

"A New Day"

by
James Yonge

*"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day;
the night is coming when no one can work."*

John 9:4

The beginning of a new day calls for our serious meditation on a subject of infinite importance--the value of time. For what purpose were we sent into the world? How have we endeavored to answer that purpose? What prospect is in store for us in that awful eternity whose gates will soon be unbarred to us by death? In this brief and uncertain day of life, are we working the works of Him who sent us? Are we taking care of our business with anxious haste lest the night overtake us before it is accomplished? Or are we indolently slumbering in the season appointed for alertness and activity? Are we amusing ourselves with idle pleasures or distracting ourselves with unprofitable pursuits in this period of time designed for occupations of the most serious and momentous nature?

These are questions of inexpressible interest to us all, for life is passing swiftly away. The sand which measures our hours is rapidly sinking in the glass. We do not know how much time may remain, how soon the last grain may steal away and leave it empty. Yet a chain of everlasting consequences hangs on the feeble thread of this momentary existence.

Human life is a time for important duties and a period in which our employments will be taken into account hereafter. It is not a mere insulated portion of time lopped off from eternity, complete in itself and unconnected with the endless duration of succeeding ages. On the contrary, it is the infancy of a man's existence. His place and manner of life is soon to be changed. In short, men are not mere "bubbles of a fantastic deity, blown up in sport, rising and breaking millions in an hour" [Young], but immortal beings sent into this school of the world for the purpose of a short probation. After they have been sufficiently tried, they will be adjudged to everlasting happiness or misery according to the characters and tempers which they have acquired in this state of discipline.

If this is the true intent and explanation of this extraordinary life, then what supreme concern we should have in calculating how far we have advanced in complying with it. The decisive day of judgment will tally our accounts forever and assign us to an unchangeable future. Will we approach it with hope or fear?

Let me ask again, For what purpose were we sent into the world? If we leave out the sublime doctrine of immortality, then neither you nor I can find any probable answer to

this question. If we should confine our views to this life only and entertain no hope of anything beyond it, I should be utterly at a loss to imagine the goal of our existence, unless it were to provide comic entertainment for invisible beings who might be amused with our erratic actions, ridiculous errors, and contemptible self-importance; with our abortive efforts at greatness and eager pursuits of shadows of happiness; with our vain pretenses of wisdom, schemes for perpetuating an empty name, and all the other numberless follies that our trifling labors, cares, and interests would exhibit to their view. Add to all these follies the miseries and pains that men endure, the diseases, sorrows, disappointments, and fears that disturb and ruin that little happiness of which we are capable, and some malicious invisible being might take a cruel pleasure in contemplating this laughable and woeful farce of human life--a drama from which the actors are perpetually retiring, never to appear again. But even to such a being I should suppose that the constant succession of similar characters and circumstances must have rendered the exhibition long since tedious and insipid.

I cannot express to you the humiliating sentiments which I have concerning the vanity and emptiness of human life when viewed without any belief in or reference to an eternal existence beyond this present scene. It seems such a medley and patchwork of inconsistencies as leaves the mind at a loss to discover any connection or harmony in the whole picture. It is a puzzle, an enigma, a maze of errors that no clue can help us unravel.

But, my brethren, the merciful revelation of God has furnished us with the only key that can unlock this mystery. It has rendered all these intricacies clear and intelligible. Now all is plain and simple since our Savior, Christ, came upon the earth and brought the glad tidings of life and immortality for man in another world. And if you ask me now what is the purpose of our existence, it is a question to which I can return a ready and easy answer. It is, that by approving ourselves sincere worshipers and faithful servants of God, according to the rules of his revealed will, we may hereafter be translated to an everlasting inheritance of happiness and glory.

It is this truth that makes our earthly state one of supreme importance, rather than one which appears insignificant and even ridiculous. Of what immense consequence, then, is the use man makes of the short time allotted to him here below! Now everything becomes significant--all his thoughts, words, actions, habits, character, and pursuits. They are all matters of the deepest concern. Scarcely anything is insignificant to him who stands on the narrow boundary between two eternities, that of heaven and hell; who must soon enter into the one or the other; and of whom the utmost circumspection is required, lest he should deviate into the path that leads to ruin. He is no longer the amusing entertainment of those invisible beings described before, but a serious subject to God and angels, who observe with anxiety the perils by which he is surrounded, and who assiduously endeavor to direct his feet into the path of happiness and peace.

Either this representation is absolutely true, or religion is nonsense and not deserving of a

serious thought. Either happiness or misery without end will result from the way you spend your earthly days of trial and probation, or the hopes and fears of eternity are all a fable. And if a fable, it is immaterial how you spend the few years of so useless and valueless an existence.

Now, for those who are professed believers in Christ and the solemn doctrines of the gospel, I ask you to take this opportunity to examine whether your practice is consistent with your belief. Are you so absolutely convinced that the one grand purpose of life is to prepare for an eternal state so as to make it the ruling principle of every action? Does it influence your general character? If you actually believe that you will hereafter have to answer at the bar of God's judgment for the use made of your present lives, then the uppermost consideration of your minds ought to be how you may best hope for a favorable sentence on that great day. Common sense tells you that if your portion either of joy or woe in another world is to be eternal and unalterable, and if that decision depends solely and entirely upon what you have done in your time of trial, then it is the very extreme of folly to let any other subject possess a rival interest in your hearts.

