the philosophies of the world.

We want to know what God says. Can you imagine if I looked to the man and I said to him, you know, what God says to you is you need to live as though you have no wife. His wife probably wouldn't appreciate that and think that was the best counsel I could have given.

But isn't it amazing that we don't hear that kind of counsel very often and yet that is exactly what the inspired apostle says. Listen to this. 1 Corinthians 7.29. This is what I mean, brothers.

Let me tell you something. So often, so often, people are debating. We have this.

It may be happening in this church. It may be happening in this day, in this age. So often, you have people who are wrangling over is it circumcision or is it uncircumcision? You know, that's just an example.

No doubt throughout history, many people have argued that. And the apostle Paul comes along and says, neither of them matter. Really? If uncircumcision doesn't matter, how can you say... I mean, if circumcision doesn't matter anymore, how can you say uncircumcision doesn't matter? It seems like if the one doesn't matter, the other one should matter.

But you know what? When Paul addresses things like that, he's not saying there isn't a place to discuss realities and truth about circumcision and uncircumcision. What he's saying is when people debate about such things, they're missing the mark as to what really matters. He comes along here and it's as though he's saying to these Corinthians, look, you guys are having a debate there in Corinth about whether a man should be single and celibate or whether he should marry.

Right? And he's saying your marital situation is not of the highest degree of importance here. That's not to say that marriage isn't important. That isn't to say that we ought not to fight for every marriage in this place.

That isn't to say that marriage definitely and distinctly is God-ordained and it's a picture of the relationship of Christ and His church. And obviously, all those things are true and those are real. But what Paul is saying is you Corinthians are arguing about something that if you'll just see things for the way they really are, you'll realize that what you're arguing about tends to diminish.

Verse 29, this is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. The time is short, various translations say.

Those are the words in the original. Time short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none.

And those who mourn as though they were not mourning. And those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing. And those who buy as though they had no goods.

And those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. Brethren, this is staggering.

We're doing a God Church family series. We're asking the Lord to teach us how to rightly think about church and family. And the God-inspired reply is let those who have wives live as though they had none.

I look at that and I say, Paul, you are a dangerous preacher. You say dangerous things. Paul clearly did not fear making jaw-dropping statements at the risk of being misunderstood.

And isn't it amazing? He doesn't feel like he has to qualify himself. He doesn't feel like he has to explain himself and say what he doesn't mean. He lays it out there.

What a statement. Men, ladies, you know very well what he says to the husband about the way to view a wife would be the same thing he would say to a wife about the way to view a husband or wife, the way to view children. This has to do with family.

This has to do with how we rightly see things, perceive things. And he says this, the present world is passing away. Brethren! The reality is that everything that has to do with this world is going to be gone and it's going to be gone like that.

We are in a passing world. This isn't forever. Listen, you may think when you're going to that altar and there's the man and he's waiting for you, ladies, and you're walking down the aisle, this is the greatest thing.

This is the thing my heart has always desired. This is going to last forever. But it doesn't last forever.

You set your joys there and they're gone. It's passing. Nothing we have right now is going to be here 50 years from now.

None of it! Most every marriage in this place in 50 years is gone. It's done. It's over.

Your wife is no longer your wife. Your husband is no longer your husband. Because you're dead or Christ has come and there is no marriage there.

That's in this world. In a world that is fleeting. In a world that is passing.

Those of us with families, those of us with wives, husbands, children, we should live as though we had none because it's all passing away. All I can say is, Paul, that is risky language. That is daring language.

Brethren, 1 Corinthians 7.29 From now on. Brethren, He's calling you. From now on.

Lay it down. Approach life in this radical sense. Brethren, this is nothing less than Paul just putting things in proper perspective.

The Corinthians are concerned with whether Christians ought to be engaging in sexual relationships, whether they ought to be touching women married or not married, celibate or not celibate. Paul seems to say that in all of it, whatever you do, single or married, celibate or not, you need to see things the way they really are. I mean, he goes through all these possible scenarios.

