

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • TV195A

A television broadcast sermon delivered
SUNDAY, MAY 29TH, 1983
By
HENRY T. MAHAN

Transcribed, edited and published
MAY 4TH, 2012

HENRY T. MAHAN TAPE LIBRARY
Zebulon Baptist Church
6088 Zebulon Highway
Pikeville, KY 41501

James 4:13-16

“Go to now, ye that say, to day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.”

I want you to open your Bible with me today to the book of **James**. I am going to be speaking to you on this subject: **“WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?”**

We are going to read from the **4th chapter of James**, three verses, beginning with **verses 13 through 15 of James chapter 4**.

Now, listen to the Scriptures: *“Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow, we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life; it is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. You ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live and do this or do that.”* What is your life?

I wish that I could get everyone who is listening to my voice today to do some serious thinking about life and death. I think we are prone to joke too much about growing old.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

I know that we do talk about getting old and we laugh about it and we joke about it but it is a serious subject. I think we speak lightly about the passing years and we are even prone to laugh and joke about death.

Well, my friends, there is no subject more serious than death and there is no appointment more certain than death. The Scripture says, *“It’s appointed unto men once to die and after that the judgment.”*

The Scripture says, *“In a few days,”* not in a few decades or a few years or even months, but the time is so short, the prophet uses the word *“days,”* *“in a few days, I shall go the way from which I shall not return.”* David prayed this way, *“Lord; teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom.”*

I wish we could think seriously about this subject of growing old, dying, and meeting God in the judgment and spending eternity somewhere. What is your life?

Now, my friends, I’m not suggesting that we miss the blessings and happiness of life, by constantly dwelling on death. I’m not suggesting that at all; God has given us many joys and much happiness, blessings, and benefits on this earth.

It is a beautiful world. *“The heavens declare the glory of God. The firmament showeth his handiwork.”* God made the world good; He made it beautiful.

Sin has marred it; take sin out of this world and it would be a good world. I’m not suggesting that we think about death, judgment, hell, and heaven so much that we miss the blessings of life and the happiness that God has given us.

A wise man, a truly wise man, will consider what he is; he is dust. His life is a vapor; it is a swiftly, passing, fad. His life, the Scripture says, *“the fashion of this world that fadeth away. His life is a flower; it is here for a little while and then gone.”*

So, a wise man will consider what he is and he will consider where he is going. A wise man will consider what his future holds and he will also consider what sort of hope he has for the future and where he will spend eternity.

Was it Longfellow, the poet, who wrote?

**“Life is real; life is earnest
The grave is not its goal
Dust thou art to dust returneth
Was not spoken of the soul.”**

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Many years ago I learned a poem. I can't recite the whole poem; I won't attempt to. I remember the story. The poem told about a great king in a foreign country who had a jester, a court-clown that entertained him and all of his friends.

The court-clown was so good at his work and so good in entertaining people. He was so foolish that the king knighted him and called him "sir-fool."

One day he called him in to the throne room. He had entertained the king and the king presented him with a gift. He gave him a gold-tipped walking cane. It had a gold knob on it. When he gave the walking cane to the jester, he said; "sir-fool; I believe that you are the biggest fool that I have ever met."

He said, "If you ever find someone who is a bigger fool than you are; give him this cane." The fool thanked the king for the cane and took it away.

The years passed. They were good friends, the king and the jester. But, one day, someone came to the jester after many years had passed and said to him, "the king wants to see you, the king is a sick man; the king is dying and he wants to bid farewell to you."

So, the jester went up to the king's bedroom where he was passing away, where he was dying. When he came up beside the bed the king said to him; "I wanted to tell you good bye." The jester said, "Is my lord taking a trip?"

The king said, "Well yes; I am taking a long, long, journey." The jester said, "Where are you going?" The king said, "I'm not sure." The jester said, "Well; when are you coming back?" The king said, "Well; I fear that I am not coming back." The jester said, "Well; your majesty, what preparation have you made for this trip?"

There was a long silence and a tear came into the eye of the old king and he said; "well, I'm afraid that I have made no preparation for this journey at all." The jester looked at him and said; "You mean that you are going on a long journey and you are not coming back, you are going to stay in this place where you are going and you have made no preparation at all for the journey?"

The king said, "That's correct; I am afraid I have made no preparation at all." When he said that the jester handed him the gold knobbed walking cane and he said to the king; "your majesty, with apologies, I believe that you are a bigger fool than I am; this is your cane; I give it back to you."

