

How Old Are You?

I'm well aware of the fact that today is the first Sunday of Advent. but instead of focusing upon the coming of Christmas, I wish instead to consider the fact that this past week I celebrated another birthday. Many of you are aware that **Wednesday was my 73rd birthday!** Birthdays are good; the more you have, the longer you live!

Three years ago while at my birthday dinner, I looked across the table at my little 4-year-old nephew & calling him by name, I said to him: "Today's my birthday! How old am I?" He looked at me & said: "2." I said, "Oh good. Am I two years old?" He blurted out: "No! -- **Too old!**"

You Know your Old when: -- In a hostage situation you are likely to be released **first**. You & your teeth no longer sleep together. People call at 9 p.m. & ask, ... "Did I wake you up?" The clothes you've put away until they come back in style... are now back in style. There's nothing left to learn the hard way. When getting lucky means, you find your car in the parking lot. When happy hour is a nap. When you realize that caution is the **only thing** you care to exercise. When you're told to act your own age, ... & you drop dead.

Allow me to ask you the question this morning: **How old are you?** Does the question of age offend you? With many people, age is a very delicate subject! People who are generally truthful on every other subject, often tend to lie about their age, especially as we grow older! When you stop to think about it, **old folk are worth a fortune!** Their hair is silver; they have gold in their teeth; stones in their kidneys; lead in their feet; & gas in their stomachs! **What more could you ask for?**

Men, you know you're getting old when, a loving, caring, gray haired lady helps you across the street, **& she is your wife!** I truly believe that the most difficult part of growing older is the **loss of memory!** My dear wife is continually telling me that she had told me some thing important; that I have just forgotten it. The problem is that she can't remember that **she didn't remember to tell me!** The fact is, everyone wants to live long, but no one wants to be called old! But I ask you again: **How old are you?**

In **Genesis 47**, we read the account of the time when Joseph, who had become the Prime Minister of Egypt, took his elderly father, Jacob, to be introduced for the first time to the Egyptian monarch, the Pharaoh of Egypt. This question of age was addressed as this ruler of Egypt, looked upon this patriarch, Jacob for the first time: **Genesis 47:7-10.** "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, & set him before Pharaoh: & Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, "**How old art thou?**" And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred & thirty years: few & evil have the days of the years of my life been, & have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh (again), & went out from before Pharaoh."

Get the picture clearly in your mind; we are in the Capital city of Egypt, in the palace of the Pharaoh, & here sets this plain shepherd, Jacob, an old man. The king, the Pharaoh, wanting to make the old countryman at ease, & seeing how white his beard is, & how feeble his step, looks into his face & tenderly says to this aged man, "**How old are you?**" I like the way Jacob responds in verse 9, "The days of the years of **my pilgrimage** are an hundred & thirty years." Jacob's answer reveals his **concept of life** here on **this earth!** **To him life was a journey! a "pilgrimage"!** The dictionary defines pilgrimage as **a journey with an objective!** Jacob did not consider **this**

earth as his final abode -- nor his destiny! Life for Jacob was **progress to a grand & glorious objective**.

It reminds me of that old hymn, "This World Is Not My Home"

This world is not my home, I'm just a passing thru, My treasures are laid up some-where beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, And I can't feel at home in this world any more.
O Lord, I know, I have no friend like you, If heaven's not my home -- O Lord what can I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, And I can't feel at home in this world any more.

The **problem** so many of us have today, is that we have become **too comfortable** with this present life! **We have lost sight of our eternal objective!** We are no longer pilgrims passing through this world; we are **in** this world, & we want to **stay** here, & **not** move on! Well my friends, I don't know about you today, but "My heavenly home is bright & fair; I feel like traveling on!" "Let others seek a home below, ... Which flames devour, or waves overflow; I feel like traveling on!" "The Lord has been so good to me, ... Until that blessed home I see, I feel like traveling on!"

This concept of life is essential to every Christian! It is so important; in fact, it is necessary, for you & I as Christians, to keep **the transitory things of this world in proper perspective**. To do so becomes the **reference point** from which the Christian makes basic decisions & **measures the issues of life!** I feel that it is an appropriate question for me to ask you today, just as Pharaoh asked Jacob, the patriarch: **How old are you?**

I do not solicit from you any **literal response** to the question I have asked, for I would not put you under such temptation, to feel you have to **lie** about your actual age! **I simply want to see by what yard-stick it is that we are measuring our earthly existence.** You see, there is a right way & a wrong way of measuring a door, or a wall, or an arch, or a tower! And so **there is a right way & a wrong way of measuring our earthly existence!** It is in this manner, that I face you this morning, with this unusual question: **How old are you? or how do you measure your life?** Allow me to suggest a couple ways by which you **should not** measure your life; & then suggest the one way by which you **should** measure your life.

1. Life should NOT be measured by lives sorrows & misfortunes!

Life is so full of woes & sorrows! If every sorrow, every misfortune, becomes the yard-stick by which we measure our lives, then life is nothing more than **misery from beginning to end!** I've talked to a lot of people who seem to see life only through the eyes of all the sorrow & misfortune they have experienced!

