

For What Is Your Life?

James 4:13-16

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** James asked, "...For what is your life?" and then answered, "...It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14).
2. To impress upon our minds the fact we are only here for a little time, I want to call our attention to Biblical words and phrases that express the shortness of our lives.
3. **3** The title of today's lesson is: "For What Is Your Life?" (Jas. 4:14)
4. The brevity of life, and our unavoidable appointment with death (Heb. 9:27), is something on which we all need to reflect each and every day (2 Cor. 13:5).

II. DISCUSSION:

For what is your life?

1. **4** Like a vapor:
 - A. James likens our brief life to "...a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (Jas. 4:14).
 - (1) Although in another context, Acts 2:19 mentions "...vapour of smoke."
 - (2) Try this sometime: Light a candle. Blow it out. Watch the vapor of smoke vanish away in a matter of seconds.
 - B. Now, do some soul-searching: Our lives are like that "vapour of smoke." Sobering!

For what is your life?

2. ****** Swifter than a weaver's shuttle:
 - A. Job: "My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope" (Job 7:6).
 - (1) A weaver's shuttle is an instrument used by a weaver in weaving cloth.
 - (2) If you've ever watched a weaver's shuttle in action it is so rapid you can't keep up with it.
 - B. Similarly, we never know just when the thread our life will run out.
 - (1) Our lives may consist of a few days or years, but our end is certain! Heb. 9:27
 - (2) We need to live as if we are to see the shuttle fly for the last time!

For what is your life?

3. ****** Like the wind:
 - A. In Job 7:7 we find the patriarch saying, "O remember that my life is wind..."
 - B. Life is as "...a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again" (Psa. 78:39).
 - C. What are your priorities in life? Do you think about that at all?

For what is your life?

4. ****** As a shadow:
 - A. Job expresses it like this: **Job 8:9:** "For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow."

- (1) Again it is written, "...he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:2).
- (2) "...our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding" (1 Chr. 29:15).
- B. You might think of a shadow on a sun dial, like Ahaz's dial mentioned in 2 Kings 20:9-11.
 - (1) The shadow on a sun dial is always changing; ever creeping forward.
- C. We sing a song (*Hold to God's Unchanging Hand*; Jennie B. Wilson, 1906).
 - (1) The first verse says, "Time is filled with swift transition,"
 - (2) Did your life turn out like you planned it?
 - (3) "Life is what happens to you while you're making other plans." —John Witt
- D. We sing another song (*A Beautiful Life* William M. Golden, 1918).
 - (1) The refrain in this song goes:

Life's evening sun is sinking low,
A few more days, and I must go
To meet the deeds that I have done,
Where there will be no setting sun.
 - (2) Indeed, life's evening sun is sinking low and we all "...walk through the valley of the shadow of death..." (Psa. 23:4).

For what is your life?

5. ** Swifter than a post:

- A. Job: "Now my days are swifter than a post: they flee away, they see no good" (Job 9:25).
 - (1) This is not a fence post, but a fleet-footed messenger.
 - (2) Jeremiah used the word "post" in this way: "One post shall run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another..." (Jer. 51:31).
- B. Do you ever feel your life is going too fast? You don't have control?
 - (1) Well, don't feel like the Lone Ranger!

Job 12:9: "In whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind?"
 - (2) Ultimately, our lives are in the hands of God!

Psa. 25:1: "Lord, I put my life in your hands, I trust in You, my God, and will not be disappointed..." (ERV)

For what is your life?

6. ** As the swift ships:

- A. Job continued, saying of his days, "They are passed away as the swift ships..." (Job 9:26).
 - (1) Watch a boat or vessel under full sail; how quickly does it pass by!
 - (2) Watch a ship under full steam; how quickly it disappears over the horizon. Uries
- B. That exactly describes our lives!
 - (1) We busy ourselves establishing a career, raising a family.
 - (2) Suddenly, we take our breath and look up...low and behold we are a senior citizen!

For what is your life?

7. 5 As the eagle hasteth to the prey:

- A. Job stated his days here on earth were: "...as the eagle hasteth to the prey" (Job 9:26).
 - (1) Visualize: an eagle swoops down from above and grabs its prey with its talons.
 - (2) The prey is caught off guard; its life is now over
 - (3) Few things in nature are more rapid than an eagle darting upon its prey.
- B. Someday death will swoop down and take us away as swift as the eagle takes away its prey!

For what is your life?

8. ** But a few days:

- A. In Job 10:20 the question is asked, "Are not my days few?"
- B. Job 14:1 affirms, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble."
- C. When Jacob was before Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked, "How old art thou?"
 - (1) The patriarch responded, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years..."
 - (2) Does 130 years sound like a long time? (Jacob died at the age of 147; Gen. 47:28.)
 - (3) Here's what Jacob said about that, "... few and evil have the days of the years of my life been..." (Gen. 47:9).
- D. Ask any elderly person, "Are not your days few?" Yes!

For what is your life?

9. ** Like a flower:

- A. I love daffodils and tulips!
 - (1) Last fall I planted 75 daffodil bulbs and 115 tulip bulbs.
 - (2) I really enjoyed seeing them bloom this spring; but the blooms were soon all gone!
 - (3) All that's left now are leaves and empty stems!
- B. Job said of man, "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down..." (Job 14:2).
- C. The Psalmist reported, "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. I 6 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (Psa. 103:15-16).
- D. Our lives are much like the blooms on a daffodil or tulip; here today, gone tomorrow.

