

Introduction

I'd like to begin by asking you a question that's a favorite of job interviewers. Where do you see yourself in five years. I mean by that, what do you think of yourself being and doing in five years? Interviewers ask that because it's a revealing question. But let me ask you one now that's even more so. Where do you see yourself in a hundred years? What do you think of yourself being and doing in a hundred years. That's a vital question the answer to which assists us in doing what we desperately needs to do. We need to live life forward and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

We Have a Future

Let's begin with our text in John 11. Jesus was close friends of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. Lazarus became seriously ill, whereupon Mary and Martha sent for Jesus to come and heal him. He tarried though and Lazarus died. Four days later, Martha went out to meet Jesus as He was coming to Bethany their hometown. The text we read, verses 21-27, records what He and she said. In verse 21, Martha pointed out to Jesus that He could have healed Lazarus if He had gotten there before he died. But in verse 22, she asserted her belief that even now God would do what He asked. Jesus responded in verse 23 that Lazarus would rise from the dead. Martha concurred in verse 24, affirming her belief in the final resurrection. That in turn prompted Him to declare what He did in verse 25. He can give resurrection and life and does to those who believe in Him.

That's what He does and verses 25 and 26 reveal the stunning result. Those of us who believe in Him will live even if we die, which means, as a practical matter, that we never die. He said it differently in John 8:51-52 but the meaning is the same. We **“will never see death.”** We **“will never taste of death.”** Let those startling words sink in for a moment. Those of us who believe in Jesus will never experience death.

We will, in fact, not die. Our earthly body will, but we won't. Our powers of consciousness and activity will continue uninterrupted after we've taken our last breath on earth.

Our life, in other words, never ends. It begins the moment we're conceived and continues forever. It will enter a new phase after we take our last breath on earth, but it won't end. The life we now have as the person we now are will continue, with differences of course.

Do you realize what that means? If we believe in Jesus, we have a future no matter how old we are.

I'd 65 years old, have my Medicare card, and can tell old people jokes because I'm now one of them. An elderly wife asked her elderly husband to please get her a bowl of ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream on the top and he agreed. She then insisted, "**You should write that down to remember it.**" "**For goodness sake,**" he curtly replied, "**I don't need to write it down. I can remember it – a bowl of ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream.**" With that, he went to the kitchen to get it. 20 minutes later, he returned with a plate of bacon and eggs, to which his wife responded, "**I knew you you'd forget. Where's my toast?**"

Aging does have its challenges doesn't it. According to actuarial tables, for instance, I only have 20% of my life on earth left to live, approximately 17 years. That's the reality for all of us who are senior citizens and what's defining is what we interpret that to mean. Many, if not most interpret it to be mean they no longer have a future. That's especially galling if they're disappointed in the way their life has turned out. They didn't accomplish what they hoped to and now they never will.

But that's crooked thinking. We need to recognize the remarkable implication of what Jesus said in verses 25 and 26. If we believe in Him, we have a future no matter how old we are. Our life lies before us and the best in that life is yet to be. I don't know about you, but I think in terms of what I'll be doing a hundred, a thousand, or even a million years from now. It's true. All of us who believe in Jesus have a future.

The Nature of Our Future

And what a grand and glorious future it is.

Remember what I said. Our powers of consciousness and activity continue uninterrupted after we take our last breath on earth. But they don't just continue. They dramatically increase as well. Our abilities to think, know, remember, perceive, interpret, communicate, experience, feel, act upon, and to be acted upon will dwarf the abilities we have now in our earthly bodies.

The result is that we will be not just alive but alive as never before. Without the restraints that our earthly body imposes upon us, our life then will be immeasurably richer, clearer, and deeper than it is now. Paul conveys just that reality in 1 Corinthians 13:12, **"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known."**

Consider, for example, the equation of quantum physics I showed you last week. How many of us understand it? None of us do. It's far too complicated for us. But if we believe in Jesus, it won't be the moment after we've taken our last breath on earth. We'll understand that equation as easily as we now understand this one ($1+1=2$).

Or consider our human relationships on earth. No matter how deep they are, we aren't able to touch people in the core of their being or to be touched by people in the core of ours. But if we believe in Jesus, we will be able to the moment after we've taken our last breath on earth.

John Hick articulates it so beautifully in his book *Center of Christianity*: **"Jesus used symbols pointing to eternal life as limitlessly enhanced life, as a state of being more intensely alive in an existence which is both perfect fulfillment and yet also endless activity and newness Beyond death we will not be less alive but more alive than we are now."**

He was right. I like to say it this way. We'll have a breathtaking life in a breathtaking environment and world that will exceed all of our highest expectations. But Dallas Willard summed it up best: **"Those who**

have apprenticed themselves to Jesus learn an undying life with a future as good and as large as God Himself.” That’s the grandest possible way of saying it. We have a future and it’s a future that’s as good and as large as God Himself. Wow, what a prospect!

