

## TEXT SERMONS

**“LIFE, WHAT IS IT?”****James 4:14*****“What is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.”***

Have you ever seriously sought an answer to the question, “What is life?” Most of us just take life for granted. We are here - we have consciousness, sensibilities, movement, etc. If you had to define “life” what would you say?

Here is a definition that may confuse more than clarify: “The organic phenomenon that distinguishes living organisms from nonliving ones; life is that characteristic that distinguishes objects that have self-sustaining biological processes from those that do not.” (American Scientific Journal)

That definition may satisfy the scientifically minded, but it does little to satisfy the spiritually minded; it may be sufficient for those with only an earthly outlook but it is insufficient for those who have an eternal outlook.

James asks a very pertinent question: “What is your life?” Many questions vie for our attention and answers but none more important than this one. So, what is your life? Let us answer this question. To help us arrive at the answer let us consider Life’s Span, Life’s Plan and Life’s Scan.

**LIFE’S SPAN - Measuring Life.**

James says the span of physical life is brief - like a vapor. He asks: “*What is your life?*” Then answers: “*It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.*” Life’s span is short!

Whether a Mr. or a Miss – we are a mist! And someday we will be missing altogether! One of the greatest mistakes that we can make is to miscalculate the length of life. God’s Word tells us in many ways that life is fragile and short. There are many similes employed in the Bible to describe the brevity of life. Some of them are:

- As the bloom on a flower – Isaiah 40:8
- As grass that withers – I Peter 1:24
- As a shadow – Job 14:2
- As water spilled on the ground – II Samuel 14:14
- As a tale that is told – Psalm 90:9
- As a deep sleep – Psalm 90:5
- As swift as a weaver’s shuttle – Job 7:6
- As “*a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*” – James 4:14

Our lives are like a vapor in the grand scheme of things, so fragile, unpredictable and too brief to waste by living it on our own terms. We must live it on God’s terms for He gave it and to Him we must eventually give an account. (Romans 14:12)

**Illust.** An unknown poet wrote about the brevity of life in these words:

*“Life at best is very brief,  
Like the falling of a leaf,  
Like the binding of a sheaf;  
Like the mist upon the mountain,  
Like the waves of the sea,  
So quickly the years of our lifetimes flee.”*

**Illust.** Abraham Lincoln used to tell the story of a blacksmith who wasted so much time because of his indecisive nature. One day, when Lincoln was young, he was watching the blacksmith. He had a piece of iron which he had heated red-hot in his forge. He took it in the tongs and placed it on the anvil and began to shape a horseshoe.

He then changed his mind and began to reshape it into a bit for the horse’s mouth. He changed his mind again and tried to shape the iron into a hinge for the barn door. But by that time the iron had cooled off to the point that he could no longer shape it with his hammer. So, taking it in the tongs he walked over to the water bucket and said, “Well, at least I can make a fizzle out of it” and stuck it down in the water where it fizzled and sent up a cloud of steam!

Many just make a fizzle out of their lives. I urge you to consider the brevity of life and make wise decisions with God’s purpose for your life in mind and life will not be a fizzle!

We count our lives in years but God tells us in to “*Number our days.*” (Psalm 90:12) Therefore, do not waste it! Make the most of every precious, golden minute. Benjamin Disraeli, former British Prime Minister said, “Life is too short to be little.” Indeed, just because it is brief doesn’t mean that it should be petty.

### **LIFE’S PLAN. The Meaning Of Life.**

This second thought I give to you is articulated by James as follows: “*You ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.’*” (James 4:15)

The meaning of life cannot, I repeat, cannot, be understood apart from God’s plan for our lives. The Christian’s life is pre-planned and prescribed by our heavenly Parent. God has a plan for our lives – it is called “*the will of God.*” He made us for a purpose and only as we are fulfilling His purpose for us are we really living! And only in the will of God will life have any earthly or eternal meaning for us!

**Illust.** I want to tell you about how not to discover God’s plan and purpose for your life. There is a book titled “*Personal Development for Smart People*” by Steve Pavlina, published by Hay House in 2008. The following information is from his web site:

“Steve’s passionate pursuit of personal growth began while sitting in a jail cell. Arrested for felony grand theft at age 19 and expelled from school, the full weight of responsibility for his life came crashing down upon him. In an attempt to overcome his out-of-control kleptomania addiction, he decided the best course of action was to go to work on himself.”

He writes in his book: "If you want to discover your true purpose in life ..... Here's what to do:

1. Take out a blank sheet of paper or open up a word processor where you can type (I prefer the latter because it's faster).
2. Write at the top, "What is my true purpose in life?"
3. Write an answer (any answer) that pops into your head. It doesn't have to be a complete sentence. A short phrase is fine.
4. Repeat step 3 until you write the answer that makes you cry. This is your purpose."

Those are Steve's instructions for discovering one's purpose in life. Try and try until you cry! How sad. In view of Bible teaching, that is not how one goes about discovering God's plan and purpose for life. No wonder so many live "lives of quiet desperation." Why do they live such empty lives? It is basically because they do not know the meaning of life from God's perspective. If we know the meaning of life we will be sincere about discovering the purpose for our life.

There are many misgivings about the meaning of life. From our earliest school days we were misinformed, in an unintentional way, about the reality and importance of life. We were taught to sing: "Row, row, row, your boat gently down the stream; merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream." Then one day we awoke to the startling realization that life is not a dream but that it is an over-whelming reality; it can be more of a nightmare than a dream sometimes; it can be sour as well as sweet and that it is both serious and sacred.

