

January 24, 2021

Mark 1:14-20; 1 Cor. 7:29-31

“What Really Matters in Life’s Little Day?”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The expression “life’s little day” comes from the well-known hymn *Abide with Me*. Life is like a tide that comes in and then goes out. Joys are bright and then they fade. Change happens in a moment. Decay is the end. Depressing thoughts, if our minds are set on things below rather than on things above.

I got to thinking about this and my thoughts drifted to what we as pastors often see in people when they are told that they are going to die soon. All of the sudden things get narrow. What was important becomes unimportant. What was neglected becomes a priority. What you were sick for in life you become sick of when the span becomes a little day. The point is that the perspective of life as being a little day can teach you to cut through a lot of red tape and focus on the one who does not change and who has overcome death and the grave. The Christian dies every day in Christ and that makes everyday a little day

Have you ever had a moment when you thought about Jesus coming on a day in which you felt that you were not quite ready and even felt afraid of the possibility? From time to time I think about how Jesus says that no one knows the day of his coming and that it will be like a thief in the night. Will I be ready? Will you be ready? It’s rather scary to think that you may not be ready because of the life you are living, that you are not truly sorry for your sins, and that Jesus has become the last thing on your list. Today may be the day! When you really believe that Jesus may come today your whole life becomes a little day. And the prayer that you will pray will be something like these words: “abide with me!”

As I considered these things in light of our gospel lesson for this morning it didn’t take long to form a thematic question for today’s message: **What Really Matters in Life’s Little Day?** A thematic question demands a stated theme. Jesus says in our gospel lesson, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Or Paul says in our epistle lesson, “the appointed time has grown very short ... the present form of this world is passing away.”

Fulfilled time. The kingdom of God. Time is short. The world is passing away. All those expressions serve the thematic question, but the real answer to the question is found in the words of Jesus, “Repent and Believe the Gospel!” Yes! That’s the only thing that really matters in life’s little day. There is nothing more important than being a member of the kingdom. The kingdom of God is God’s gracious rule and reign through Jesus. Remember what the criminal on the cross next to Jesus requested? He asked, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The kingdom came to the criminal. The kingdom of God is God’s forever gracious rule and reign through Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through him. Nothing matters more in life’s little day than to be in the kingdom. In Luther’s *Large Catechism* we learn to pray this for our ourselves and for others:

Dear Father, we ask you first to give us your Word, so that the gospel may be properly preached throughout the world and then that it may also be received in faith and may work

and dwell in us, so that your kingdom may pervade among us through the Word and the power of the Holy Spirit and the devil's kingdom may be destroyed so that he may have no right or power over us until finally his kingdom is utterly eradicated and sin, death, and hell wiped out, that we may live forever in perfect righteousness and blessedness (LC, Third Part Lord's Prayer, 54).

Indeed! This is what we are asking for every time we say in the *Lord's Prayer*: "Thy kingdom come" - that it would come to us and others. And this kingdom comes through sorrow over sin and faith in the good news of forgiveness in Jesus Christ our Savior. In him alone are we counted as members of the kingdom, and can anticipate eternal paradise when life's little day is over. The apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:18, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom." That is the promise of the living Lord who raises the dead.

As you can see, we are not asking for crumbs that are here today and gone tomorrow, but for an eternal, priceless treasure and for everything that God possesses. When we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, God will then take care of the crumbs we need for each day. Let us be careful that the crumbs do not become more important than the kingdom. In other words, may we see life's little day as a constant need to die to sin and rise in forgiveness. May life's little day compel us to share the kingdom with those who are currently outside of that glorious kingdom. This is what's really important. Everything else takes a back seat.

We see the priorities in our rather strange epistle lesson for this morning. Paul writes what he writes by the Holy Spirit to change our perspective as we live on this earth. While we live in the temporal we are to see through the temporal and fix our eyes on what is forever. He writes:

This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very 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 (1 Corinthians 7:29-31).

So, what exactly is Paul saying? Before we get to that, let's make it clear as to what he's not saying. Paul is not telling us to neglect our spouse, nor is he saying that we are to live emotionally detached from what we and others are going through down here, nor is he commanding us to live with no care for the needs of the day. Rather, he is saying that we are a people of the eternal kingdom and, as such, we are to be acutely aware of the fact that we may have to leave this world behind at any moment. Like a person who has been told that they have days to live, or like a person who realizes that today may be the day of Jesus' return, we now see, hear, and value everything differently. Gregory J. Lockwood in his excellent commentary on *1 Corinthians* writes (pg. 256):

During the time that remains to them in this world, believers should 'focus on eternal essentials.' This does not mean they should cultivate a stoic aloofness and detachment from

the concerns of this present age. But they should not let their lives be dominated by the world and its values. They should not become too preoccupied, too absorbed, too engrossed in this transient existence. Their true citizenship is in heaven.

Let me say those last words again. Your true citizenship is in heaven. Look at how some have lived life's little day all caught up in the political battles since the 20th century all to build a tower on earth and a name that reaches the heavens. Look at how some have lived life's little day to amass as much wealth and power as possible to control people and gain treasures on earth where moths and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. Look at how some have lived life's little day to chase after the world and the things in the world - the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life. And John writes in his first epistle, chapter two, verse seventeen, "the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever."

And what is the will of God? Jesus says, "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (John 6:39-40)." **What Really Matters in Life's Little Day?** Repent and believe the good news! Now you know! And if you already knew, it is healthy for both body and soul to be reminded again!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott