

Living with a View to the End

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While working in my study one day in Jamaica, my children came in all excited. They took me by the arm and dragged me into the backyard in order to show me something they had discovered. We had an old rundown fire pit there with gaps, holes and chips in the mortar joints between the bricks. Inside the walls of that pit through a hole about a quarter inch around a colony of ants had made their nest.

On this particular morning these ants were performing a most amazing feat. Hundreds of them had filed out of their nest in their little column and were now busy carrying upon their backs a dead lizard about six inches long. My children and I were convinced that these ants had taken on a task far too large for them to accomplish. They would never be able to scale the wall of that fire pit bearing the weight of their burden. And surely they would never fit that large lizard through that quarter inch hole that led to their nest. As you may already realize, we were grossly mistaken.

The ants slowly but surely began to carry that lizard up the wall not dropping him even once. They labored hard and long. They toiled: they pushed, they pulled, they called in recruits. If they had been human I would have said that they were sweating in the heat of the day. Eventually, they hoisted that lizard to the hole which led to their nest.

This was going to be interesting! I was certain they would never succeed. For the longest time, that lizard went round and round the opening until I grew weary of watching. I felt they had been defeated so I returned to my study and work. About fifteen minutes later the kids came in and hauled me back out to the fire pit. I was just in time to see the tail of the lizard disappear into that quarter inch hole. They had actually done it! They had labored and toiled until they had stored up their precious treasure in their nest!

When I returned to my study again I could not help but look up that passage in Proverbs 6:6-11, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; and consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth and thy want as an armed man." How those ants had toiled and worked for their treasure! How they had laid up in store with a view to that time when their eggs would hatch and their young would need food! What a lesson a lazy man or woman who felt that everything ought to be handed to them on a silver platter could learn!

Now, you may be thinking by now: "But what in the world does this have to do with the subject this morning? What does considering the toil of the ant have to do with living with a view to the end of time?" But when we apply the example of the ant to our spiritual lives rather than our earthly we will see the connection. We live very near to the end of this world. We have already found that out in the previous speech. In light of this, it is our calling in life to be as the ant, that is, to labor and toil to enter into the rest of heaven. We must labor by laying up for ourselves treasures for that time to come – treasures in heaven.

That takes work! That takes spiritual labor!

There is no time in our lives, therefore, to be spiritual sluggards, to be spiritually lazy. If we are, then when the end comes we will be left with nothing!

It is this example of the ant, then, that we turn for a few moments this morning as we consider how we must live with a view to the end.

LIVING WITH A VIEW TO THE END

LIVING IS LABORING. Living is laboring. Life is work. Ever since the fall of Adam and Eve into sin this has been the case. The earth was cursed for man's sake and God informed Adam that if he were at all to get ahead in life he would have to labor by the sweat of his face. And man has done so ever since. Our parents are where they are today because they have worked for it. God's law tells us, "Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work," and that in order that we might enter into the rest of the Sabbath on the seventh day. We sing also in Psalm 126:5-6, "The sower bearing precious seed may weep as in his toil he grieves, but he will come again with joy in harvest time with golden sheaves."

Living is laboring. We must work for what we receive. And if we do not, if we are lazy and sit back simply expecting our food and raiment and shelter to fall into our laps we will be sorely disappointed. "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; so shall thy poverty come," Solomon tells us. Or again as Solomon writes in Proverbs 20:4, "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing."

Living is not fun and games. No doubt we have heard that from our parents many times. God did not place us on this earth to have fun. Life does not center in fun. That does not mean that a man cannot enjoy the fruit of his labors. That does not mean that there can be no time for recreation. If that were true then our conventions would be taboo. Nevertheless, fun and recreation must be kept to a minimum if we are to expect to get anywhere in this life.

The same is true from a spiritual point of view. Our spiritual life is also one of labor. It is work. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 4:11 that we must "labor to enter into that rest" that awaits us in heaven. This is a command: our spiritual life must be that of labor and toil. There is no room for spiritual laziness in this life, lest we find ourselves in spiritual poverty, and when Christ comes we will receive nothing of the riches of heaven. And that is especially true of you and me, young people, who live so very, very close to the end of time. You and I are laboring on the sixth day of the week and there is much to accomplish before the Sabbath comes. You and I are not sowing, but harvesting and the winter is right around the corner! WE of all people ought to be busy spiritually. The day is all spent and the night comes wherein no man can labor.

So I want to ask each of you a question this morning: "How hard of a worker are you? I mean spiritually. How hard do you work at your spiritual life? How much toil, how much blood, sweat and tears do you put into your spiritual lives with a view to the end? Are you a spiritual sluggard who needs to be taken by the hand and led to consider the ant? Or are you busy toiling (just as those ants with that lizard straining themselves to their limits), laboring for that rest which is promised us when the end comes?"

To answer that question we must know the nature of this work we are called to perform. What kind of work are we to perform from a spiritual point of view which truly constitutes labor? Well, consider the ant again. What labor does she perform? Her efforts are expended on laying up in store food for herself and her larvae. She lays up in store treasure for the time to come. And so must we, Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:19, 20, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." According to what Jesus tells us, you and I ought to be busy laying up in

store all kinds of spiritual treasures in heaven; not on earth, of course, as we are so apt to do, but in heaven.

And that is but reasonable too, is it not? The end of all things is at hand! The end of our houses, our lands, our possessions, our earthly relationships, our position in life. And just as this is true so also is it true that the kingdom of heaven is at hand! That is what is true of the end when Jesus comes. For that reason we ought to be laying up treasures in heaven because it soon will be our eternal dwelling place.

There are many treasures that can be laid up too. There are many labors we can perform right now as far as our spiritual lives are concerned which will profit us when we enter into the kingdom of heaven. These are not easy labors. They are work. They take up our time and talents. But they are necessary labors – labors which if you and I do not perform them will result in spiritual poverty. They are labors which if not performed diligently will result in our receiving nothing when Christ comes in the harvest of this world.

THE LABORS WE PERFORM. The character of our spiritual labor Peter explains to us in II Peter 3:11, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness.” What we are interested in is the last part of this verse which tells us that the lives of those who are looking for the end must be characterized by a holy conversation and godliness. These are, from a general point of view, what our spiritual labors ought to be.

We must labor in our lives to be godly, first of all. This means the deep love, respect and fear of God we have been given by God’s grace must be cultivated in our lives. We must use every means available to become pious and godly people. We are not satisfied with just some superficial outward show of spirituality in our lives. We are not interested only in pleasing man by our outward actions. We are not interested in looking good on the outside. But we toil to love God and fear him in our hearts. That is what God looks at, after all. He is interested in hearts filled with the fear of His name. And if we are going to enter into the joy of His rest then we must labor diligently in the fear of God. We must cultivate our knowledge of God and His commandments, we must have a deep understanding of our sin, and we acknowledge in our hearts the deep need we have for the cross of Jesus Christ. How hard have you labored to be a young person characterized by godliness?

And how hard have you labored to be characterized as well by a holy conversation? By conversation the Bible refers to our entire walk of life. It refers not only to things we say, but also the things we do and the places we desire to go. A child of God who is looking for Christ to come soon must also labor in this way. He must labor diligently to walk a new and holy life in the midst of this wicked world. He must fight against his old man of sin within him which is so attracted to the ways of the wicked. He must avoid those places where he knows he might be tempted to walk in a way that is contrary to the commandments of the God whom he fears.

On the other hand, he must cling to the cross of Christ in faith. Only as he labors to live near the cross will he be able to bring forth good works in his life. All this is involved in walking in all holy conversation.

All this is spiritual work. It is toil. It is hard labor. I know this is not easy. It is a whole lot easier to be a spiritual sluggard! It is a whole lot easier to slide along without putting much work into our spiritual lives. And it is so easy to think that we have plenty of time later on in life to worry about spiritual labor. Right now it is time for fun! Christ tarries. The end is not here yet. I will work harder later on in my life.

So we grow rather comfortable, we close our eyes, we fold our hands on our chest and relax. Before we know it we are fast asleep. And as we doze off we comfortably reason to ourselves, "I am a young person, and, after all, spiritual labor, spiritual maturity is not yet required of me."

Then the end comes! Suddenly - as a thief in the night!

And we are suddenly awakened from our spiritual lethargy only to realize that we have been lazy. And there is nothing that awaits us in the end. The doors of the kingdom of heaven are shut to us just as they were to the five foolish virgins who were too lazy to put oil in their lamps. Ah, if only we had worked at our spiritual lives!

And we can! We can labor at a holy conversation and godliness. I know you can because most of you know what it is to work. I am sure that most of you hold down some sort of job. And I am sure that you work hard at those jobs. You know what work is. But I am certain that you can work spiritually especially because you are children of God! God has sent forth His Spirit into your hearts. And that Spirit has applied to you as well as me the benefits of the work Jesus has performed on the cross. Christ has justified us and gained for us the forgiveness of sins. God has through His shed blood adopted us to be His very own children.

