

49. The Book of 1Samuel—31:1-13

“Life’s Two Minute Warning”

(6/5/16)

1 Samuel 31:1-13 (NKJV)

¹ Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. ² Then the Philistines followed hard after Saul and his sons. And the Philistines killed Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, Saul's sons. ³ The battle became fierce against Saul. The archers hit him, and he was severely wounded by the archers. ⁴ Then Saul said to his armorbearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised men come and thrust me through and abuse me." But his armorbearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell on it. ⁵ And when his armorbearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword, and died with him. ⁶ So Saul, his three sons, his armorbearer, and all his men died together that same day. ⁷ And when the men of Israel who *were* on the other side of the valley, and *those who were* on the other side of the Jordan, saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. ⁸ So it happened the next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹ And they cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and sent *word* throughout the land of the Philistines, to proclaim *it in* the temple of their idols and among the people. ¹⁰ Then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan. ¹¹ Now when the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹² all the valiant men arose and traveled all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth Shan; and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. ¹³ Then they took their bones and buried *them* under the tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.

These verses record the sad end of the life of King Saul.

Actually Saul's death didn't take him by surprise...(1Sam.28:19)

For those of you who follow football you know that two minutes before the end of the game there is an automatic time out that takes place called—“*the two-minute warning*”.

The idea behind it is to give both teams some time to plan their end of the game strategies.

It’s interesting that they chose to call it the “two-minute warning”—as if to say that players can get so caught up in *playing* the game that they become oblivious to the fact it’s almost over.

And therefore they need to be warned the “*end is near*” to give them time to make final end of game preparations for winning.

What would you think if God attached a ‘two minute’ warning to the “*game of life?*”—actually I’m thinking it would have to be something more practical—say like, the 24-hour warning He gave to Saul.

This would be time to “wrap things up” on earth—to make amends with people; to get right with God—and especially to prepare for eternity.

If we lived our life knowing that at any time God might say to us “*you have 24 hours left to live*”—how would that effect the way we lived our lives on a daily basis?

I believe it would radically effect the way we lived our lives knowing that at any moment God could give us the “*24-four hour warning*”—and therefore most of us, I’m convinced, would make sure we were ready to die—most but not all.

You see many people in our culture are so caught up with seeking pleasure and living for themselves that I believe they would spend the last twenty-four hours of their lives throwing as big of an “end of life” drunken, drug party that they could rather than using the time to get right with God.

Unfortunately, this was how Saul spent the last day of his life on earth—not partying but not getting right with God either—for Saul the last day of his life was *business as usual*.

And why was that?—Because Saul was a creature of earth (an “earth-dweller”) and not someone that took eternity seriously.

Saul was a man who had pretty much cultivated a philosophy of life, like so many in our day, which said, “*live for the moment and don’t worry about tomorrow.*”

There is nothing in the Bible concerning Saul’s life that would lead us to believe he had ever cultivated an intimate relationship with God.

The Scriptures are silent about his devotional life; he never wrote any Psalms praising God; he never established any public worship; he never desired to build God a house (like David); he never proclaimed any holy days of worship to the Lord—in fact we never get any insight into the spiritual life of Saul at all.

All we see is a man who gave God lip service; called on God when he needed His help—but pretty much lived his life for himself and did his own thing.

And even after God, through Samuel, told Saul he had only one day left to live—we don’t see anything from chapter 28 to 31 (the last twenty-four hours of his life) to indicate he got right with God or made any changes in the way he was living at all.

Saul was blessed by God to get a warning that he only had twenty-four hours left to live—something that most people don’t get.

And yet he didn’t make any use of it and died totally unprepared to enter into the next life.

Jesus told a parable about a man who, like Saul, only lived for this life and died unprepared for the life to come.

Luke 12:15-21 (NKJV)

¹⁵ And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." ¹⁶ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. ¹⁷ And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' ¹⁸ So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry." ' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' ²¹ So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

The Lord Jesus was always trying to shift the emphasis of people away from the material/temporal to the spiritual/eternal.

He began this parable with a warning against coveting (lusting, strongly desiring) material things on earth—

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." (v.15)

Actually in the Greek it comes through even more forceful—"Guard yourselves against covetousness" (the desire to always have more of this world's stuff).

