

What Do You Do With Your Future

by J. Vernon McGee

The future is unknown, but we can trust in God and follow His way to be certain of our future.

Duration: 36:52

Scripture: Proverbs 14:12, Proverbs 27:1, Isaiah 53:6, Isaiah 56:12, Luke 12:16-21, John 14:6, James 4:13-14

Topics: "Future"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses various metaphors to describe the fleeting nature of life. He compares life to a mess on a hillside, grass in a valley, the flight of a bird, and the passage of a ship in the night. The preacher emphasizes that because life is unpredictable, we should not boast about our plans for the future. He references James 4:14, which reminds us that we do not know what tomorrow will bring, and encourages the audience to reflect on the brevity and uncertainty of life.

Transcript

What do you do with your future? Are you entering 1957 as an unguided missile? Multitudes are, including many Christians, and before the year has concluded they will have done an unestimated amount of damage. The entire human family faces this coming year with mingle feelings, different degrees of uncertainty, misgivings, and insecurity. What does the future hold for me is a reasonable question that every normal individual is bound to ask himself.

If this morning I had a crystal ball into which I could peer and could determine every event that will take place in the future, I'd be the most popular person in Los Angeles. Washington would be calling me, the White House would be in touch with me, I'm confident of that, and the capitals of the world would make contact, and every car driving out to Santa Anita would come by my place. My friend, this morning, many are posing as prophets, and they say, I predict so-and-so for this coming year, but no man can know the future, no man stands in a unique position like that at all.

I said last Lord's Day when we were speaking on the subject, what do you do with your past? That there was an axiom that we could put down, and it was this, the past cannot be changed. It's likewise axiomatic that the future cannot be known. As we scan the highway looking toward the dawn of a new day, we cannot see clearly anything that's in the future must be very hazy to us today.

In fact, there is a total blackout as far as to be able to determine what the future holds, and the scripture makes that very clear to us. The writer to the Proverbs in the 27th chapter, the first verse wrote, Boast not

thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day will bring forward. And you will find that Isaiah had a great deal to say along this line.

Over in the 56th chapter of Isaiah, the 12th verse, he wrote language like this, Come ye, say they, and he's speaking now of evil men, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink, and tomorrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. And so many as they look into the new year predicting prosperity, well, they were right last year, they were right the year before, and the year before that. But my friend, they could be right and they could be wrong this coming year, for no man knows the future at all.

And that's what James says in the 4th chapter, the 14th verse, and if we have a text at all, this must be it. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow, for what is your life? It's even a vapor that appeareth for a little while, and then vanisheth away. You see, it's not that the future is unknown, it's not that time today is like a runaway truck going down a grade on the ridge route, careening from side to side without brakes or a steering wheel, and the only thing sure is that it'll crack up at the bottom of the hill.

Time's not like that. There is someone today at the controls. There is someone who does know the route.

There is a mighty hand upon the steering wheel of time today, my beloved. God knows the beginning. And the writer to the Psalms expresses it in a very, very significant manner when he says from everlasting to everlasting thou art God.

And the Hebrew is really more picturesque than that. It's really this, from the vanishing point of eternity past to the vanishing point of eternity future, thou art God. And this morning, this calm about his throne as he enters into the future, because known unto God is everything that is in the future.

So you see today, the difficulty is not that the future is unknown. The future is not unknown. But it's man that is uncertain.

Man is the unknown quantity in the equation of life. Man is the one that you have to put down as X, not the future. Will you listen to James again? Whereas ye know not what shall be on the Why don't we? Well, because the difficulty is in here, my beloved.

For what is your life? It's even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away. My beloved, this morning, your life and my life is just like a vapor that appears on the hillside, and the oncoming sun drives it away. And here in Los Angeles, it's just a little bit of smog.

That's all we are. It appears for a little while and then it just disappears. And Isaiah put it like this.

He was quoting the Lord when he gave it, by the way. The voice said, cry. And he said, what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the Spirit of the Lord groweth upon it. Surely the people is grass. And my friend, this morning, your life and my life is just like the grass that's out in the front lawn.

It won't take much of a frost to kill it. It won't take much to drive it away. It won't take much to make it disappear.

Your life and my life, this morning, is like a little bit of mist on a hillside. It's like a little grass in the valley. It's all in the world that it is.

And Scripture describes it further by saying it's like the flight of a bird, the passage of a bird out of darkness through a window into a lighted room and then out another window into the darkness. It's like the passage of a ship in the night. That's your life and that's my life today.

And because of that, you and I look into the future and God says to us, we know not what a day will bring for us. This morning I want us to make a very brief analysis of our life. That is a verse of Scripture I want to turn to.

