

## FORGOTTEN TRUTH #4—WE ARE ALL VANISHING!

### **INTRODUCTION:**

(Imagine a clock “tick-tocking” for 30 seconds, followed by 30 seconds of silence)

What was worse—the 30 seconds of “tick-tock”—or 30 seconds of silence? The point I am trying to make is simply this—whether we think about it or not, **time keeps marching** on. Second after second, minute after minute, hour after hour, day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year continually go by.

Time keeps marching on, doesn't it? But too many times it seems too many of us operate on auto-pilot. We not only forget that time is marching on, we forget that we are building our spiritual lives—and our spiritual legacy. There are no breaks or time-outs or vacations—we are constantly building. And God reminds us in His Word that everyone of us is to “take heed how he buildeth thereupon.”

How do we do that? Since “taking heed how you build” is “Big Picture” and kind of broad, I broke it down into “Life-Building Truths that we Often Forget.”

--#1: We are all sowing! Every day we either sow to our selfish sinful nature or to the Spirit. And the inescapable principle is that we **will reap** what we sow. Don't be deceived and think you can be the exception; don't think that you can be the one who sows to the flesh, but reaps of the Spirit. Gal 6:7 reminds us “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” What are you sowing?

--#2: We are all serving! Every day we serve someone or something. God's people should serve God, but too often times we serve **self**. Jesus warned us in Mt 6:24 that “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Sadly, it again seems that some of us try to prove God wrong. We serve God—but only half-heartedly—because we still largely serve ourselves. Some of us have in our homes the plaque “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” But a plaque on the wall is not always practiced in the heart, is it? You are serving someone. Who are you serving?

--#3: Last week we looked at II Corinthians 3 and noted the truth that we are all **being read**; meaning we are being watched! Paul told the Corinthian believers in **II Cor 3:2** that “Ye are our epistles written in our hearts, **known and read of all men**.” In the context of that chapter, Paul was saying he did not need a letter of recommendation because **they** were his letter of recommendation! They weren't just a reflection of his ministry, however. More importantly, it was obvious to all that observed them that they were epistles **of Christ**. You could tell by watching their lives that God the Holy Spirit had done a work in their heart. Everyone of us is being “read”—and we may be the only “Bible” some unbelievers ever read! What kind of message are we giving about Christ with our lives? Are we giving a mixed message—a confusing one—or do people know for certain that we are new creatures in Christ because of how we live?

Please turn to James 4 and follow along as I read verses 13-17. Forgotten Truth #4 is found in the last part of verse 14—that our life is a vapor that “appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Just as the imaginary clock stopped—and there was silence—life as we know it will some day stop.

Forgotten Life-Building Truth #4—We are all Vanishing!

### **1. The reality of a vanishing life**

How do we know our life is but a vapor? Because God says so!

## A. Pronounced by God

### **i. Our life is as a vapour (v 14)**

Verse 14—“For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Margin note in my Bible has “mist” as a meaning for vapor. Other commentaries suggest the word carries the idea of “exhaled breath” or “smoke” or “steam.” My wife and I have had the privilege of going to Yellowstone National Park. One of the many impressive things about Yellowstone is that there is steam everywhere it seems. It is coming out of the ground, it is coming out of the river, it is coming out of the geysers. Regardless of its source, however, the common denominator of mist, steam, and smoke is that it appears for only a short time—then is gone. This is not the only place where we see the fleeting nature of life.

### **ii. Our life is as a shadow**

**Job 8:9** “(For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow:)”

**I Chronicles 29:15** “For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding.”

**Psalms 102:11a** “My days are like a shadow that declineth...”

### **iii. Our life is as grass**

**Psalms 102:11b** “...and I am withered like grass.”

**Psalms 103:15-16** “As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.”

What is your life? A vanishing vapour. A fleeting shadow. And withered, wind-blown grass.

It is not secure, it is not sturdy, and it is not stable. It can be counted on for one thing—to vanish away.

We know that to be true because God pronounces it to be true! We also know it to be true because it is...

## B. Proven from experience

The brevity of life is all too real from some of us. Some women in here have lost little babies—not by their choice, but by God’s—that were only weeks old in the womb and slipped through this life like a shadow into the next. Others have had and held their babies for only a short time before their life vanished away. But whether 6 weeks in the womb—or 6 weeks out of the womb; whether 6 months...or 6 years...or 26, 66, or 106—we know from experience that our life is but a vapour!

My intent this morning is not to discourage you, but this isn’t overly delightful news, is it? So how do we respond in light of this pronouncement from God? First, we are going to look at how **not** to respond.

## **2. The response of the world in the light of a vanishing life**

### A. Ignore the fact

VCY radio has a radio commercial they are currently running that reminds the listeners that most people spend more time preparing for a one-week **vacation** than they spend preparing for **eternity**. How sad—and yet true! In verse 13 we see an attitude of presumptuous confidence that ignores the fact that life is short—and that they have no control over it! Please follow along as I read it.

--“Go to now” carries the idea of “Come now” and is a phrase designed to get someone’s attention

--They arrogantly claim that they know **when** they are going to go and **where** they are going to go and **how long** they are going to stay and **what** they are going to do and **what** the results will be  
They ignore two facts from v 14, however: 1) Don’t know what will happen; 2) Can’t control what will happen

Reminds me of what Jimmy Stewart (aka George Bailey) said in “It’s a Wonderful Life!”