The Roman's had a proverb which said that money was like sea water—the more a man drank the thirstier he became.

It's what Paul called "*the deceitfulness of riches*". (Explain)

Luke 12:15 is a very valuable verse for many Christians today who are consumed with the desire for earthly riches and material things.

So many professing Christians are so obsessed with these things that they've sought out preachers and teachers that preach what some have called the 'prosperity gospel' which sanctifies greed by saying it's your spiritual birth right as children of God to be wealthy.

This is not a biblical doctrine—in fact it's the opposite of what Jesus was teaching in the Parable of the Rich Fool here in Luke 12.

As we read this parable—two things stand out about this man—

1. He never saw beyond himself

I don't think there's another parable in all the teachings of Jesus that contain as many personal pronouns as this one.

It kind of reminds me of a poem I heard years ago—

"I had a little tea party this afternoon at three.

'Twas very small, three guests in all—just I, myself and me.

Myself ate all the sandwiches, while I drank up the tea.

'Twas also I who ate the pie and passed the cake to me."

This is the way many people live today—totally wrapped up in themselves and their pleasures without the least bit of concern for anyone else.

Apparently, it never entered into this man's mind that he could share some of his abundance with others in need.

The “*why should I, what's in it for me?*” attitude is everywhere in our culture—a definite sign that we are in the last days—

Jesus said in the last days the “*love of many would grow cold*” (Matt.24:12).

Paul prophesied about the heart of man in the last days—

2 Timothy 3:1-4 (NLT)

¹ You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. ² For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. ³ They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. ⁴ They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God.

1. He never saw beyond himself

2. He never saw beyond this life

This seems to be the attitude of so many today who are so consumed with the things of this life that they have little or no concern for the life to come—which will be forever.

There's another story of a conversation between a young, ambitious man and an older, wiser man who understood the important things in life.

The older man asked the young man what his plans were for his life.

The young man said, *“I will learn my trade”*—*“and then what?”* said the older man.

“I’ll start a business”—*“and then what?”*

“I’ll make my fortune”—*“and then what?”*

“I suppose I’ll grow old, retire and live on my money”—*“and then what?”*

“Well someday I’ll die”—***“and then what?!”***

It’s very interesting to me to see how the man in this parable viewed himself—and then to see how God viewed him.

Verse 19 is how he viewed himself—on easy street with not a care in the world.

He felt he could retire and live for many years on the fortune he had amassed—and his philosophy of life was going to be, *“take it easy and eat, drink and be merry.”*

Now that’s how he viewed himself looking at life from the perspective of earth and the temporal.

Unfortunately for him that’s not how God saw this man’s life—He saw it from an eternal perspective—

Luke 12:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

It's also interesting that this man never got the chance to build bigger barns to hold all his abundance and he never got the chance to enjoy his retirement—he only *thought* to do these things in his mind—that was his *plan* for the future—a future he never lived to see.

God calls him a fool because he made all these plans for his future life on the earth not realizing his time on earth was just about up (“this night your soul will be required of you”) and he was totally unprepared for the life to come.

Jesus then gives the moral of the story—

Luke 12:21 (NKJV)

²¹ So *is* he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Jesus is saying that everyone is a fool who uses their life to make money and lay up for themselves all kinds of material things on earth but is spiritually bankrupt toward God and will spend eternity in hell—how utterly foolish is that—to plan for retirement but not for eternity?

And that's why this man, and everyone like him, are called fools—they're fools because they live their lives as though this life is all there is and self is all that matters and there is nothing beyond death.

I want you to notice that the Lord didn't call this man *evil* for working hard and gaining wealth—there is nothing evil about hard work and enjoying the fruits of your labor.

The Lord called him a *fool* because he only stored up for himself treasures on earth but laid up nothing in heaven for his eternity.

The reason was because he was a materialist—if he couldn't see it, touch it, taste it or smell it—it either wasn't real or simply didn't matter to him.

Materialists aren't concerned about spiritual things, like heaven, and therefore leave this world unprepared for eternity.