This world is filled with walking dead people who think they are living. The majority have not submitted their lives to Jesus Christ and are therefore left to try to figure out life's purpose for themselves.

**Illust.** Take the word "Life" and look at it – L.I.F.E. Rearranging the letters we can spell several different words which define many lives. Notice:

- Three of the letters spell "lie." Some people are living a lie;
- Two letters spell "if." Many are living an "iffy" sort of existence, unsure of anything;
- Three letters spell "elf." An elf is a very small being. There are those who live very small lives;
- Four letters spell "file." There are persons who just follow the crowd –they file along following the many on the Broad Way to destruction;
- One letter is "I". That is, there are those who are living a self-centered life.

It is revealing to read what some of our well known literary giants have written about what life meant to them:

- Robert Browning said, "Life is an empty dream."
- Edmund Cook, "Life is a hollow bubble."
- Shakespeare, "Life is a walking shadow."
- Colton, "Life is the jailor of the soul in this filthy prison."
- Mary Roberts Rinehart, "A little sleep, a little love, and it is all over."
- Campbell said, "Life is a dusty corridor, shut at both ends."
- Voltaire said, "We never live; we are always in the expectation of living."

What empty commentaries these statements are on the subject of our existence! How refreshing, inspiring and promising are the words of Paul who exclaimed, *“For to me, to live is Christ.”* (Philippians 1:21) You see, life must have a center and the life centered in Jesus Christ is the only life that has true meaning!

Jesus said, *“I am come that they might have life and that they might have it in abundance”;* (John 10:10) *“He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son has not life.”* (I John 5:12) *“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”* (John 14:6)

As an anonymous writer said, “Without The Way there is no going; without The Truth there is no knowing; without The Life there is no living!” Life then, is the portion of those who have been given new life by Jesus Christ. *“In Him we live, and move, and have our being.”* (Acts 17:28)

**Illust.** Michelangelo, the famous painter and sculptor was challenged by his teacher to make a statue of an angel. He labored long and hard in his master’s studio with hammer and chisel to produce a figure out of stone. Finally, when the day came for his teacher’s inspection Michelangelo hid in a closet and watched as his teacher inspected his work. As his master walked around the sculpture, Michelangelo heard him say, “It lacks but one thing.” Michelangelo went into depression. He thought he had miserably failed. Finally he went to his mentor and confessed that he had hidden in a closet and observed when he came to inspect the work. He asked, “What did you mean when you said, ‘It lacks but one thing?’ His master teacher replied, “It lacks life! It is so real that it lacks only life!”

There are many who are good specimens of physical and moral life, but they lack one thing – spiritual life! In order to have the life that Jesus Christ imparts, they must be born into God’s family. Jesus said, *“You must be born again.”* (John 3:7) It is at that point that life’s meaning is realized.

### **LIFE’S SCAN - Meditating on Life.**

As we have been talking about the subject of “Life”, have you been scanning your life? “Scan” means: “To examine by a point-by-point observation: to investigate thoroughly; to examine systematically.” (Webster’s Dictionary) The medical profession often speaks of “CAT Scans” or “CT Scan” for short. This is X-ray imaging to thoroughly examine the body.

To scan one’s life is to take an in depth look at life. Have you had a “Life Scan? From time to time we need to stop and evaluate our lives in the light of eternity. A good place to begin is literally at the beginning: *“The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* (Gen. 2:7)

A “living being” created *“in the image of God.”* (Gen.1:27) From the hand of God we came and to the hand of God we must return. In the interval, be it long or short, there must be a divine differentiation between an animal and a human. There must be more to life than just occupying space on planet earth for 60, 70 or 80 years.

*“Know thyself”* is an often quoted ancient Greek statement which has been attributed to at

least 6 ancient Greek sages, including Socrates. Most modern-day scholars believe that the saying originally was: "*Thine own self thou must know.*" It was an inscription originally found at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi. Do you know yourself?

As you scan the whole spectrum of life are you not inquiring about subjects such as:

- Who am I?
- Why am I here?
- What is the origin of life?
- What is the nature of life?
- What is the meaning of life?
- What is the purpose of life?
- What is a meaningful life?
- What is the value of life?
- What is the reason to live?
- What am I living for?
- Where do I go from here?

Such questions have been the subject of much philosophical, scientific, and theological speculation throughout history. How can persons live year after year without thinking about such questions? They are questions that, it seems to me, every intelligent person should be asking.

As you scan your life, are you satisfied with it? Is it everything you had hoped it would be? Is it everything God wants it to be? James's question and his answer bring us face to face with not only our existence but with our eternity. Life is the vestibule of eternity. Yogi Berra is credited with saying of ball games, "It's not over till its over!" But when life is over on earth it's not over! It is never over. From the moment we are born we begin an endless existence; we live forever somewhere.

What is the meaning of life? Real Life is the possession of those who are alive in Jesus and are living out His design and desire for them. So, learn from life's span, live God's life plan, look at your life scan.

Remember this: Life with Christ is an endless hope; life without Christ is a hopeless end! It is never too early to accept Christ as Savior and Lord, but at any moment, it could be too late! Live each day as if it were your last – it might be!

In Jesus Christ life is:

- A Gift .... receive it!
- A Challenge .... meet it!
- An Adventure .... enjoy it!
- A Journey .... take it!
- A Song .... sing it!
- An Opportunity .... seize it!
- An Eternity .... face it!

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