He talks about, well, if you're married, you should do this. If you're a Christian married to a Christian, you should do this. If you're a Christian married to an unbeliever, then this.

If you happen to be single, well, then this. If you happen to be married, but your unsaved spouse leaves you, then this. He's got all these scenarios.

But brethren, when you boil it all down, you might be single, you might be married, you might have had a spouse leave you, but for all of us, brethren, whatever you may think of timing, the truth is you don't have much. Marriage and family relationships belong to this passing world and eternity hastens. Brethren, there are two things represented to us in Scripture that we ought to see as worth buying.

One is truth in Proverbs 23. The other is time. When it says redeem the time, it is the idea of buying up the time there in Ephesians 5. Two things in Scripture worth buying.

Truth and time. Time is worth buying. Time is valuable.

Time is precious. Let me show you why. We don't always think about it this way, but think about time being precious because of its importance.

Things are precious in proportion to their importance to your life. Brethren, there's no doubt about it. Those things in your life that you recognize as having the greatest amount of bearing on your life to make it good, to make it well, to make it joyful, those are the things that you look at, the things in life that have the greatest bearing, the greatest impact on you, on how you feel, on what you have, on what is good for you.

Every man is the same this way. Every man will look at life and he will say, if that thing over there has the greatest potential to bring me happiness, then that's what I want more than anything. Every man is like that.

Every man goes towards what he thinks is for his greatest good. Every man finds that precious. And what the Bible comes along and says, look, you folks at Corinth, you are looking to marriage as where you're going to put your joy.

Marriage as what is precious. Whether you have sexual relationships as that which is desirable, or not having it as that which is most desirable. He says, this is what is precious.

It is time and the time is short and this world is passing. Brethren, men find things precious in proportion to the importance that men put on things. The greater that thing has an ability to affect and concern their welfare, the greater degree that they will esteem that thing.

Brethren, do you realize our eternal welfare depends on time? Our eternal welfare depends on time. When Jesus Christ comes to this earth and all the nations and every one of you included are gathered there on Judgment Day, we have a picture in Matthew 25 of Jesus Christ as a shepherd. And He separates these sheep and these goats.

The one to His right hand. The other to His left hand. And He says, I was hungry and you fed Me.

When? When, brethren? When? In time! That's what they did with their time! They fed. They clothed. They gave drink to.

They visited in prison and when they were sick and when they were strangers. In time! That is what time is for. And it's in that day that what we did with our time is going to be brought to the judgment bar.

Brethren, it is now. Our eternity hangs on now. Yes, we're saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Yes, we're justified before God on the merits of the shed blood of Christ. No question. But I'll tell you this, when those books are opened in the end, men are going to be judged based on what they did in time.

Time, brethren! Time! Have you never read Revelation 14? It says, their works follow them. Revelation 14, verse 13, I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write this, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Blessed indeed says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors for their deeds follow them.

Our welfare, they follow them! What these men and these women did in time, follow them. And let me tell you this, it is absolutely apparent to us that those that go the way of the damned, their works follow them as well. You will not escape this life.

What you do is preparing you for eternity. There is no question about that. Brethren, let me say a second thing here.

Time is not just precious because of its importance. Time is precious because of its shortness. The time is very short.

Often when something is rare. Think about the rarity. Men, when they find something that is rare, they tend to put value on things too.

I mean, you think about stamps and baseball cards. But men especially set a high value on things that are scarce if it's something they can't live without. You may recall when Syria besieged Samaria back in 2 Kings.

There was great famine in Samaria. You know what happens when there's great famine? Things become scarce. And then do men put high prices on them? They do.

As they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for 80 shekels of silver. A donkey's head. 80 shekels.

Why? What might in another day be utterly useless and not worth anything? 80 shekels. Brethren, the question I ask you is not time all the more to be prized when your whole eternity depends on it and because you have so little of it. Time is so short.

Brethren, the work Jesus Christ has called us to do is so great! The work we have to do to prepare for eternity must be done in time. Jesus sets us to a work. He says, pray for labors.