Live Life Forward

And we need to live in light of it. Or as I’m saying it today, we need to live life forward.

Notice I said that we **“need”** to. We need to because it’s a matter of meaning. Meaning, psychologically, isn’t a luxury for us. It’s a necessity instead, a sort of spiritual oxygen that enables our souls to live. Day-to-day life is an empty grind without it. We have to have a sense of meaning in order to flourish, to thrive, as personal beings.

But where do we find it? It’s in what comes later. Meaning, by its nature, involves a **“going beyond”** or transcendence of the experience, activity, or event before us. It’s always found, when it’s found, in what comes later. It’s found in the future in other words. So, the meaning of a college education is found in what comes later – the job or profession to which it leads. Or the meaning of a wedding ceremony is found in what comes later – the marriage to which it leads.

In the same way, the meaning of our life on earth is found in what comes later, the eternal life to which it leads. Our life on earth, therefore, is meaningful only if we live it in light of that eternal life. Or to say it another way, it’s meaningful only if we live it forward. So, let’s live it forward. We live our life forward by doing two things.

Incorporate Our Future into Our Life Now

First, we incorporate our future into our life now.

We do that by building a thorough vision of that future. We study all the details the Bible reveals about it and then use good logic to infer other details about it from those. We gain a vision of it when we do that’s substantial enough to impact the person we are and the life we

live. I've written a study titled *Life after Life* that's available on our church's website, www.bethelfriendschurch.com. That study assists us in building the thorough vision of our future that we need to have.

Once we've built that vision, we then routinely take it into account. We perceive, interpret, and experience all the realities of day-to-day life in terms of it.

Consider this observation as just one example of what I mean. For almost everyone, the ending of their present life is the most significant event in that life. I've ministered to scores of people through their final illnesses, most of whom thought their present life ending was paramount. It was tragic to them and preoccupied the greater part of their thinking, conversing, and acting.

But it won't be that for us, if we have a thorough vision of our future and interpret our present life ending in terms of it. I'll tell you my point of view in that regard. My present life ending is of little significance to me. If I were diagnosed with pancreatic cancer next week and given a month to live, it wouldn't bother me. I'd feel badly for my wife but not at all for me. Knowing that the ending of my present life is the beginning of my breathtaking eternal life, I'd eagerly anticipate it not dread it. I'd rejoice not mourn.

That illustrates how impacting it is to incorporate our future into our life now, which is the first thing we do to live life forward.

Incorporate Our Life Now into Our Future

There's a second thing we do. We incorporate our life now into our future. We do that by making a specific life choice.

William Law wrote about a successful 35 year-old businessman who was terminally ill. Shortly before he died, he shared a penetrating insight with some visiting friends of his, "**What happens after death makes all that goes before it trivial.**" When we know that our earthly body is dying, we'll be far more concerned about what we'll experience after death than about what we experienced before it.

The Bible teaches in that regard that one factor more than any other determines what we'll experience after death. It isn't how much money we made, how good looking we were, how popular we were, or how successful we were in our professions. It's the person we've become.

At the moment we take our last breath, we'll be a person who is either at home or not at home in heaven – a person who'll either fit in or not fit in there. If we'd be at home in heaven, we'll go there. If we'd be not at home in heaven, we won't go there. But what determines whether we'd be at home there or not be? It's the person we've become. It's our character – our inner condition. More specifically, it's how much we are or are not like Jesus. It's how much we do or don't think, feel, will, and act like Him.

That implies how we incorporate our life now into our future. It's by making the specific life choice that being like Jesus requires. We apprentice ourselves to Him. We make the decision to be with Him in order to become like Him and to do all that He says. We then arrange our affairs around carrying out that decision. Or to say it another way, we arrange our affairs around engaging Jesus and His kingdom at hand. He then engages us with the result that we become friends of His. We enter into an intimate ongoing conversational relationship with Him. That relationship in turn is quietly but profoundly transforming. It continually and increasingly morphs us into the image and likeness of Him. Apprenticing oneself to Jesus, in other words, is consistent with the reality of our future. It incorporates our life now into that future.

Conclusion

Let me ask you a question in closing. What kind of person are you right now as I speak? Are you the kind of person who would be or wouldn't be at home in heaven? Incorporate your future into your life now and your life now into your future. Live your life forward in other words. You'll become the kind of person who is at home in heaven if you do.