

# Coming to the End

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon reminds us that everything in life is temporary, and we should be prepared for the end of our friendships, visions, hopes, trials, and ultimately, life itself, by living a true Christian life and being ready for any event that may occur.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 30:5, Ecclesiastes 3:1, Matthew 6:34, John 14:1-3, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Philippians 1:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 21:4

**Topics:** "Hope in Christ", "Transience of Life"

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## Description

J.R. Miller reflects on the transient nature of life, emphasizing that we are constantly coming to the end of various experiences, relationships, and even life itself. He illustrates how beauty and joy are fleeting, yet new experiences continually emerge, shaping our lives in unexpected ways. Miller encourages us to cherish our friendships and the lessons they impart, while also recognizing that loss is an inevitable part of life. Ultimately, he reassures that through faith in Christ, we can find hope and comfort in the face of loss and death, viewing them not as calamities but as transitions to a greater existence. Living each day fully prepares us for the end, allowing us to embrace death as a gateway to eternal life.

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## Transcript

We are always coming to the end of something; nothing earthly is long-lived.

Many things last but for a day; many, for only a moment. You look at the sunset-clouds, and there is a glory in them which thrills your soul; you turn to call a friend to behold the splendor with you--and it has vanished, and a new splendor--as wondrous, though altogether different--is in its place. You cross a field on an early summer morning, and every leaf and every blade of grass is covered with dewdrops, which sparkle like millions of diamonds as the first sunbeams fall on them; but a few moments later you return, and not a dewdrop is to be seen! You walk through your garden one summer morning, and note its wondrous variety of flowers in bloom, with their marvelous tints and their exquisite loveliness; tomorrow you walk again along the same paths, and there is just as great variety and as rich beauty--but all is changed. Many of yesterday's flowers are gone--and many new ones have bloomed out.

So it is in all our personal experiences. Life is a kaleidoscope--every moment the view changes! The beautiful things of one glance--are missing at the next, while new things--just as lovely, though not the same--appear in their place. The joys we had yesterday--we do not have today, though our hearts may be quite as happy now, with gladness just as pure and deep. In a sense, to most of us--life is routine, an

endless repetition--the same tasks, the same duties, the same cares, day after day, year after year. Yet even in this routine, there is constant change. There is a life that flows through the channel of our daily experiences, and that is ever new. We meet new people, we have new things, we read new books, we see new pictures, we learn new facts--while at the same time many of the familiar things are continually dropping out of our lives.

The face we saw yesterday--we miss today, and there are new faces in the throng. The songs we sang last year--we do not sing this year. The books we used to read with zest--we do not care for any longer. The pleasures that once delighted us--have no more charm for us. The toys that meant so much to childhood and were so real--have no fascination whatever for manhood and for womanhood. The happy days of youth, with their sports' and games, their schools and studies, their friendships and visions--are left behind, though never forgotten, as we pass on into actual life with its harder tasks, its rougher paths, its heavier burdens, its deeper studies, its sterner realities.

So we are ever coming to the end of old things--and to the beginning of new things. We keep nothing long. This is true of our friendships. Our hearts are made to love and to cling. Very early, the little child begins to tie itself to other lives by the subtle cords of affection. All through life we go on gathering friends and binding them to us by ties of varying strength, sometimes as slight as a gossamer-thread and as easily broken; sometimes as strong as life itself--the very knitting of soul to soul. Yet our friendships are ever changing. Some of them we outgrow and leave behind us--as we pass from childhood and youth to maturity; some of them have only an external attachment, and easily fall off and are scarcely missed and leave no scar.

This is true of many of our associations in business, in society, in life's ordinary comminglings. We are thrown into more or less intimate relations with people, not by any attractive affinity, any drawing of heart--but by circumstances; and, while there may be pleasant congeniality, there is no real blending or weaving together, life with life; consequently, the ending of such associations produces no sore wrench or pain, no heart-pang. All through life these friends of circumstances are changing; we have the same no two successive years.

In every true life there is an inner circle of loved ones who are bound to us by ties woven out of our very heart's fibers. The closest of these, are the members of our own household. The child's first friend--is the child's mother; then comes the father; and then the other members of the family are taken into the sacred clasp of the opening life. By and by the young heart reaches outside and chooses other friends from the great world of common people, and out of the multitude of passing associates, and binds them to itself with friendship's strongest cords.

