

Fourth Quarter Strategies – Saturday, November 25, 2017

For most, death will not be swift and as we grow older we will be confronted more frequently with those around us dying. To me, it's important to live and die with dignity. As a follower of Christ, I truly want to live a life that pleases my Savior and Lord. And as more aches and pains beset me, I want to continue to handle this life with dignity. Socrates along with numerous philosophers of his time believed in "dying a good death." I don't consider taking one's life as a good death. Life is a wonderful gift that God bestows upon each of us and I proclaim we need to live it purposefully. Taking one's life before God's appointed time is a travesty.

In Psalm 90:10, Moses prays and declares for the sake of the Israelites that *"Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away."* This message was specifically communicated to those remaining in the wilderness. As you may recall, only Joshua and Caleb would enter the Promised Land and all others who were rescued from Egyptian bondage died in the desert. If we go further back in time to the days of Noah, we read in Genesis 6:3 *"Then the Lord said, 'My spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.'" Which seems to be the best antidote to the longevity of men and women after the Great Flood.*

Most of you will agree that 120 years is an exceptional lifespan. And, I imagine most of us would settle for a bit less - especially if our health and lifestyle drastically diminish. Most of us cannot even imagine living anywhere near that many years. Since my Dad made it to 100 and my grandmother on my Mom's side made it to 104, I'm optimistic about my longevity based upon the genes I've obviously inherited. With that prospect in mind, I am seriously considering what God might have planned for me as I near the fourth quarter of my life. What's most important is simply this - as Christians whatever days we have left, we must live them as fully and faithfully as we possibly can.

I'm often encouraged by the words of Joshua before his death at 110 years of age. In Joshua 23:14-15 he proclaims *"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then chose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."* In verse 31 we are told *"Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel."* Yet in due time they fell away and took their eyes off the Lord.

In the Book of Judges, we find that the generation that trailed Joshua's generation became wicked in the eyes of the Lord. In Judges 2:10-11 we are told *"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord or what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals."* The entire book deals with disobedience followed by obedience to God once He would again deliver them through one judge after another in His continued effort to teach them to remain strong in their belief in Him. We are no different today. We can easily fall away and lose sight of what God has done for us in the past.

Life is a process and a continual progression that tests us with opportunities to follow the righteousness of our Father in Heaven. It does not get easier as we grow older. In fact, it can get more difficult unless we remain close to God through remaining in His Word and fellowshiping with other believers who will encourage us as we deal with the challenges we all face in life. As we age we must retain that childlike faith that brought us to Jesus years before. In Matthew 18:2-4 Jesus explained to His disciples *"I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of God."*

So, we must remain humble, accept the afflictions that come our way and continue to trust God with childlike faith. Please join me in the quest to live and die in dignity.

Passages to Ponder: Deuteronomy 30:19-20; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; Psalm 23; 1 Corinthians 15:54-58

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Deuteronomy 30:19-20 New International Version (NIV)

¹⁹This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live ²⁰and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 New International Version (NIV)

3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
2 a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
3 he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
4 Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 New International Version (NIV)

⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.