"Let's see," they say: "There was that year I was divorced; & then the year I lost my job; then the next year I claimed bankruptcy; & then I got remarried; & then my spouse died."

When **you** look at your life, what do **you** see? Do you see only the misery; the disappointments; the heartaches; the sorrow; the hurts; the agony; the anguish; the suffering; that life has brought your way? Perhaps you have been betrayed, misrepresented, sat upon. Is your life consumed by all the sorrows & misfortunes you have experienced? to the point that, that is all you have to talk about?

Or, are you able to sing with John Newton, "Thru many dangers, toils & snares, I have already come; 'Tis grace that bro't me safe thus far, & grace will lead me home." My friends, by God's amazing grace, be determined to handle your sorrows wisely, & not let them handle you! Find the strength to turn every bitter experience of life into

stepping stones to spiritual achievement, & to become an even more effective witness for Jesus Christ!

Even the brightest life must have its shadows! Even the smoothest path must have its thorns! There is **no escape** from trouble of some kind in any life! Some times it is through the avenue of physical distress, or some times through mental anguish; yes, in 10,000 ways, troubles come to harass & annoy. But rather than measure your life by its sorrows & misfortunes, **discover the grace of God that can bring you through every bitter disappointment with victory & joy!**

I visited a couple who lost their precious child in death when she was at the tender age of 15! Oh what a beautiful girl she had been! My friends, there is nothing in life that prepares you for the untimely death of one of your children! no matter what the age! I expected a story of sorrow & grief to come from their lips; instead I encountered a couple who radiated the grace & the gladness of God! I asked them how they could be so brave, so courageous in their loss. While they deeply felt their grief, they told me of all the memories they cherished; of how she came to them every night for a kiss; of the soft touch of her hand. They did not dwell upon their grief, their sorrow, their misfortune. They choose, **by God's grace** to remember the joys, the happy memories, & **not** the sorrows.

My friend, it is an unwise person, an ungrateful person, an unfair person, & most of all, an unchristian person, who measures their life on earth only by the groans, the tears, the abuse, the scorn, the terror, the sorrows & the misfortune. **Learn to appropriate the grace of God in your life**, that you can be **more than overcomer**, & thereby be able to measure your life by the **victory**, & not by **defeat!**

2. Life should NOT be measured by the amount of money you have made; -- nor the things you accumulate!

It is so easy to get caught up in this materialist world in which we live, to the point that we think we should measure our life by the money we earn -- or the possessions we have. When Willie Sutton was asked why he robbed banks, he said: **"That's where the money is."**

A teacher of second-graders said: "I'll give this \$5 bill to the student who can tell me who is the greatest person in the world." One child said: "It's George Washington." "No, he's great, but not the greatest." Another said: "Abraham Lincoln." "No, he's great, but not the greatest." Others suggested John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, etc. Finally a **Jewish boy** in the class raised his hand & said: "Jesus Christ." The teacher was impressed & gave the child the \$5 bill, but asked: "How is it that you, a Jewish boy said 'Jesus?'" The boy said: "In my heart it is Moses, but **business is business.**"

Oh how we do strive to earn more, make more, have more, & end up owing more ! We measure our life by what we have, & by the price of our toys. There are many people who estimate their life on earth by the amount of money they earn, & all the things they accumulate. They say, 1986, or 1990, or 2001 was wasted." "Why?" you ask them. They reply: "I made no money that year."

Now, it is insincerity to talk against money as though it had no value. Money certainly has its place in our lives. It does bring life a certain amount of comfort. It does help provide refinement, & education & food & warmth, & shelter, & in the end it provides a decent tombstone on which is chiseled the words of your Christian hope. But while this is true, if we think of money as anything but **a means to an end**, we will soon discover our mistake when the glittering treasures slip out of our nervous grasp. A wealthy man died, & someone asked: "How much did he

leave behind?" The answer was: "**All of it!**"

As contradictory as it may sound, a man can be alive & yet not have a life! For life does not consist of **what** one has, but **Whom** one has. How much you have in your **pocket** is a poor judge of how much you have in your **heart!** If your wealth consist solely in how much you can count, you probably don't count for much! Those who are always quick to tell just how much they are worth generally aren't worth very much. The Psalmist summarized that truth so concisely when he said: "A little that a righteous man has is better than the riches of many wicked" (37:16).

Apart from Jesus, life at its very best is an endless quest; an agonizing journey through a confusing maze of unsatisfied desires & unquenchable thirst. **It is a lonesome street to nowhere!** But for those who **have Christ**, life is better than the riches of many wicked, for Jesus said: "I have come that you may have life, & have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Some have much abundance, but no life! But for those who are in Christ, we have life & much abundance!

