

INTRODUCTION

We are dying. All of us.

Death is inevitable. People differ in their preparedness for it. Some give it no thought at all. Others obsess over it. Still others live by the motto, “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.” They want to grab all the gusto they can get out of this life because, to them, this is all there is.

People may “put their ducks in a row.” They may “put their affairs in order.” They may write wills, leave trusts, and prearrange their funeral and burial. Then they can place a big checkmark that states, “Done.” But is that all there is? Are these final measures the most we can do to prepare for such a momentous occurrence? How does “the end” affect their living?

What about spiritual preparedness? Is there a balanced way to look at death—a way that prepares us and honors God? A marquee in front of a local church said, “Live with the end in sight.” I thought, “Wow, what a gruesome idea.” However, the more I thought about it, the better I liked it.

You see, it depends on how you define “the end.” Is death the end? Or is it life *after* death? We are all dying. Then again, we’re all eternal beings. Where we spend eternity depends on what we’ve done with our lives on earth. Ultimately, it depends on whether we obeyed God’s call to believe in Him, to trust Him as our Savior.

Though none of us have the ability in and of ourselves to obey Him, He provides the ability by choosing His elect from among mankind, by sending His Son to redeem His people, and by sending the Holy Spirit to efficaciously draw those He loves to Him. Only then are we given eyes that can see His truth and hearts that can turn to Him in faith and repentance, believing in Him as our Lord and Savior.

If we’re believers in Jesus Christ we have no end. Death is but a doorway for us that leads to heaven and our Lord. We step through it to eternal bliss. Death is also a doorway for unbelievers—but once they step through it, they step into the abyss of eternal damnation.

Some people turn thoughts of death into a morbid fixation—death, death, death and then the grave, followed by black nothingness. Black hair, black eyeliner, black nail polish, black clothes, dark circles under the eyes, black hat. Gloom and doom. But is that how believers are to approach death? No. Believers understand that death is not the end.

Living with the end in sight doesn’t mean thinking of death all the time. It means thinking of what comes *after* death—eternal life in heaven with our Savior, Jesus Christ. We are to strive to do what Colossians 3:1-2 says, “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the

right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

Before we can truly set our minds on things above and not upon things of this life, we must heed the first part of the verse. We must be raised to life with Him. Therefore, I’m writing primarily to Christians, to God’s elect. Only they will have the capability to view life and death through the spiritual lens Jonathan Edwards saw through when he wrote this sermon. Yet, unbelievers may also profit from this outstanding sermon, especially if it causes them to think about what lies ahead.

As a hospice nurse for over twenty-five years, I’ve had far more exposure to death and dying than the average person. I’ve sat by hundreds of bedsides, held the hands of hundreds of people as they exited this world to step into the next. I suppose thoughts about death are an occupational hazard for hospice nurses.

I had the recent honor of sitting beside my father as he lay dying. Holding his hand, singing hymns, praying for him, and watching his spirit tear loose from his mortal flesh have made me suddenly more philosophical about the meaning of life and death.

Not that I’m not always philosophically and spiritually-minded when I think of such things. I’ve written about them. *Sunsets: Reflections for Life’s Final Journey*, continues to be my most successful book.¹ It serves as a devotional as well as a nursing guidebook for walking that journey with a dying loved one. Yet, it is directed more toward the process of dying than it is about the life to follow.

1. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005)

My father's death brought this excellent sermon by Jonathan Edwards to mind. Once again, I was blessed by reading it. *To me it serves as a pep talk for heaven.*

As part of my daily devotions this year, I'm reading Paul David Tripp's *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*. His entry for September 18 echoes the principles of this book. He said, "Today remember that this moment isn't intended to be a destination, but it is what God's using to prepare you for your final destination." He goes on to explain what happens when we view this life as our destination.

Basically, he says if you live with a destination mentality:

- You are going to be regularly disappointed.
- You will have unrealistic expectations and you will not guard yourself against temptation as you should.
- You will struggle to believe that God is loving, good, faithful and kind.
- It will be easier for you to complain than to be content.
- You will be tempted to envy the life of someone else.
- You will tend to hook your happiness to the degree of ease and comfort that you experience in your present situations and relationships.
- You simply won't be on God's agenda page at all.

He writes,

Living with a destination mentality means that you load all your hopes and dreams, your search for a definition of the good life, and your inner sense of well-being into this present moment. It means that no matter what your

theology says about eternity, you live as if this is all there is. And because you are living as if this is all there is, you try to turn this present moment in this fallen world into the paradise that it will never be. Yes, if you are God's child, you have been promised a paradise beyond your ability to conceive, but you must understand that this is not it. This sin-broken world, populated by sin-scarred people, will never be the paradise that you and I tend to long for it to be. You see, a sound biblical doctrine of the future is the only way to arrive at a sound biblical understanding of the present. . . . So don't try to turn today into paradise, but thank God that you are being prepared by grace for the paradise that will be your forever home."²

Edwards would have heartily approved of this passage in Tripp's book. He believed that, too. The things of this world are nothing compared to the bliss of our eternity with Christ.

Edwards lived with the end in sight—not a morbid fascination with death, but an excitement and enthusiasm about the eternity beyond. His joyful exuberance for heaven, more than anything else, dictated the joyful way he lived his life. That life, lived 300 years ago, serves as a terrific encouragement and example for believers. It is as relevant and inspiring today as it was then. In writing this book I hope to introduce this marvelous sermon to others, and to deliver an encouraging word to this generation of dying people.

Jonathan Edwards fixed his eyes upon God. Like John Bunyan, writer of *Pilgrim's Progress*, Edwards viewed the Christian life as a journey to a final destination. Certainly, *Pilgrim's Progress* must have influenced his

2. Tripp, Paul David, *New Morning Mercies: A Daily Gospel Devotional*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). September 18 entry.

thoughts and ideas. In that book, Christian's journey toward the Celestial City is like our own pilgrimage to our heavenly abode, encountering dangers and blessing along the way.

We are also guided by the Spirit, held secure by God's righteous right hand and delivered safely to our final destination. Edwards understood this better than most, and, oh, the joy he experienced when considering this heavenly home! You'll see that clearly in this sermon.

Can we attain to Jonathan Edwards' glorious, entranced view of the glory of heaven? Can we love God as he loved God? Can our joy derive from God's very existence, from His holiness, from His excellencies? Can we do it perfectly?

Probably not. However, Edwards' writings give us a high standard to strive for. The blessing is in the striving. He shows us what it means to truly live our lives with the end in sight. And what is the end? Death? No, GLORY. Those who belong to the King of Heaven will dwell in His glory for all eternity.

This was the source of Jonathan Edwards' joy. This foundation cannot be shaken, a truth that never fades, and cannot be destroyed. When your heart is fixed upon this truth, nothing that happens in this life will be able to separate you from that exquisite joy.

So now let me introduce you to this wonderful sermon. (To prevent any confusion, the sermon by Edwards has been placed in a different font from my commentary on it.)