He says, go into the nation. He says, be witnesses of Mine. Be light.

Be salt. This is what I've commissioned you to do. Go and do it.

And we have such short time to do it. The work is great. The time is short.

Brethren, we ought to value it on that note. Time is short. Time is short.

And what He's saying to us is don't become so overly consumed with a spouse, with a wife, with a husband, that you lose sight of that reality. Don't let a wife blind your eyes to the fact you don't have long in this world. Not only do you not have long with her, you don't have long in this world.

You don't have long to do what God has called you to do. You don't have long to do this work, the greatness of all this work that Jesus Christ gave to His church to do. So if you're married, buy up the time as though you were not married.

Don't become so overly consumed with a spouse. Or some of you who don't yet have one, so overly consumed with finding a spouse that you waste your life. Don't fritter your time away simply because

you're married.

And if He's saying that, listen, if He's saying that to the married man, live as though you don't have a spouse, live as though you don't have a wife, what in the world would He say to the single person? The married should live as though they're that way. How then should you live if indeed you're not married? Young people, are you buying up the time with fervency that singleness allows? Are you in bed at 10 a.m.? As a door turns on its hinges, so does a sluggard on his bed. Brethren, this is for real.

Listen to Queen Elizabeth of England. These are some of the last words she spoke on her deathbed. Millions of money for an inch of time, cried Elizabeth the Queen of England upon her dying bed, reclining upon a royal couch with 10,000 dresses in her wardrobe in a kingdom on which the sun never set.

She who wasted more than half a century would now barter millions for an inch of time. The sands of time are sinking. You only live once.

But I'll tell you this, not only is time precious because it's so valuable to our eternity, not only is it precious because it's short. Brethren, I'll tell you this third thing. Time is precious because of the uncertainty of its shortness.

It isn't just short. You're uncertain as to how short it is. And it may be a whole lot shorter than you think.

We know it's short. Just this week, our dear brother Bob Jennings found his time may be much shorter than he thought. Some of us recall from our Community Baptist Church days, a sister by the name of Vivian Reese, she went to bed Thursday.

She didn't wake up Friday. Do you know if we could go back a week? Can you imagine what Paul would say to her? What Paul would say to Vivian? Your time is short. Let you that has a husband live as though you have no husband.

She probably, if you were to ask her, would have said that she had years possibly left to live. The fact was, she didn't have much time at all. You see why he says, live as though you don't mourn? Brethren, what do you mourn about in this world? Do you mourn because my car got in an accident? Do you mourn because something happened over here? We have these joys in the things of this world.

I mean, you basically go to Vivian Reese a week ago, and if she mourned because the coffee maker broke, let her that mourns live as though they mourn not. Why? Because it just simply doesn't matter. You see, whatever we lose, whatever problems we have in this world, whatever brings sorrows that are attached to this world, it is so soon gone.

The sorrows of this world are so soon over, and they are so soon past, but it's the same thing with the joys. You know, you have joy over a sports team that wins. You have joy over the crop that comes in from the tomato plants.

You have joy over the report card of a child. But it's Paul saying, look, let those of you that rejoice... He's not talking about rejoicing in the Lord, obviously. He's talking about the mourning, the buying, the selling, the joys that all have to do with this world.

You look at that list. Everything in that list has to do with this world. Wives have to do with this world.

Yes, they have eternal souls, but that marriage is only in this world. And he's basically saying everything about this world is just fleeting, it's past, it's soon gone, and you don't know the shortness. All that woman could have been any one of us.

Any one of us. How many of you in this place may not be here a year from now? A month from now? But you don't think it's going to be you. I tell you, the sister did not think her time was done.

We need to buy up the time. Don't rest your hopes and your joys here. That's the point.

Isn't that what Paul would have said to Vivian? Don't rest your hopes here. Live as though you have no husband because in a week, you won't have one. It's not unearthly.

I'd say this, time is precious again. Not because it's just so valuable to eternity. Not because it's short.