George W. Truett, long-time pastor of 1st Baptist Church, Dallas, TX, was invited to dinner in the home of a wealthy man. After the meal, the host led him to a place where they could get a good view of the surrounding area. Pointing to the oil wells, punctuating the landscape, the man boasted "25 years ago I had nothing. Now, as far as you can see, it's all mine." Looking in the opposite direction at his sprawling fields of grain, he said: "That's all mine, too." Turning east toward huge herds of cattle, he bragged: "They're all mine." Then, pointing to the west & a beautiful forest, he exclaimed: "That too is all mine."

He paused, expecting Dr. Truett to **compliment** him on his great success. Truett, however, placing a hand on the man's shoulder & pointing heavenward simply said: "How much do you have in that direction?" The man hung his head & confessed: "**I never thought of that.**"

Although that wealthy Texan had succeeded in making money & accumulating a lot of things, he had failed to prepare for eternity. My friends, money, bonds, mortgages & leases have their purpose, but they make a poor yard-stick with which to measure your life!

The Bible says in Psalm 49:6-9, "They trust in their wealth & boast of great riches. Yet they cannot redeem themselves from death by paying a ransom to God. Redemption does not come so easily, for no one can ever pay enough to live forever & never see the grave."

3. Instead, Our Life should be Measured by Spiritual Progress!

Where are you today in your spiritual growth & development? Are you farther up the road, or down the road, than you were a year ago, five years ago?

It is **not** sinful egotism for a Christian to say: "I am purer than I used to be! I am more dedicated to Christ than I used to be; I have gotten over a great many of the bad habits in which I used to indulge; I am a better man, a better woman, than I used to be." **There is no sinful egotism in that!** It is not egotism for a soldier to say: "I know more about military tactics than I used to know." It is not egotism for a sailor to say: "I know better how to serve in the Navy than I did before I ever saw a warship." And there is no sinful egotism when a Christian, fighting the battles of the Lord, to say: "I know more about spiritual tactics, & about spiritual warfare than I used to know!"

The Bible says we are to “grow in the grace & in the knowledge of our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:18). **We either grow in grace -- or we grow in dis-grace!** Are you growing in the Lord Jesus? Are you making progress spiritually? Are you more in love with Jesus than you have ever been? Are you fulfilling God’s purpose in your life? Doing that which is pleasing to God? **How do you feel about your life spiritually?**

There’s only one life; -- it will soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last! There are **many**, & I wish there were **more**, who are estimating life by their **spiritual development!** They stand on an entirely different plane of character from that which they **once** occupied. They are measuring their life on earth, by prayers answered; by victories won; by the hallelujah’s of life; by joy of the Lord’s presence. They have stood at Calvary, & seen the Cross of Christ bleed for their sins. **They know the joy of sins forgiven!**

Years I spent in vanity & pride -- Caring not my Lord was crucified, Knowing not it was for me He died -- On Calvary.
Now I’ve giv’n to Jesus ev’ry-thing; -- Now I gladly own Him as my King; Now my raptured soul can only sing -- Of Calvary!
Mercy there was great, & grace was free; -- Pardon there was multiplied to me; There my burdened soul found liberty -- At Calvary!

My friend, has Calvary made a difference in your life? Is Calvary continuing to make a difference in your life, **daily**? Can you sing along with Fanny Crosby, “Close to Thee”? “Thou, my everlasting portion, -- More than friend or life to me, All along my **pilgrim journey**, -- Savior, let me walk with Thee. Not for ease or worldly pleasure, -- Nor for fame my prayer shall be; Gladly will I toil & suffer, -- Only let me walk with Thee.
Close to Thee, close to Thee, -- Close to Thee, close to Thee, All along my **pilgrim journey**, -- Savior, let me walk with Thee.”

Conclusion: I always look forward to another birthday! There is something very liberating about beginning another year! Your Birthday is not just another day on the calendar; it represents a point in time when you can say, “old things pass away” & there is the potential of wonderful new things before you. Your Birthday is a **good time** in which to begin a **new style of measurement!** I ask you this morning: **How old are you?** -- or in what manner do you measure your life?

Some measure life by their fame, or by their popularity, or their power over others. Some people measure their lives by the amount of worldly pleasure they have had; by mere worldly gratification. Certainly there are many who estimate their life on earth by their sorrows & misfortunes. And some measure their life on earth by the amount of money they earn & things they have accumulated. But there is a vast difference between the **worldly way** of measuring life, & the **Christian way** of measuring life! For the Christian, **life should be measured by our spiritual progress!**

Years ago, years ago, a man standing along side of the Hudson River, was handed a gospel track. In indignation, he tore up the track & pitched it into the river. Just one word of the track landed on his coat sleeve, the rest of the track floated away, but that **one word** aroused & convicted his soul! What was that one word? It

was that one word, so long, so broad, so high, so deep; it was the word “**eternity**”!

Now let me ask you all: Have you made preparation for eternity? We all make preparation for **time**, but have you made any preparation for **eternity**?

The wheel of time turn so very swiftly! As for me, I am glad the years are going ever so swiftly! **I am coming on nearer to my eternal Home.** My countenance lights up with the thought, **I’m nearer Home!**

Rev. Lyle Pettit -- Calvary Baptist Church -- Benson, AZ Sunday Morning -- November 30, 2014