Well, that is what I am talking about. I want us to think seriously about this thing of death, this thing of judgment and eternity. I often wonder how I will die, do you? Do you ever think about that?

I know that I am older than many of you but there are some of you older than I am. Do you ever wonder how you will die? Do you ever wonder when you will die? Do you ever wonder what shall be your hope and confidence when you come to die? Will you be able to face death at rest, at peace and with confidence that you will live always with the Redeemer?

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

The prophet in the book of **Numbers chapter 23:10** wrote this: *“Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his (Jacob).”*

Now, in our text, the apostle James raises a question; *“what is your life?”* That is my subject today: **“What is Your Life?”**

I suppose that I could get many answers to that question, just about as many answers as there are people listening to my voice. Let's go to the Scriptures; the best interpreter of Scriptures is the Scriptures. That's right; the best way to find out about what a Scripture means is to find another Scripture on that subject.

So, I am going to ask the question, *“what is your life,”* and answer it from the Word of God. I will divide the message into three parts:

First of all: I am going to talk about the swiftness of life. What is your life? It is very swift; it is quickly over.

Secondly: Then, I am going to talk about the uncertainty of life. What is your life? Well, it is very uncertain; it is like a frail tent.

The Bible doesn't call these bodies buildings; it talks about a building which we have with God but it talks about our bodies as a tent which we live in below. A tent is a frail structure; it can quickly be dashed aside or blown down by the wind or something happen to it. So, it is the uncertainty of life.

Thirdly: Then, I am going to talk lastly, about the hope of life after death, the hope of eternal life.

First of all: The Bible talks about the swiftness of life. What is your life, what is your life? Your life is the swiftness of it.

I know that young men and women listening to my voice today view life as a long experience. I suppose that if you are 21, 22, 23, 24, or 25, and you are sitting there listening to my voice, you will say; *“what is he talking about, the swiftness of life? Boy, it seems like I am going to live always down here on this earth.”*

Turn to granddaddy there, and ask him how long life is. The man who is 60 or 70 years of age, he has been here as long as you will probably live. Ask him how long life is. He will say, *“Son; it's just a day and a half.”*

The older you get the faster the years go by. The years go by like days after you get 50 or 60 years of age. The years roll by so quickly and it is soon gone. The older you get the faster it goes by.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

A young man looking forward to life 40 or 50 more years, it seems so long. But, the old people looking back on life, well; it just seems like yesterday that they were children sitting around their mother and father's table. Life swiftly goes by.

Let's see what the Scripture says about it: In **Job Chapter 9:25**, Job says; "*my days are swifter than a post; they flee away and see no good.*" What is he talking about?

Well, back in the days of Job, the mail was delivered by men riding fast horses. They had relay stations. A man would have letters to deliver or messages to deliver. He would get on a horse, here, and he would ride rapidly to the relay station and they would have a horse waiting on him.

He would lay aside the tired horse and get on the fresh horse and ride rapidly to another relay station. He would get off that horse and onto another and ride until he completed his journey.

Well, this is what Job is talking about when he says, "our lives go by so swiftly." Each year is like those fast horses; we get off one and on to the other. We get off of that one onto another. We get off of that one onto another until soon; we reach the end of the journey. Our years are like these fast horses; they go by so quickly.

Watch another illustration: He says in **Job 9:26**; "*My days are like a swift ship being carried by the wind, it is swiftly going toward the harbor;*" there is no stopping it. The wind gets into the sails and the ship just speeds along to its destination.

"*My days are like an eagle,*" not an eagle floating gently in the air taking its time, you know. It's not an eagle sitting on the nest but "*my days are like an eagle that hasteth to its prey.*" The old eagle has spotted some prey or victim down below and he swoops down upon that victim and over takes it. Even so, death overtakes us as swiftly as an eagle flies after its victim.

Then, in **Job 7:6**, he says; "*My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, a weaver's shuttle and they are spent without hope.*"

Did you ever see anyone weave a rug or a garment on an old fashioned weaver, an old fashioned shuttle? It just flies; it flies faster, really, than the eye can see it. After awhile the garment is done and completed.

That's what Job says; "*My life, my days, are like a weaver's shuttle;*" they just go by so quickly and they are passing by.