Someday I want to return to this verse and preach on it when we have more time, because it's filled with a wealth of meaning. Will you listen to it? It's 1 Thessalonians 5, 23. And the very God of peace sanctify you holy.

And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless under the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We can make a brief analysis of man this morning. What is your life? Well, our life is body, soul and spirit.

We're a triune being. And let's look at these three departments of man. Let's look at these three different sections into which that you and I are divided today.

First of all, the body. The word Paul uses is interesting. It's the somatic, soma is the word he uses.

It's the somatic side of us today and we're hearing so much of it. The physical and the material. And the emphasis is right here today.

Everything in this life today is geared, the entire program of the world is directed toward the physical man. Television, radio, newspapers, magazines, billboards, there are pastes and powders and perfumes and pills for the physical man. There are liquids and soaps and shampoos and tonics.

And each one of them contains a miracle ingredient. And that if you use this particular one, it'll probably make a new man out of you. And you'll get a raise next month for your work.

You can get all of these things, they come in boxes, they come in bottles and tubes and in plastic containers. You can pour them on, you can sprinkle them, you can rub them, or you can get the large economy size and go swimming in the gooey stuff. And these things are so designed that they were going to make you physically take 15 pounds off around the waist and add 20 years to your life.

My beloved, the body is important. It's certainly one-third of man. And it's interesting to look at it.

We're told today that it's made up of 15 chemical elements. And some waggish chemist years ago figured it out that if you took man all apart and took each one of these 15 chemical elements and sold them on the market, 15 years ago they would have sold for 98 cents. But don't let that disturb you because everything's gone up.

And today they would sell on the market for \$1.67. That's what you were worth today. And this waggish chemist went on and found out there's enough phosphorus in us to make the head on 11 matches. He found out that there was enough lime in us to whitewash a chicken coop.

And we sometimes say, my, so-and-so has a lot of iron in his system. Well, he only has enough to make three shingle nails. And sometimes some fella comes to the conclusion that some little girl is all sugar.

Well, may I say to you, there's not enough sugar in her to sweeten a cup of cold coffee. My friend, this morning, man physically is not very much. And he's not very important physically.

Actually, he disintegrates right back into the earth. Dost thou art to dust, shalt thou return. But may I say to you this morning, God has put a value even on the physical man.

And for the Christian today, he said to the Christian, your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost. But only one-third of man, at best or most, is physical. And when you look at that, you must turn to the words of our Lord when he says, is not the life more than meat and the body than raiment? The whole philosophy of the world is expressed in a verse of scripture.

Over in the 22nd chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, the 13th verse, will you listen to this? Behold joy and gladness, slaying of oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine. Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die. That's such an important verse that Paul in the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, he quoted it.

He quoted it in order to be able to say that no Christian can live by that philosophy of life, because these bodies that we're living in today are crumbling, they're falling down, they're fading away. John Quincy Adams, at the past 90, ex-president of the United States, was taking a walk one day in Boston, Massachusetts. He met a friend.

His friend says, how are you today, Mr. Adams? He says, well, I am fine, but this house that I live in is growing very feeble, and I suspect I'll be moving out of it before long. Oh, I don't mean to be a pessimist today, but look around you this morning, and this great congregation we have here, one out of 100 will not be here next year. You won't be here, my friend.

Isaiah again says in the second chapter of the 22nd verse, cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils. Again, it's very picturesque language that Isaiah uses. Cease ye from man whose breath stands tiptoe in his nose.

My friend, you breathe it out. You don't know whether you're going to pull it back or not, and one of these days you won't. And this morning, because of that, as we look into the future, it must be with an iron element of uncertainty, for man physically is not something you can depend upon.

Then Paul says to the Thessalonians that there's another department of man. He calls it the soul. The word in the Greek is the word psuche.

We get our word psychology from that, and it is the psychological part of man. Somebody says, well, I thought the soul and the spirit were the same. Well, they are used interchangeably in some passages, in fact, in many passages of Scripture.

But the Scripture also divides the soul and the spirit. The word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, dividing asunder the soul and the spirit. And only God's word can divide the soul and the spirit.

I wish this morning we had time to go into these two. I just mentioned them in a cursory way. There is a distinction and a difference between soul and spirit.

The soulish part of man is that part of man that's the mental part. It's his mind. It's the that puts man on a cultural level, above all the creatures that are in this world today.

It is the thing that's disturbed the evolutionists lots more than the body, to find in the bodies of certain animals great big brains, when man's brain is not as large as some others. It's hard to explain, but you see man is a soul, a living soul. And right now there's a battle going on in the collegiate circles that doesn't pertain to most of us today.