Not because of the uncertainty of the shortness. Time is precious because you can't get it back. Look, you can lose something precious, something that you treasure, and it can be returned.

It can be stolen. The police can find the burglar and it can be restored. You can get your wallet stolen or lose it somewhere and somebody drop it in a mailbox and suddenly it shows up back on your doorstep.

But the fact is, if you lose time, you can't get it back. You lose your reputation, that's harder to get back, but you can. Brethren, once time is gone, it's gone forever.

Period. It doesn't matter if you're like Peter and you repent and you have godly sorrow and you fall on your knees and you weep bitterly. Brethren, you can be forgiven, but you can't get it back and no matter how much you repent, you cannot restore lost time.

Repent and weep and sorrow, but it's gone. If you wasted it, it's gone. There can simply be no delay.

If you do not buy up the time now, you'll have no other opportunity. You have an eternity before you. The Lord God of Heaven gave you time here in order to prepare for eternity.

And He didn't give you much of it. So don't waste it. I recently read about a woman in the agonies of despair.

She cried out. Again, a woman on her deathbed. She cried out to those who sought to comfort her.

How do you comfort a dying woman on her deathbed who has wasted her life and has no hope of an eternity with Christ? How do you comfort? They're trying to comfort her and she cries out, call back time again if you can. Call back time again. Then there may be hope for me.

But time is gone. Brethren, the important lesson I'm endeavoring here to show you is this. Because time is so short, the things of this world are so frail.

They are so fleeting. The work of Christ that you and I have been called to are so great, that it is essential that we always look at things which we see in this world in their true character. Brethren, C.S. Lewis came along and he looked at all this and he called it the shadow lands.

Let me tell you something. Yes, life is real. Life is earnest.

Marriage is real. Family is real. My wife is real.

Our love for each other is real. The fact that you men have to take care of your families is real. Our walk with the Lord here is real.

Our worship together is real. What makes it so unreal, what makes it so unsubstantial is not that it isn't real. It is real.

What makes it such a shadow, what causes the reality to be so suspect isn't that it isn't real. It's that tomorrow it may be gone. It's the shortness.

It's the fact that I can't really put my hopes here. I can't walk down the aisle as I'm leaving the church building with my wife and think, great, now I'm going to be happy forever. This is going to last forever.

Ladies and gentlemen, nobody in this world walks off into the sunset and lives happily ever after. That is a myth. It doesn't happen.

Listen, I'll tell you this. There's one more thing about time I'll tell you. It's ending.

It's certain. We may not know how much of it we have left. It's very uncertain how much time we have here.

You can't get it back when it's gone. But we know the end of it. The end of it is certain.

The end of it is judgment. Death is coming. Hell is moving.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are caught in a river that is more powerful than we are, that is sweeping us along. And there are falls at the end. And I'll tell you this, only those in Jesus Christ will be saved from the destruction at the bottom of those falls.

That time is coming. The time is short. Brethren, let me remind you of something else.

Some of you are sitting in this place right now and you are ungodly. I'm not saying you don't profess to be a Christian. You may very well, but you're ungodly.

You love unrighteousness. You love what God hates. You know it deep in your heart.

You're not a true child of God. And I'll tell you this, at the bottom of those falls, there is destruction. And here's the reality.

God gave you time in which to find Him. Every man, woman, or child who finds Jesus Christ finds Him in time. The first and most important work for you to be involved with, to set yourself to in time is finding Jesus Christ.

It's going to Him. It's trusting Him. That is the greatest calling.

Time affords you. And if you waste it, you may call yourself a Christian. But if in time, you do not find Christ, whatever disguise you have on, whatever false name you may bear, those falls will test it.

And the rocks at the bottom will chew you up and there will be no escape. In time, you must find. You are being swept along and I can't pull you out of that river of time.

You're in it. You're being swept along by it. And the falls for most of us are much closer than we realize.

You think you have lots of time. Some of you sit in this place and you think if only I could be married, I'd be happy. And this is exactly what Paul's saying.

Do not set your heaven there. Do not make marriage or a wife or a husband your heaven. Because it can soon be gone.