Then, in **Job 7:7**, he says this as he is talking about the swiftness of our days and the swiftness of our years; "*O remember that my life is like the wind, like the wind, sudden, swift, and then it is gone.*"

Do you ever stand out in the field and everything is calm and suddenly you hear the rustling of the leaves and see the bending of the trees? A wind comes up so quickly and blows and it seems like it is going to blow you away.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

In a moment, everything is calm again. Do you see what the Lord is saying? Life is moving swiftly along, swiftly along. Life is like fast horses on a relay, a post relay. Life is like the swift ships driven by the wind.

Life is like an eagle that hasteth after its prey. Life is like a weaver's shuttle; each day passes by like the weaver's shuttle, weaving the garment. Life is like the wind. Boast not thyself of tomorrow; yet tomorrows may all be gone. Boast not thyself of tomorrow, yet tomorrows may all be gone.

Are you thinking with me, the swiftness of life? What is your life? Well; it is a quickly, passing, thing.

Secondly: Let's look at the uncertainty of life!

Now, there are many Scriptures, there are so many Scriptures, in fact, on the uncertainty of life that I have had to leave many out. I'm just going to deal with a few that I find in the Word of God and leave most of them out.

The Bible speaks quite a bit about the uncertainty of life, how frail it is. Mr. Spurgeon use to say, "It's surprising that a harp of so many strings could stay in tune so long." In **James chapter 4:14**, when the apostle asked, "*What is your life;*" he doesn't stop there, he says; "*what is your life?*"

He tells you what it is. He says, "*It is even a vapor, (a midst of fog) that appeareth for a little time and then it is gone.*"

Did you ever walk out on the lake before the sun comes up some morning? You walk out on the lake and just before the sun rises you can see a vapor rising from the lake; there is a midst or a fog that is rising from the lake; it is all over the lake. You see it everywhere; there's that midst, that fog. Vapor is what it is.

Then, the sun tops the hill and shines down on the lake and the fog just slips away and it is gone. Life is frail like that; it is frail as a vapor, as a mist of fog. It is fleeting and uncertain; that is what he is saying to us. What is your life? "*It is a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then it is gone.*"

Then, in **Ecclesiastes Chapter 6:12**, he says; "*All of my days I spend as a shadow.*" Now, you talk about a vapor being frail and uncertain, how about a shadow? There is nothing with less substance than a shadow. There is nothing with less certainty than a shadow.

Now, a tree is firm and certain, but the shadow is nothing. The great wall that you built with your stones and your bricks are permanent but the shadow of the wall is temporary; it is there and then it's not there.

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

That is what he says, *“My days are spent as a shadow. The days of my vain life are but a shadow.”* Listen to **Isaiah 38:12**; *“My age is departed and removed from me as a shepherd’s tent.”*

You know, you see the shepherd out there on the side of the mountain; he is grazing his sheep. He is not going to be there long. He’s just going to be there until the clover is gone or until the grass is gone. He is going to be there a little while.

He doesn’t build a house there; he doesn’t put a fence around his house. He doesn’t plant a garden or plant trees. He pitches a little tent, a lean-to; it’s a temporary dwelling place. It is something to shield him from the wind, the sand, and the sun. He won’t be there very long. That’s what the prophet Isaiah says; *“My age is removed from me as a shepherd’s tent.”*

In **Isaiah 40:6**, it says; *“All flesh is grass and the glory thereof as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; surely the people is grass.”*

Why do we try to plant our roots so deep? I don’t know why but we do. On this earth, when life is so frail and so fleeting, and so uncertain, we try to plant our roots deep. We build our mansions and put fences around them as if we were going to stay there.

The Word of God says this; *“God knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust. As for man, his days are as the grass, as the flower of the field, so he flourisheth.”*

Oh yes, he’s strong, handsome, beautiful, full of strength, power, and nourishment. But, *“the wind passeth over and it is gone; the wind passeth over and it is gone, and the place thereof, shall know it no more.”*

As I said, there are so many Scriptures on the uncertainty of life.” Other Scriptures picture life as a pilgrimage, as a *“tale that’s told and our days fly away, (the Scripture says), as a dream.”*

The song writer said:

**“Swift to its close
Ebbs out life’s little day
Earth’s joys grow dim
Its glories fade away**

**Change and decay
All around me I see
O Thou that changeth not
Abide with me.”**

Well, let’s close with this thought; what is the hope of eternal life, what is the hope of eternal life?

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

Now, one of the clearest Scriptures in the Bible of the hope of eternal life; we've been talking about it, the swiftness, the swiftness of human life, natural life, the uncertainty of it. But, there is a hope of eternal life.