Thus all true men and true women come up to mature years, clustered about by a circle of friends who are as dear to them as their own life. Our debt to our life's pure and holy friendships, is incalculable; they make us what we are. The mother's heart--is the child's first schoolroom. The early home-influences give their tints and hues to the whole after-life; a gentle home where only kindly words are spoken, and loving thoughts and dispositions are cherished, fills with tender beauty, the lives that go out from its shelter. All early friendships print their own stamp on the ripening character. Our souls are like the sensitive plates which the photographer puts into his camera, which catch every image whose reflection falls upon them, and hold it ready to be brought out in the finished picture.

True in general, this is especially true of the pure friendships of our lives. None of the impressions that they make on our lives, are ever lost; they sink away into our souls--and then reappear at length in our character.

But even these tender and holy friendships we cannot keep forever; one by one they fall off--or are torn out of our lives. There are many ways of losing friends. Sometimes, without explanation, without offence or a shadow of a reason of which we know, without hint or warning given--our friend suddenly withdraws from us and goes his own way; and through life we never have hint or token of the old friendship.

Some friends are lost to us, not by any sudden rupture--but by a slow and gradual falling apart, which goes on imperceptibly through long periods--tie after tie unclasping, until all are loosed, and hearts once knit together in holy union, find themselves hopelessly estranged.

A little bird dropped a seed on a rock. The seed fell into a crevice and grew--and at length the great rock was rent asunder by the root of the tree that sprang up. So little seeds of alienation sometimes fall between two friends, and in the end produce a separation which rends their friendship and sunders them forever.

No picture could be sadder than this--but the saddest thing about it--is its truthfulness and the frequency of its repetition in actual life. Many a friendship is lost--by this slow process of imperceptibly growing apart.

Then, friends are lost through misunderstandings, which in many cases a few honest words at first might have removed. The Scriptures say, "A whisperer separates chief friends."

Friends are lost, too, in the sharp competitions of business, in the keen rivalries of ambition. For love of money, or of fame, or of power, or of social distinction--many throw away holy friendships.

Friends are lost, too, by death. Often this process begins early; a child is bereft of father or of mother, or of both. All through life--the sad story of bereavement goes on. As the leaves are torn from the trees by the rude storm--so are friendships plucked from our lives by Death's remorseless hand. There is something inexpressibly sad in the loneliness of old people, who have survived the loss of nearly all their friends, and who stand almost entirely alone amid the gathering shadows of their life's eventide. Once they were rich in human affection. Children sat about their table and grew up in their happy home; many other true hearts were drawn to them along the years. But one by one their children are gathered home into God's bosom, until all are gone. Other friends--some in one way, and some in another--are also removed. At last husband or wife is called away, and one only survives of the once happy pair, lonely and desolate, amid the ruin of all earthly gladness and the tender memories of lost joys.

Were it not for the Christian's hope, these losses of friends along the years would be infinitely sad, without alleviation. But the wonderful grace of God comes not only with its revelation of after-life--but with its present healing. God binds up his people's hearts in their sorrow, and comforts them in their loneliness. The children and the friends who are gone--are not lost; hand will clasp hand again, and heart will clasp heart in inseparable reunion. The grave is only winter--and after winter comes spring with its wonderful resurrections, in which everything beautiful that seemed lost, comes again.

We come to the end, also, of many of our life's visions and hopes--as the years go on. Flowers are not the only things that fade. Morning clouds are not the only things that pass away. Sunset splendors are not the only gorgeous pictures that vanish.

What comes of all childhood's fancies, of youth's day-dreams and of manhood's and womanhood's visions and hopes? How many of them are ever realized? Life is full of illusions. Many of our ships that we send out to imagined lands of wealth--to bring back to us rich cargoes--never return at all; or, if they do, only creep back empty with torn sails and battered hulks. Disappointments come to all of us, along life's course. Many of our ventures on life's sea are wrecked--and never come back to port; many of our ardent hopes prove--only brilliant bubbles that burst as we grasp them!

Yet if we are living for the higher things--the things that are unseen and eternal--the shattering of our life's dreams; and the failures of our earthly hopes--are only apparent losses. The things we can see, are but the shadows of things we cannot see. We chase the shadow, supposing it to be a reality; it eludes us and we do not grasp it--but instead we clasp in our hand that invisible thing of which the visible was only the shadow.

A young man has his visions of possible achievement and attainment; one by one, with toil and pain--yet with quenchless ardor, he follows them. All along his life to its close--bright hopes shine before him, and he continues to press after them with unwearying quest. Perhaps he does not realize one of them, and he comes to old age with empty hands--an unsuccessful man, the world says. Yet all the while his faith in God has not faltered, and he has been gathering into his soul--the treasures of spiritual conquest; in his inner life he has been growing richer every day. The struggle after earthly possession, may have yielded nothing tangible--but the struggle has developed strength, courage, faith and other noble qualities in the man himself. The bright visions faded--as he grasped them, leaving nothing but disappointment; yet if his quest was worthy, he is richer in heart.