How many men and women have worked hard all their lives, working overtime, working Saturdays and Sundays to save up a nice little 'nest egg' for retirement—only to retire and die the next day?

Look, the guy in this parable had no idea his life would be over in a few hours—King Saul had no excuse.

He was given a 24-hour warning but it seems he didn't make any use of it at all—why?

Because he was too wrapped up in living his life on earth than to think about the life to come.

The thing about it was that God didn't have to call Saul a fool (like the guy in the Parable of the Rich Fool)—that's what he called himself.

Saul summed up his own life when he said, *"I have sinned. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly."* (1Sam.26:21)

As we said a few weeks ago—that is definitely not the epitaph you want written on your tombstone—it is not how you want your life summed up.

I've entitled this message *"Life's Two Minute Warning"*—a facetious title since we don't get a two-minute warning or a 24-hour warning in life where we have time to wrap things up and prepare for eternity (which we should never wait till we're on our death bed to do).

Therefore, we must live as if each day might be our last—without the warning because God tells us this is how we are to live our lives every day.

It's funny how our problems and concerns seem so important until a doctor tells us we only have six weeks to live—and then everything in life takes on a new focus and perspective.

Somehow everything I was so concerned about, everything that was important to me—all of a sudden doesn't seem to matter (unless it's family) as I'm brought face to face with death and eternity.

At that point what you've really valued in life and poured yourself into will determine how prepared you'll be to face death and eternity.

Philippians 1:21 becomes a valuable test of our lives. "*For to me to live is _____ and to die is _____*"—you can fill in the blanks for yourself.

"For to me to live is *money* and to die is *to leave it all behind.*"

"For to me to live is *fame* and to die is *to be forgotten.*"

"For to me to live is *power* and to die is *to lose it all.*"

No, the only way to live our lives that will allow us to face death and eternity with joy is to live like Paul who was able to say, "For to me to live is *Christ*, and to die is *gain!*"

At some point all of us will have to face the reality of death—however most of us will not be as fortunate as Saul—we won't have any advanced warning.

A car accident or a heart attack could end one of our lives today.

It could happen when a person is in the prime of their life, while they're on top of the world—you could stop by a convenience store for a gallon of milk and walk in on a robbery and have your life ended.

The Bible says our lives are like a puff of smoke, here today and gone tomorrow—and tomorrow isn't promised to anyone.

This is why it really doesn't matter if God gives us a 24-hour warning to tie up loose ends, or make amends with friends or family that you're at odds with—or even to get your life right with God.

You see we should live every day as if it could be our last—we should always be ready for the life to come.

The first thing you do is to make sure you're right with God. (Explain)

The second thing you should do is to make sure the people closest to you know you love them—and if you're at odds with any of them (spouse, children, parents, siblings or any other family member) make it right—reconcile with them—you don't want to have any regrets if they were suddenly taken from you.

I'm so thankful that when my dad died 25 years ago and my mom died 2 ½ months ago we were close and on good terms—which means I have absolutely no regrets concerning unresolved conflict because there weren't any.

And finally, start living your life with the proper perspective and priorities—don't wait until you're brought face to face with death before you begin to realize what's really important in life.

Always be ready to meet God and say good-bye to the people you love on earth with a clear conscience.

It was either Augustine or Wesley that was asked the question if they only had one day left to live how would they spend it.

He said *“I’d spend the day taking care of my garden.”*

The person asking the question found that answer odd and not a little indifferent—so he asked him to clarify why he would spend the last day of his life tending his garden.

“Well, he said, I have always lived my life in such a way that God has always been first and I therefore have no regrets in my relationship with Him nor do I need to get anything right with Him before I die.

Secondly, he said, I have always lived in such a way that I have treated my fellowman with kindness, benevolence and honestly—so I have no need to confess any sin to anyone I know or ask them for forgiveness for some wrong I have done to them or make anything right with man before I die.

Therefore, I just think I’d like to tend my garden on the last day of my life here on earth.”

That’s a man who didn’t need a 24-hour warning before dying—he lived ready to die.

I pray we will all be able to make that claim at the end of our lives—whenever that end finally comes!