These things are passing. That fall is coming. And even though those of us in Christ will be rescued there at the end, Christ's arms will bear us up.

We will not be dashed against those rocks. Brethren, the time we may find ourselves there is close at hand. The world is perishing around us.

We go live in our vacations, in our houses, in our fancy things. Brethren, let me tell you this. You get to the heart and the soul and the core of what it means for a man to live his life who's married and live it as though he's not married.

What does that look like? What does that have to do with? I think it has to do with this. It has to do with setting your joys, your hopes, your heaven, all your glory in that, in a spouse, in a relationship here. It's fleeting.

It's shadow. It's going to be gone. Don't set it there.

Set your hope in heaven. Another thing that it would tend to press upon us is don't allow marriage to keep you from seeking first the Kingdom of Heaven. Don't let it be that.

Don't allow it to be a snare. Yes, men, love your wife. Yes, that's real.

Yes, provide for your house. Yes, those are all real things, good things. But men, women, we still have this Word.

Luke 14.20, "Did not the man there say, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come?' Brethren, you know one of the ways we live as to say we don't have a wife is when the Lord says, come. When the Lord says, come, you don't want to be like this fool who says I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come. Brethren, we're to come when we're called as though we had no wife.

I've had certain people tell me that they're married, they have family, brethren, I would just say this, to our focus on the family and family integrated type friends, if Jesus Christ calls us to bear a commission to this world, if Jesus Christ calls us to gather together and strengthen one another in a corporate body, building up one another in love, speaking to one another in love, exhorting one another that we not be swallowed up by the deceitfulness of sin and have our hearts hardened, pressing on together, seeking to stir up one another to love and good works, if these are the things that our Lord has called us to, I just say to brethren of that persuasion who are persuaded to distance themselves from the church and distance themselves from this great commission that we are called to in this world to be salt and light and bear the testimony of Christ to the nations, those who would withdraw from it, I call them to come and bring the family with them. Do not let family be a hindrance to that. Do not let it sway you away from that.

Brethren, don't love your wife more than Christ. Luke 14.26, if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Brethren, Jesus Christ calls us to absolute devotion and commitment to Him.

Christ is Lord. Christ is King. He didn't come to haggle.

He didn't come to debate, bargain, or dispute that point. Your time is short. Your life is short.

Your time is His. Your life belongs to Him. You were bought with a price.

He doesn't come to haggle. He doesn't come to say, it's okay for you to serve your wife and not me. It's okay to be led over there by her.

He comes and He says, I have total demand on your life. All of it. On the altar.

All of it. Sacrifice to Me. I want your love.

I want your affection. All of it. Brethren, I would say this too.

Don't let your wife, don't let your husband be a snare to you from storing up treasure in heaven. Don't store up treasure here. Look, I guess this brings in another note.

You that are married, live as though you have no wife. You that live as though you have no husband when it comes to your faith. What do I mean by that? Some people, they feel like, oh, when they're single, they could go off and help Trevor over in Papua New Guinea.

But, oh, I have a family. Brethren, is God not able to preserve one as well as twelve? Is God not able to provide for? I'll tell you this, the reality is that even if our brother Bob Jennings, he's going to die at some point, and maybe sooner or later, I am going to die and you're going to die. But the fact is, if I die with a wife, I can die as though I have none.

How's that? Not because the person leaving isn't keenly aware of the separation of a loved one, but they can leave in this sense. There are people that would as much as be afraid to die because how is my wife and how are my children going to be cared for? I read somewhere in the Scriptures that God is the One who cares for widows and orphans. Brethren, we need to live our life in faith.

Just because you have a wife, just because you have children, doesn't mean that you can't go to the most dangerous place in the world. It doesn't mean that you have to have large insurance policies. It doesn't mean that you can't store up treasure in heaven.

God has called you to live by faith, not by sight. And it's not like if you have a wife, you have to live more by sight. He calls you to live by faith.

