

to the introduction of the *phalanx*, Napoleon gained his victories by concentrating his forces upon a single point.—*Newton*.

### WHAT IS YOUR LIFE?

"What is your life?"—*James iv. 4.*

If God ask a question, we should listen to it, think of it, and prepare an answer. Here the Lord puts a question to us; it refers to the brevity of our mortal existence; he asks each one of us, "What is your life?" We think much of it. We make great provision for it. We spend much thought upon it. We are very careful to preserve it. *But what is it?* Let us ponder this question. Let us give it the attention it deserves. It is especially suitable to us when shut up in our sick chamber, when afflicted and tried with losses and crosses, or at the commencement of a new year. Our sufferings may be great, our trials may be many, but they must be short, for what is our life? Let us look

*At its duration.* It is exceedingly brief. No one figure can set forth its brevity, or sufficiently affect our minds with it, and therefore many are employed. It is like a flower which springs up under the influence of an eastern sun, which blossoms for an hour, and then fades and dies. It is like a shadow, which lessens and lessens until in a few minutes it is gone. It is like the shuttle which flies from the weaver's hand, and passes before the eye so swiftly, that one can but just see it and say, *It is gone.* It is like the wind which rushes by us; we hear it, we feel it, and it is no more. It is like the dried leaf, or the thistle down, which is made the sport of the breeze, and soon carried out of sight. In one passage in the book of Job, we have figures taken from three elements, to represent its rapid flight. It is swifter than a post, which travels with the greatest speed and makes no delay. It is like the swiftships, with all their sails spread, which, with the canvass crowded, glide along the watery way. It is like the eagle hastening to its prey, compelled by hunger; with strong pinions it cuts the air, and is soon at the point where it would be (*Job ix. 25, 26*). What, then, is your life? "It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." What is it in *retrospect*? Look back over the past ten or twenty years; how swiftly they have passed away; and every year appears to pass more quickly than the last. What is it in *comparison*? What are your thirty, or forty, or even seventy years, if compared with the age of the antediluvian patriarchs,—*Methuselah* for instance? But what are they in comparison with eternity? Think of endless duration, of interminable ages; and while you think of the *n*, "What is my life?" Ah, what?

No comparison can be drawn, but the thought may be improved. May the Lord help us to improve it.

This naturally leads us to enquire,

*What is its design?* Why was life given us? Why is it continued to us? It has reference to three parties. First, *to ourselves*; and the design is to prepare us for eternity. We must live for ever; but *how* depends upon the present. If we live in sin here, we must live in suffering for ever. If time is spent in folly, eternity will be spent in bitter, unavailing remorse and sorrow. If we believe in Jesus, exercise repentance toward God, are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and devote our lives to God's service, then eternity will to us be an endless existence in pleasure, satisfaction, and unspeakable delight. In reference *to God*, the design of our life is to glorify him, which we can only do by believing his promises, embracing his Son, observing his precepts, and consecrating our time and all our talents to his praise. Here we should live *for God*, and then in eternity we shall live *with God*. Here we should aim in all things to honour God, and then in eternity God will honour us. In reference *to our fellow-men*, the design of our life is to benefit and to do them good. No one is created for himself. Each one is bound to his fellow, and every one should aim to benefit the whole. We should serve our generation by the will of God. And life is misapplied, it is squandered, it is wasted in folly, if we do not use it to secure our eternal salvation, to promote God's glory, and to advance the holiness and happiness of our fellow-men.

*What is its character?* Looking at its *natural* character, it is a gift conferred upon us by our beneficent Creator. A gift which, if rightly used, will prove invaluable; but which if abused, will be an occasion of eternal regret. God gave us life; he placed us high in the scale of his creatures; he made us capable of serving, enjoying, and glorifying him for ever; he has given us also the means of grace, set before us the way of salvation, and promised his Holy Spirit unto them that ask him. Having given us life, he has crowned that life with loving kindness and tender mercies, and has pointed out the way by which we may obtain everlasting blessedness. But let us look at its *moral* character, what is our life in reference *to others*? Is it exemplary? Is it convincing? Is it useful? Is it likely to make a good impression? What is our life in reference *to ourselves*? Is it holy or profane? Is it godly or ungodly? Is it becoming an immortal being, one who *must* live for ever? This view of the subject is not sufficiently attended to by many. Is it by us?

*What is the importance of our life?*

Ah, who shall say? Who can describe, what language can set forth, the importance of our present life? It is the bud of being; the flower will not open on this side the grave. It is the youth of existence; we shall not be full-grown in this world. It is the seed time of eternity; what it sown now will be reaped in a changeless state. It is the introduction to immortality. What then is its importance? Ask the dying sinner, whose eyes are just opened, whose soul is just awakened to the solemnities of the eternal world. What reply will he give? Look at his death-struck countenance, mark the expression of his half-glazed eye, hear the accents of his tremulous voice; but he fails, he tries in vain to set forth the importance of the present life. He exclaims, "O that I had my time over again! O that I had one year, one month, one week, of the time I have squandered! But wishing is in vain. 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and I am not saved.' The importance of life I cannot describe. The value of time I can never declare." Ask the lost soul. The soul which, like the rich man lifts up its eyes in hell, being in torment. Despair now rules over the immortal spirit. Agonies, beyond description, torture the never dying intellect. What is its estimate of the importance of life? But it would require a new language to describe, unearthly figures to illustrate, and a voice such as we have never heard, to set forth its estimate of the precious gift. Only in the depths of hell, or in the highest heavens, is the value of life really known. The glorified saint, while he tunes his golden harp, sings his never dying song, and drinks in pure and celestial pleasure, can estimate, but not fully describe, the importance of this present life.

Sinner, what is your life? Is it sin? Time spent in opposing God? Time squandered upon folly? Time dreamed away to no useful purpose? Is it trifling? Oh, how many trifle away their precious time! They despise their own souls. They live as if existence were bounded by time, and all beyond were annihilation. Is it folly? How many live fools? They provide for the body, but they neglect the soul. They live for time; but they lose sight of eternity. The accepted time passes away unheeded. The day of salvation is spent in sin. They only lay a foundation for everlasting self-condemnation, and open in their own hearts a source of never ceasing agony. Believer, what is your life? Is it Christ? Can you say with Paul, "For me to live is Christ?" Does Christ live in you? Are you spiritually minded, and do you find it life and peace? Is it a wise preparation for eternity? Are you living now as you will wish you had lived by and bye? Life is