*“I’m shaking the dust of this crummy little town off my feet and I’m gonna see the world.*

*Italy, Greece, the Parthenon...the Colosseum.*

*Then I'm coming back here and go to college and see what they know. And then I'm going to build things. I'm gonna build air fields. I'm gonna build skyscrapers a hundred stories high. I'm gonna build bridges a mile long."*

But poor George Bailey never left Bedford Falls, did he? He made plans, but had no ability to carry them out.

**Barnes writes:** "Who can calculate on the permanence of a vapor? Who can build any solid hopes on a mist?" And yet that is what the world does. They live as though they know what will happen and can control what will happen, but neither one is true. They ignore the fact that their life is a vapor and consequently leave God out of their plans.

What about you? There is nothing wrong with making plans—I believe God's Word teaches we **should** make plans—but the underlying attitude we should have is found in verse 15: "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."

Whereas the attitude of some is to ignore the fact that life is fleeting, others have the opposite approach. Since "you only live once"—known now, I guess, by the acronym YOLO—get the most out of life; live life to the fullest. What does that look like? For some it means indulging the flesh.

#### B. Indulge the flesh

**Isaiah 22:13** "And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die."

**I Corinthians 15:32** "If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die."

Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes tells us that he had this kind of philosophy for a while. We read not only about **what** he did, however—we also see the empty results: Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 "And **whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy**; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. <sup>11</sup> Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, **behold, all was vanity** and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

We are reminded in Hebrews 11:25 that although there are "pleasures of sin for a season," it is **only** a season. A life of indulgence does not satisfy; it does not give lasting pleasure.

**Proverbs 27:20** "Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied."

How are we to live in light of the fact that our life is vanishing? Here is the don'ts: don't respond like the world by ignoring the fact that life is short and don't indulge the flesh. Now for the "do's":

### **3. The responsibilities of God's people in light of a vanishing life**

#### A. Avoid presumption (13-14a)

Notice again verses 13-14. They made plans which, in and of themselves, are not bad. Two problems with their planning, however. Problem 1—they left God out of their plans. Problem 2—they did not know the future so presumptuously assumed that they would get certain results.

Please **turn to** Luke 12, beginning with verse 16. We have here another example of someone not knowing what shall be on the morrow. It is also a perfect example of someone who was presumptuous in his plans, indulged the flesh, and found out too late that his life was a vapor.

--v 16 already rich, ground brought forth plentifully. He did not provide the perfect conditions for the ground to produce abundantly—God did

--v 17 "What shall I do?" No thoughts of others; no recognition of God's blessing; claimed ownership over that which was given to him.

--v 18-19 Notice the “I’s” and “my’s”. Makes plans—but no thoughts of God. His plans were all about him. There was a presumption that his life would continue and that he would “eat, drink, and be merry”—not because he thought life was short, but because he felt he deserved a life of ease for many years.

--v 20 “But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee:”  
The tick-tock of the clock of his life ended. He didn’t count on **that**, did he?

We need to be ready all the time to meet God because we don’t know when that day will come. We make plans to do “this, that, and the other,” but forget the fact that “ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”  
**Proverbs 27:1** “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.”

First, avoid presumption. Second,

#### B. Acknowledge providence (v 15)

Back to James 4:13. As was already pointed out, we see here the attitude of presumption: “To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:” Verse 15 tells us what our attitude should be: “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”

“Lord willing” is an expression I’ve heard here more than any of the other churches I’ve been a member of. In fact, I’m not exaggerating to say that I have heard—or said—“Lord willing” more in the last two years than I said or heard in the previous 35 years! Is that a good thing—or a bad thing?

It is a **bad** thing if we “say it just to say it” and there is no meaning behind it.

It is a **good** thing, however, if we say it because we recognize that the success of our plans—and our very life—is dependent upon God. Notice Barnes’ quote:

“If the Lord will... - This is proper, because we are wholly dependent on Him for life, and as dependent on Him for success. He alone can keep us, and He only can make our plans prosperous. In a thousand ways He can thwart our best-laid schemes, for all things are under His control. We need not travel far in life to see how completely all that we have is in the hands of God, or to learn how easily He can frustrate us if He pleases.  
**There is nothing on which the success of our plans depends over which we have absolute control**; there is nothing, therefore, on which we can base the assurance of success but His favor.”

What are our responsibilities in light of the reality that our life is a vanishing vapor? First, avoid presumption; second, acknowledge providence; and third...

#### C. Assess priorities (v 13)

What is important to you? How often do you stop and think about your priorities? When the clock stops ticking—when this vaporous life ends and we meet God—what will **He** say of your priorities?

In verse 13, their priority was to “buy and sell, and get gain.” In the parable we looked at in Luke 12, the foolish rich man’s priority was to lay up much goods for many years so he could “take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” In both cases the priority was “things” and not God.

Where is God in your priorities? “If the Lord will” is not just an acknowledgment of God’s control over our life. It should also be a recognition that God **has a will** for our lives—He has revealed certain things that He wants us to do. Are you doing them? Do you even care to know what they are?

As we close this morning, I want each of us to consider this thought: What if God were to say to us: “This night thy soul shall be required of thee?” That will happen someday—and we don’t know when. When our vaporous life ends, one of two things will happen.

1. For the saved—for those who have trusted Jesus and Jesus alone for their salvation and forgiveness of sins—they will be rewarded for what they have done for Christ. What an amazing thing to consider! He saves us...and creates within us both the **desire** to serve Him and the **ability** to serve Him, then rewards us for that service! And I can't help but think the desire of everyone of us at that point will be, "I wish I had given Him more!"

2. For the unsaved—for those who die unforgiven—their meeting of God will be very different. There will be no rewards. They will be judged for their sins and spend all of eternity away from God in a place called hell.

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."