And when it comes to living by faith, live as though you have no wife. Live as though you have no children. Live as though you really trust the God who has said and called Himself Jehovah-Jireh.

Brethren, I really believe that this is the heart and the soul of what the Apostle is calling us to. He is the same One that in Ephesians tells you men to love your wives. He is the same One in Ephesians that tells you ladies to respect, to submit to your husbands.

He obviously honors marriage. He esteems it very highly. He speaks of it as that which has the ability to portray the love of Christ and the submission of the church.

But I'll tell you this, He's not being contradictory here. He's dealing with reality. He's dealing with fleeting realities of this world.

Brethren, God help us. God help us to feel this. If you're wasting your life, He calls you away from such a life.

He calls you to number your days. Look at your life. It is a vapor.

It is passing. Fifty short years. There's a cemetery over there.

It is full of people. People by and large who did not think death would take them as soon as it did. And it took them.

Brethren, our time is short. What are you doing with it? What are you doing with your time? Look at your time. Count it as a precious thing.

Think about the time right now. You cannot get back. Brethren, when it comes to God, and church, and family, Paul would say, it's fleeting, it's passing, your time is short.

So whatever family life you live in, it's here today, it's gone tomorrow. Deal with it. With regards to the things that are eternal.

The soul of your spouse is eternal. The soul of your children are eternal. Press them towards Christ, yes.

But don't invest in the things that are passing away in this world in ways that are inappropriate, in ways that are excessive, in ways that pull you away from the great work of Christ. Family needs to be surrendered to this principle. You don't hear it much.

It's not popular, but it's reality. What really matters is not whether you've got family, not whether you're single, not whether you've got a lost spouse or a saved spouse. The real issue here is it's all passing.

It's going real fast. You've got one life to live, don't waste it. You don't get it back.

Brethren, Adenaarim Judson, I quoted this a little while ago to some of you, but it's worth bearing out again. You have but one life to live in which to prepare for eternity. If you had four or five lives, two or three of them might be spent in carelessness.

But you have one only. Every action of that one life gives coloring to your eternity. How important then that you spend that life so as to please the Savior, the blessed Savior who has done everything for you.

And as I've been reading just recently this biography of Daniel Rowland, I came across this account of the first great awakening in Wales back in the 1740 era. Griffith Jones, he said this, Never was the world fuller of hindrances to the good work of stirring ourselves up to lay hold on God. And yet this work was never more necessary.

Since we have reason to fear that God is now about leaving our land and departing from us. It is now, if ever, we should stir ourselves up to lay hold on Him as the prophet says and be earnest, resolute, fixed, flaming affections to solicit His return and stay with us. What does that have to do about time? Let me tell you what it has to do.

You know what he realized in that day? They had a movement of God in their land and then they came to realize God was drawing back. And he said, oh, how desperate they were with fervency, with affection, with passion, with resolve. They went after God and they pleaded with Him, don't leave our land, come

back.

And He did. And He came in and He brought great awakening there. He brought and swept many into the kingdom.

What does that have to do with time? It has to do with this. Brethren, we have seen something of a work of God here in San Antonio. But who knows? Is there an ebb here? Is there a falling off? Is God withdrawing? Would He have us to heat up our passions and lay hold on Him and pull Him back and say, God, please don't go.

Please don't pull back. Please don't stop saving. Please come back.

Come in greater power. We need more. We haven't hardly yet tasted of it.

Brethren, this is time. This is the time we've been called to live in. And one thing that's certain about this time is we need God in it if we're going to accomplish anything.

If we're going to do the work. If we're going to carry on. If we're going to be victorious.

We can only do it in time. God help us, brethren. Hold on to God in this time.

Walk with Him. Talk with Him. Plead with Him.

Hold on to Him. Very shortly, it's going to be gone. Brethren, this is our time.

We're not guaranteed it tomorrow. This is our time. And I can read about the Griffith Jones, Adam and Adam Judson's.

They lived in another time. This is our time. You basically sit night after night in front of a television set or laying asleep in bed or playing video games or whatever little trivial things.

Brethren, time. Time.

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