For what is your life?

10. ** As an handbreadth:

- A. David expressed the shortness of life in this manner: "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psa. 39:5).
- B. Stick out your hand. How far is it from one side to the other?
 - (1) That's life!

- (2) Sobering? **Gen. 3:19:** “For out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

For what is your life?

11. **** As a tale that is told:**

- A. Psalm 90:9-10 teaches: “For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten [that’s 70]; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years [80], yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”
- (1) Think about telling a story (tale). The tale starts; then it’s told.
 - (2) The same is true with our lives. Our lives begin; then they end!
- B. Have you ever strolled through a graveyard and looked at the headstones?
- (1) Some people live long lives, some shorter.
 - (2) But all their lives have a tale to be told.
 - (3) What “tale” will my life tell?

For what is your life?

12. **** As a moment;**

- A. Paul spoke of “...our light affliction, which is but for a moment...” (2 Cor. 4:17).
- (1) Not only is our life of brief duration, but it is nothing compared to our future glory.
 - (2) Envision a balance (i.e., scale); on one side is our life, as brief as a shadow or vapor.
 - (3) On the other side is eternity; forever and ever and ever!
- B. Notice how our lives are described in **1 Samuel 14:14:** “For we will surely die and become like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.”
- (1) The only opportunity I have to prepare for eternity is this brief life.
 - (2) Once death’s shadow passes over me; it’s too late for a “do over”!
 - (3) Remember the “great gulf fixed”; once we’re dead our eternal fate is sealed (Lk. 16:26).
- C. That thought should encourage us to endure to the end! Rev. 2:10

Since we are here for only a short time...6

1. **Love who needs loving:**

- A. Love God with all heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37) and neighbor as self (Matt. 22:39).
- B. Love husband, wife, children (Eph. 5:25; Titus 2:4).
- C. Love one another (**Jn. 13:34-35:** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”).

Since we are here for only a short time...

2. **** Forgive who needs forgiving:**

- A. Forgiveness from God hinges on our forgiveness of others (**Matt. 6:14-15**: “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. *15* But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”).
- B. Paul put it this way: **Eph. 4:32**: “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”
- C. Is there a relationship in your life that is in need of repair?

Since we are here for only a short time...

3. ****** Work what needs working:

- A. The preacher said, “...there is no work...in the grave, whither thou goest” (Eccl. 9:10).
- B. Now is the time for work!
1 Cor. 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”
2 Cor. 6:2: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”
- C. Remember the words of Jesus? **Jn. 9:4**: “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.”
 - (1) Don’t be a fool and dismiss these thoughts from your mind!
 - (2) Our day in the sun will end very soon!

Since we are here for only a short time...

4. ****** Say what needs saying:

- A. Remember what James said?
Jas. 4:13-16: “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; *14* whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. *15* Instead you ought to say, ‘**If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.**’ *16* But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.”
- B. Some very important things we need to say before it’s too late:
 - (1) “Forgive me this wrong!” (2 Cor. 12:13; cf. Matt. 18:15ff)
 - (2) “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (Lk. 18:13)
 - (3) “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37)
 - (4) “I have sinned” (Lk. 15:21).
- C. Do you have something that needs to be said? Say it!

Since we are here for only a short time...

5. ****** Do what needs doing:

- A. “...to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).
 - (1) Are you laying up “treasure in heaven”? Lk. 18:22
 - (2) Remember our Lord’s words: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)
Heb. 13:16: “But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

- B. Remember, *“Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city”* (Rev. 22:14).
- C. The road to hell is paved with good intentions!
 - (1) Do you have something that needs doing?
 - (2) Stop talking about; stop thinking about it. Just “do it!”

Since we are here for only a short time...

6. ****** Live a life worth living:

- A. *“...live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world”* (Titus 2:12).
- B. *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Psa. 90:12).
- C. Here is the epitaph I would like to be able to have engraved on my headstone:
2 Tim. 4:7: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*
- D. Because, then I would know the following statement would be true:
2 Tim. 4:8: *“Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.”*

III. CONCLUSION: 7

- I. We often sing a song entitled, *“A Beautiful Life”* (William H. Golden, 1918; Ironically, Mr. Golden’s life was cut short. He died in a traffic accident.):

******Each day I’ll do a golden deed,
 By helping those who are in need;
 My life on earth is but a span,
 And so I’ll do the best I can.
 To be a child of God each day,
 My light must shine along the way;
 I’ll sing His praise while ages roll,
 And strive to help some troubled soul.

******The only life that will endure,
 Is one that’s kind and good and pure;
 And so for God I’ll take my stand,
 Each day I’ll lend a helping hand.

I’ll help someone in time of need,
 And journey on with rapid speed;
 I’ll help the sick and poor and weak,
 And words of kindness to them speak.

******While going down life’s weary road,
 I’ll try to lift some trav’ler’s load;
 I’ll try to turn the night to day,
 Make flowers bloom along the way.

Refrain:

Life’s evening sun is sinking low,
 A few more days, and I must go

To meet the deeds that I have done,
Where there will be no setting sun.

2. ** Indeed, “Life’s evening sun is sinking low, a few more days, and I must go to meet the deeds that I have done. Where there will be no setting sun.”
3. Are you ready to “meet the deeds” you have done? Heb. 9:27
4. Invitation

Adapted from an article by John Isaac Edwards;
The Terre Haute Speaker, Vol. 7, No. 21; May 27, 2018.