I noticed that during the holidays that the college professors and presidents got together. And in one convention, one president, he certainly did tee off and express himself. He deplored our present methods of education with the emphasis today on specialization.

He says today that we are taking men and making them specialists. We take away from them every subject but the subject they're specializing in. And we're making today engineers and physicists and chemists and atomic scientists.

But these men have no broad basis of education and culture, and it's leading to abnormality. We're merely turning out machines today that are like geniuses. They are robots.

And that the international business machine company can probably turn them out just as well. Oh my friend, this morning there is a part of man that appreciates the better things of life. There's a part of man that thinks.

Man, a thinking being, is defined. Few use this grand prerogative of mine, how few think justly of the thinking few, how many never think who think they do. Man is a thinking being, my beloved.

And he gives estimations. He determines values. He puts a price tag on everything he comes in contact with.

He says what's important to him. He makes decisions, my beloved. This is the man that moves through life today.

But our Lord had something to say about him. I turn to a parable that he gave yonder in the twelfth chapter of Luke. Let me read this to you.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do? Because I have no room where to bestow my fruits. And he said, This will I do.

I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Do you notice it's his soul now, not his spirit? I'll say to my soul, So thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then who shall those things be which thou hast provided? What a picture of man today that makes all of his plans for the future. Man gathers together and accumulates that which he thinks is worthwhile, puts his price tag on them, gives his own value to them, and then sits back and says, Everything is taken care of for the future.

And not knowing, my beloved, that God requires his soul of him. And in the case of this man, it was that very night. Because we do not know what a day will bring forth.

We cannot boast ourselves of the morrow, for we do not know what the morrow holds for us. And then, my beloved, finally man is a spirit. When God created man in the Garden of Eden, it says that God breathed into his breathing places the breath of life.

The breath there is spirit. It is the pneumatose, the pneumatic, if you please, part of man. And you say to me this morning, What is the spirit of man? I do not know how I would have explained it fifty years ago, but I think this morning we can reach out and put our hands on an illustration that will make it clear what the spirit of man is.

When I was in Chicago some time ago, there was in the service a very fine-looking young Army officer. What rank he is, I do not know. When they get past a sergeant, I have trouble knowing just what they are.

But he was way up yonder and he attended all the meetings. I got acquainted with him and I found out he had charge of these Nikes that were all around Chicago. I do not think he betrayed a secret when he told me a little something about them.

They are guided missiles that he can sit at a desk with a great many gadgets in front of him. He can turn a switch and he can push a button. He can turn a lever.

He can make certain movements and adjust it. And that little fellow, and a big fellow, he will lift up and start out. And he will go exactly where he wants him to go.

It is a guided missile. And he says that inside that guided missile there are some more little cubes and wires and little gadgets in there. And it is because of those little things in there that he here can guide the missile.

My friend, when God created man, he breathed into his breathing places the spirit, his own spirit, so that now instead of being down here and guiding a missile God up yonder could guide man down here. But something happened. Something happened to the missile.

And that is the reason this morning I opened by saying, are you entering the new year as an unguided missile? Multitudes are. Because man in the garden of Eden broke loose and that spirit died within man. God could no longer press a button and guide man.

God could no longer speak to man and lead him. But this man went out in rebellion against God. May I say that when Niki goes wrong in the air, it is tragedy.

And it means the destruction of Niki. When man went wrong, it was tragedy. But honestly, it did not mean the destruction of man at all.

For God was busy, even in the garden of Eden, to restore the communication and bring man back into fellowship and to be able again to push a button and guide man. I turn to the 8th chapter of Romans. If you think I have stepped over the bounds this morning in an illustration and let you listen to the language of the Apostle Paul in the 8th chapter of Romans, will you listen to the 8th verse? So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.

Man in the garden of Eden, when he fell, a spirit within him died as far as God is concerned. No longer did he have contact with God. He's in rebellion against God.

And it can be said this morning, they that are in the flesh, they cannot please God. Because even if you wanted to, my beloved, which we don't, but even if we did want to in our natural condition, we could not respond to God when he pushes the button. There's no contact.

Listen again, because the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it's not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. God says man's broken loose. No longer can I control him.

He goes through this world an unguided missile. But now God says, and as he said yonder to Nicodemus that night, even a religious man that you and I would have passed any moment. But our Lord said to him, ye must be born again.

You've got to get a new nature. You've got to be in Christ. You'll become a new creation.

And old connections are broken and now new connections are made. And again, you can respond to the creator. And that's the reason you must be born again.

Now he says, if you are born again, they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit, the things of the spirit, if you've been born again, the spirit of God bears witness now with our spirit that we are the children of God, the sons of God, my beloved. God gave us everything that we need except a steering wheel. And God never put a steering wheel on any of us.