And more, as the Spirit of Christ dwells in us we are sanctified, and therefore also able to live a new and holy life. We have the desire implanted in us to serve God. That means we have the desire to labor diligently to enter into the kingdom of heaven. WE look for and long for the coming of Christ and the end of the world. We understand and believe that the elements will burn with a fervent heat. We believe that we have no abiding place here. And it is because of this work of salvation God has wrought in us we receive the command, "Labor to enter into this rest! Labor in all holy conversation and godliness!"

In order to attain unto such godliness and holy conversation in our lives I want to place before you now three concrete and vital labors you must be involved in right now.

First of all, you must be working at knowing your Bibles. You must discipline yourselves in Bible study. This is not a task reserved only for scholars. But it does take discipline on our part – a necessary discipline. You can discipline yourselves by concentrating hard on the sermons preached for you on Sundays. This means being there for them, both of them. This means as well making sure you are not out so late on Saturday night you sleep or sit in a daze the whole service long. You can labor in knowing your Bibles also by preparing yourselves for society meetings. You can do this by learning the answers to your catechism lessons. Not just memorizing a bunch of words, but actually understanding the questions and answers. You can learn your Bibles by taking time out for family devotions and certainly for private study of the Bible.

All of this is work. I know. But if we can discipline ourselves in our physical labors then we also are able to discipline our lives in spiritual labors, too. They are, after all, much more valuable to us who look for the end to come soon. And if we cannot discipline ourselves then perhaps we must carry with us a picture of an ant.

This, remember, is a vital labor. Your and my day is characterized by a terrible lack of proper knowledge in the Scriptures. This ought never be said of us. You are the future strength of our churches, young people. We must know the doctrines of our churches and we must know these to be the teaching of Scripture itself. Far too many young people today are blown about by the slight of men. They have itching ears to follow after anything that tickles the ear. You must never be blown about by every wind of doctrine that comes your way. You must be rooted in the Word of God! And in order for this to be true, you must work at it. It is spiritual toil!

In the second place, you will also have to labor long and hard to maintain a spiritual separation from the world. We receive the command from God in II Corinthians 6, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers...come out from among them and be ye separate and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you.” And that command of God is equally difficult to keep, and it takes work to do so. We meet the wicked world everywhere: in our neighborhoods, at the work place, even at school or worse yet, in our homes through the face of the TV set. And it is so easy for us not only to make friends with unbelievers, but also to follow in their unbelieving ways.

We must labor therefore at keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. We must make friends of God’s people, that is, those who fear God as we do. We must say “no” to the unbeliever (even if he claims to be Christian) when he asks us to walk in sinful ways. How hard you must work at this, young people! Far too many young people even in the church allow anything to go. That is so sad! Fornication is on the rise. Worldly amusements: devil music (sometimes called Christian rock music), dancing, drunkenness, movies and more are heard of more and more in the church! It makes me shudder. When Christ returns will there be any faith in the world? Will we too follow in these ways and become spiritual sluggards? You see how necessary it is to start your spiritual labors now as you look for the end to come? You and I must fight our own sinful flesh in order to keep on watching for the return of Christ. And that takes hard work and discipline!

One other labor we must perform with a view to laying up in store treasures in heaven. We must labor to love the brother. Look at that community of ants together tugging at their prize lizard. There is no fighting. There is no tugging in opposite directions. Without guides or overseers these ants know in what direction they are pulling. In perfect harmony they strive with each other to attain unto their prize. And we must labor in this same exact way spiritually. We must know our brothers and sisters in Christ and we must work together to attain the same goal and prize. Putting aside all evil speaking and quarrels we must know the truth and pull in that direction in perfect harmony. And that too, takes conscious effort on our part – since all of us are sinners and are quick to see the faults of others.

These then are the labors we can and must perform as we live with a view to the end.

If we are busy with these spiritual labors – as busy as the ant – then when Christ comes we will be found without spot or blemish. We will have no reason to be ashamed. Only the spiritual sluggard, only the one who is lazy spiritually will blush at the return of Christ. He will be caught sleeping and he will receive nothing in that day. We, who labor, on the other hand, will be watching for the return of Christ. And when He comes we will know that all that hard work we put into our spiritual lives was not in vain. WE will receive our heavenly reward.

It will be so good to rest in heaven to all eternity!

Do you want that rest?

Then we must be willing to work for it!

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