Thus, God gives us friends, and our heart's tendrils entwine about them; they stay with us for a time--and then leave us. Our loss is very sore, and we go out bereft and lonely, along life's paths. Even love seems to have been in vain, yielding nothing in the end, but sorrow. It seems to us, that we are poorer than if we had never loved at all; we have nothing left of all that was so precious to us. But we have not lost all. Loving our friends drew out to ripeness, the possibilities of love in our own hearts; then the friends were taken away--but the ripened love remains. Our hearts are empty--but our lives are larger.

So it is with all our experiences of disappointment and loss, if our hearts are fixed on Christ and if we are living for the invisible eternal things; we miss the shadow--only to clasp in heart-possession the imperishable reality. The illusions of faith and hope and love--are but the falling away of the crude scaffolding used in erecting the building, that the beautiful temple itself may stand out in enduring splendor.

We come also to the end of trials and sorrows. Every night has a morning, and, however dark it may be, we have only to wait a little while for the sun to rise, when light will chase away the gloom. Every black cloud that gathers in the sky, and blots out the blue, or hides the stars--passes away before long; and when it is gone there is no stain left on the blue, and not a star's beam is quenched or even dimmed. The longest winter that destroys all life and beauty in field, forest and garden--is sure to come to an end, giving place to the glad springtime which re-clothes the earth in verdure as beautiful as that which perished. So it is with life's pains and troubles. Sickness gives place to health. Grief, however bitter, is comforted by the tender comfort of divine love.

Sorrow, even the sorest, passes away--and joy comes again, not one glad note hushed, its music even enriched by its experience of sadness.

Thus in a Christian life--no shadow lingers long. Then it will be but a little time until all shadows shall flee away before heaven's glorious light--when forever life will go on without a pain or a sorrow!

There is another ending: we shall come to the end of life itself. We shall come to the close of our last day; we shall do our last piece of work, and take our last walk, and write our last letter, and sing our last song, and speak our last "Goodnight". Then tomorrow we shall be gone, and the places that have known us--shall know us no more. Whatever other experiences we may miss--we shall not miss dying. Every human path, through whatever scenes it may wander, must bend at last into the Valley of Shadows.

Yet we ought not to think of death as calamity or disaster; if we are Christians, it will be the brightest day of our whole life--when we are called to go away from earth--to heaven. Work will then be finished, conflict will be over, sorrow will be past, death itself will be left behind, and life in its full, true, rich meaning will only really begin!

The fragility and transitoriness of life, should lead us to be always ready for death. Though we are plainly taught by our Lord, not to worry about anything that the future may have in store for us; we are as plainly taught to live so as to be prepared for any event which may occur. Indeed, the only way to eliminate worry from our present--is to be ready for any possible future. Death is not merely a possible event--but is an inevitable event in everyone's future; we can live untroubled by dread of it--only by being ever ready for it. Preparation for death--is made by living a true Christian life. If we are in Christ by faith, and then follow Christ, doing his will day by day--we are prepared for death, and it can never surprise us unready.

True preparation for death is made, when we close each day as if it were the last. We are never sure of tomorrow; we should leave nothing incomplete any night. Each single separate little day--should be a miniature life, complete in itself, with nothing of duty left over. God gives us life by days, and with each day--he gives its own allotment of duty--a portion of his plan to be wrought out, a fragment of his purpose to be accomplished by us. Our mission is to find that bit of divine will--and do it. Well-lived days make completed years, and the years well lived as they come--make a life beautiful and full. In such a life no special preparation of any kind is needed; he who lives thus--is always ready. Each day prepares for the next, and the last day prepares for glory.

If we thus live, coming to the end of life need have no terror for us. Dying does not interrupt life for a moment. Death is not a wall cutting off the path--but a gate through which passing out of this world of shadows and unrealities--we shall find ourselves in the immediate presence of the Lord and in the midst of the glories of the eternal home!

We need have only one care--that we live well our one short life as we go on, that we love God and our neighbor, that we believe on Christ and obey his commandments, that we do each duty as it comes to our hand, and do it well. Then no sudden coming of the end will ever surprise us unprepared. Then, while glad to live as long as it may be God's will to leave us here--we shall welcome the gentle angel who comes with the golden joy to lead us to rest and home!

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