In **1 John 5**; do you want to turn over there to **1 John 5:11**? It says, "*And this is the record.*" In other words, this is the promise of God. This is the Word of God. The Word of God cannot lie. The Word of God cannot fail.

Paul called it, "*A faithful saying, (a sure saying), and worthy of acceptance (by all men).*" This is the record; this is the Word of God. What does it say? It says that "*God hath given to us eternal life.*"

Who gave it to us? God did. We didn't earn it, we didn't merit it, and we didn't buy it; God gave it to us. God thought it; God in Christ bought it. God in Christ sought us and applied that life. "*God hath given us eternal life.*"

"*If a man die, shall he live again?*" Well, you can't answer that question because you have never talked to anybody who died and lived again. The only one who can answer that question is God Almighty. He says, "man shall live again; there is a resurrection of the dead." There is an eternal life. We are not just talking about the length of it we are talking about the quality of it. Eternal life is spiritual life, it is divine life.

You see; there are several kinds of life. There is mineral life, there is vegetable life, and there is human life. Then, there is divine life, eternal life. Divine life is eternal. God, the source of divine life, the giver of life, "*hath given to us eternal life.*" I am interested in that. "*The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life.*"

Are you with me so far? "*This is the record.*" This is not guess-work, this is not theory; this is the record; this is God's record. He is the only one who has the answers to these questions; nobody has the answer.

The doctor stands and watches life leave the body. He cannot do anything about it. He doesn't know where it goes, what it is, or what its form is after that. He doesn't know.

The philosopher might talk about life but when a person dies that is all he knows. That is the end of his; that is the end of his knowledge.

God knows; God says, "*This is the record; God hath given to us eternal life.*" Listen to the next sentence: "*And this life, (this eternal life, this divine life, this spiritual life), is in His Son.*"

Who is His Son? He said, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,*" the Lord Jesus Christ. When Christ Jesus was on this earth, "*the Father spake from heaven and said, this is my Son.*"

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

This life, this eternal life, this divine life, this spiritual life, is in His Son; that is where it is. Eternal life is not in the church. The church is not a building anyway; the church is an assembly of people.

Eternal life is not in the ordinances, baptism, the Lord's Table, or whatever. Eternal life is not in the law. Eternal life is not even in a profession of faith. It is not in a mourner's bench, walking the aisle, or shaking a preacher's hand or having somebody put some water on your head. That's not where life is.

Eternal life cannot be conferred by one human upon another human. I don't have eternal life to give you. I am not the source of life; God is the source of life. *"In Him is life."* In Him, Christ is our life. No man can give eternal life; *"Christ quickeneth whom he will."*

"As the Father quickeneth whom he will, so the Son quickeneth whom he will." Eternal life is in Christ. That is what He said, *"This life is in his Son."*

He is life and He purchased our eternal life by His death on the cross. He bought life for us; He bought life. He satisfied God's law and honored God's justice in order to give us this eternal life, in order that *"God may be just and justify the ungodly."* This life is in His Son; that is where it is; that is the source of life.

Now, listen to the next sentence: *"And he that hath the Son of God, (he that hath Him, not a picture of Him); he that hath the Son."* It's not he that hath His words but *"He that hath His Son."*

It's not he that hath His ordinances or some relic or a piece of the cross or a piece of the Ark or something. It says, *"He that hath the Son (Christ Himself) hath everlasting life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."*

He said, *"These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life and this life is in His Son,"* and this life is in His Son.

Yes, I am going to die. I will face God at the judgment. There will be an eternity to spend somewhere. I want to spend it in the presence of God.

I read this Scripture quite often and think about this. Let me share it with you in **Revelation 21: 1 through 5**: John is writing here and says, *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away and there was no more sea."*

"And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with men and they shall be His people."

"And God Himself shall be with them and be their God and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. Neither shall their be any

WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

JAMES 4:13-16 • HENRY T. MAHAN

more pain, for the former things are passed away and He that sat on the throne said, behold; I make all things new. And He said unto me, write; for these words are true and faithful.”

What is your life? Have you understood what I have been trying to say to you? It is swiftly passing by. The years you have, most of them are gone for some of you. The tomorrows that you have been talking about, most of them are gone.

Life is so uncertain and so frail and fleeting. But, eternity is certain. Judgment is sure and eternity is long. Where will you spend eternity? Well, if you have the Son by faith, you have eternal life; *“to live is Christ; to die is gain.”*

“When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory!”