Shall you fall into so senseless an error as to regard the world as your settled home, its possessions as your richest treasure, its honors as your highest ambition, and its interests as worthy of your most lively care? Shall heaven occupy but an inferior and secondary place in your affections? Shall earth and its vanities command your most zealous services and heaven be but an object of occasional aspirations, of feeble hopes, of lukewarm desires, of languid exertion or reluctant labors? Have we been sent into the world to be rich, great, learned, finely clothed and sumptuously feasted? Have we been sent into the world to excel in the arts and professions of life, to prosper in business and indulge in ease and enjoyment? Alas, how many there are who begin and end their course with no other views than these!

How many we find who are "careful and troubled about many things," but who neglect the one great end which alone is worthy to be attained. How many we find who neglect "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," but who devote their entire time and thought and strength to infinitely less important matters. I am not speaking now of those whose wicked lives consign them at once to that wretched class of men who are altogether "without hope and without God in the world." No, I am speaking of those whose respectable characters, honest occupations, and innocent diversions seem to evidence a heavenly inheritance, but who, in actual truth, have no more reasonable a prospect of it than the others. Their employments may be praiseworthy and absolutely necessary, their pleasures innocent and their virtue unimpeachable according to human estimation, but yet they have no solid principles or lively impressions of Christ. All their views are earthly. They desire to succeed in business, to amass a fortune, to acquire a reputation, and to enjoy the elegant accommodation of polished life, but the love of God does not form the ruling principle in their minds. In other words, they are only men of respectability engaged in useful and laudable occupations.

I will not charge them with anything worse, but suppose we can attribute to them nothing better? Can we then grant them the praise of a godly character? Can we say that they are working the works of him who sent them, that they are fulfilling the great purpose for which they were born, that they are striving to enter in at the straight and narrow gate that leads to life, that they are faithful servants of God, sincere disciples of the gospel, hopeful heirs of immortality? No, we cannot. They have applied their precious time to most frivolous uses. They have been extravagant spendthrifts of their valuable lives. Were they summoned to judgment now, all their past years would rise up in witness against them and condemn them. Although their consciences may not reproach them with willful transgressions, and though they have not been guilty of any immoralities and indecencies, and even though they have been diligent and faithful in the exercise of their various callings without a whisper against their integrity and just dealings, yet I will not hesitate to say that if godly motives have had nothing to do in influencing their conduct, they have hitherto lived in sin. However respectable in the eyes of the world a man's whole life is, it is in fact one continued course of sin if the love of God and the desire to please him and do his will is not its presiding and pervading principle. It is this alone that sanctifies our employments; and the very same occupations may be either sinful or innocent depending on the views that have furnished the motives for them.

In this sense, "whatever is not of faith is sin." It is a perversion and profanation to call him a "Christian" whose mind has neither received any impression nor exhibited any feature of Christianity. It is a mockery of the gospel to number the mere man of business and the mere man of pleasure among Christ's disciples, no matter how free from human censure in their general conduct they may be. We need no gospel if *this* religion will suffice; for then heaven may be attained without repentance, faith, and prayer. It may be attained without love for God and the influence of the Holy Spirit. It may be attained without self-denial and conquering the evil inclinations of our corrupt nature. In a word, heaven may be attained without believing any of the Christian doctrines or acquiring any of the Christian graces. In other words, it may be attained without any need for a Redeemer!

Nothing could be further from the truth! The doctrine of redemption does, in fact, carry with it the strongest obligation and gives the most forcible impulse to all the warm emotions and active duties of religion. So far from being a substitute for religion, it is the strongest motive to it. It is because we are "bought with a price" that we are therefore not our own. It is because "Christ died for all" that we should not henceforth live to ourselves but to him who died and rose again. It is because "God first loved us" that we ought therefore to love him in return. It is because "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" that we ought therefore to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world, looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify to himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Depend upon it, that whoever is a hearty believer in the efficacy of our blessed Saviour's atonement and mediation, that man is not content with merely acknowledging this doctrine but loves Jesus as his greatest benefactor, confides in him as his steadfast friend, attends to him as his best instructor, follows him as his safest guide, and obeys him as his most kind and supreme master.

My brethren, the object of my discourse has been to convince you that the Christian religion is the grand business of life, and that those who have not kept that steadily in view have wholly wasted their time in pursuits foreign to the purpose for which they were born. I designed my discourse for those whose actions may be of a creditable nature, to those whom we cannot impute flagrantly vicious conduct but have on the contrary led decorous and perhaps useful lives in a worldly sense. Though they have lived without Christianity, they have not been in willful opposition to it. And it is for this reason that they may easily delude themselves with a belief that they cannot be charged with a misuse of their time. But a word of warning to those who have lived in direct and flagrant sin: Do not flatter yourselves with the thought that *your* lives have not been egregiously and woefully misemployed.

Before it is too late, let a serious and practical conviction take hold of the worthlessness--nay sinfulness--of even the most respectable pursuit in life when it is not connected with Christian principles and motives. Man was made to worship and serve God, and to work out his own salvation. Everything else is secondary. If God is not the chief good, if his will is not the principal goal and heaven the highest aim, then the greatest success and most perfect happiness that can be attained on earth is vanity. Consider this matter earnestly, take it to heart today. Do not delay, for who knows whether God will grant us another day. We all know that death is certain, and we have no assurance that God will prolong life. Much time has already been wasted and can never be recalled. Little may remain, but God is granting the opportunity for repentance and amendment. Therefore let us apply our hearts to wisdom by making every day count for him.

Most merciful God, teach us the true wisdom of devoting our whole hearts, and strength, and time to your glory. We call to you for our salvation and pray that you show us the works to which you are calling us. And when you think it fit to conclude this our short day of trial, take us to your everlasting kingdom, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our only Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon I from *Sermons (Second Series)* by James Yonge (Exeter: Printed by W. D. Pollard, 1832).
Note: This sermon has been condensed and moderately rephrased for clarity.