And the reason is that he wants to guide us by remote control. He wants to lead us in direction. Little wonder this morning we stand as creatures on the threshold of a new year, peering into the future with uncertainty and ignorance and even in darkness.

Why? Because the one at the steering wheel is up yonder, not you or not me. And some folks attempt desperately to penetrate the future and some even will plunge defiantly into the future on their own, an unguarded missile. Is that the way you're entering this year? Scripture says that.

There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death. Oh, we like sheep have gone astray, we've turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The trouble this morning with all of us fundamentally is, is those three little words, his own way. We don't want to go God's way. We want to go our way.

The Lord Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me. Paul said yonder in Lystra, who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways, but now God says, you've got to come my way.

And with what assurance today our Lord is speaking to you and me out of the upper room and saying, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by me. Those are dogmatic directions.

That statement, as a UCLA student said to me several years ago, he says, that statement's too dogmatic. I agree with him. It's dogmatic.

Truth is always dogmatic. I like it that way myself. I remember the first time I went up to the Firs in Bellingham, Washington, we drove up and I'd been to Seattle by train, but had never driven before.

We spent the night in Portland, and the next morning there was a great deal of fog. And when we drove out on Highway 99, I don't know what happened, we got off of it some way out of town, or even before we got out of town, seemed to me like. And we drove around, couldn't get our way back.

I said to my wife, I said, I don't see how in the world we ever got on the wrong road with both of us driving, me at the steering wheel and she sitting in her custom place. But we did. We got off the main route.

And finally I said, there's not one thing to do, that's to go back and start all over again. And we turned back into Portland and we started over again. Went into a filling station, asked a young fellow in the filling station if he knew the way to Highway 99.

He had a broom in his hand. He pointed at that broom in five different directions. And he said, he finally asked him, I said, do you, do you know? I asked him first, how long you been here? He said, two weeks.

I said, you then don't know. He said, really didn't. I went across the street, an older man was there opening up the filling station.

I said to him, do you know the way to get on Highway 99? He says, I certainly do. You go down here, three blocks, there's a streetlight, you turn right and you continue that right, till you come to another streetlight, then go left, and you're on Highway 99. I said, are you sure? He looked at me in amazement.

He said, he was. He was. The Lord Jesus says, I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh to the Father but by me. And friend this morning, have you come this way? Have you come to the one that knows the way into the new year? You don't, I don't, no man knows, but he knows. Let me give one final word, and then I'll not detain you any longer.

One final word from scripture. I didn't give all the quotation from Isaiah 40. Verse 8 says, the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand forever.

Man's is grass, and the grass withers, but the word of God abides forever. This, friend, is the only road map we have. God has given us only one road map, and it's his word.

Oh, I wish this year that I could get you closer to the word of God. I have one ambition as the pastor of the Church of the Open Door, and that is to get more people into the word of God. Oh, I don't mean this stuff of sticking it under your arm and carrying it on Sunday morning and saying I believe it's God's word.

I mean to really dig in and know what it's all about. I wish I could get you out on Thursday night. I wish I could get you into the word of God that you might see his road map.

The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, that's you, that's me, but the word of our God abided forever. We stand on the threshold of a new year. Paul says, I can stand with you.

Forgetting those things which are behind, reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. As you face the new year today, are you looking to Jesus Christ? Unsaved friend this morning, have you come to him, the one who is the way, the truth, and the life? The one that can bring you into contact with God and bring you to the Father and bring you to God and restore that relationship? And my Christian friend this morning, are you plunging into this year as an unguided missile? Are you looking to him today, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith? Shall we pray? Briefly this morning as we come to the Lord's table, examine your own heart and

life, and in the quietness of this moment, oh, it's so easy to put up a front. It's so easy to use subterfuge.

It's so easy to say things that are not true. But today, what are you going to do with your future? Are you entering the new year as an unguided missile? Is he at the controls today? Have you turned your life over to him? No wonder today that multitudes have hearts filled with fears, anxieties as they look into the future. We don't know where we're going.

We know not what a day will bring forth. He does. Put him at the controls of your life.

Let him push the buttons. Let him turn the switch. You've never let him in to your heart and life.

You never come to him. Do it this morning as we come to this table with heads bowed, eyes closed, God's people praying. I'm wondering if you're here today, friend, on the threshold of a new year to register a decision and say today, I've been at the controls too long, and I'm not getting anywhere, and I certainly don't know the future.

This morning, the best I know how, I want to say to him, Lord Jesus, take my life, take over, direct me, guide me, become my savior, become my Lord.

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