

Life's Shortness and Vanity

by Samuel Davies

Life is short and fleeting, and we should prioritize our eternal destiny over our temporal concerns.

Scripture: Matthew 10:37

Topics: "Eternal Perspective", "Mortal Life"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the shortness and vanity of life, urging listeners to live with a perspective of eternity in mind. He emphasizes the need for serious preparation for death and eternity, highlighting the insignificance of worldly affairs compared to the eternal world. Davies warns against excessive attachment to present joys, sorrows, possessions, and pleasures, urging a noble indifference to earthly matters. He calls for a focus on securing a place in heaven and avoiding the pitfalls of eternal misery, reminding listeners that the world and its pursuits are passing away, while eternity is everlasting.

Transcript

Indifference to the Things of this Present Life

--Urged from Life's Shortness and Vanity

A funeral sermon by Samuel Davies (1724-1761)

"What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on, those who have wives--should live as if they had none; those who mourn--as if they did not; those who rejoice--as though they did not rejoice; those who buy something--as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world--as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form, is passing away!" 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

A creature treading every moment upon the slippery brink of the grave, and ready every moment to shoot the gulf of eternity, and launch away to some unknown coast--ought to stand always in the posture of serious expectation; ought every day to be in his own mind taking leave of this world, breaking off the connections of his heart from it, and preparing for his last remove into that world in which he must reside, not for a few months or years as in this world--but through a boundless everlasting duration. Such a situation requires habitual, constant thoughtfulness, withdrawal from the world, and serious preparation for death and eternity.

But when we are called, as we frequently are, to perform the last sad offices to our friends and neighbors who have taken their flight a little before us; when the solemn pomp and horrors of death strike our

senses--then certainly it befits us to be unusually thoughtful and serious. Dying beds, the last struggles and groans of dissolving nature, pale, cold, ghastly corpses:

The knell, the shroud, the shovel, and the grave:

The deep damp vault, the darkness and the worm;

these are very alarming warnings of our own mortality: these out-preach the loudest preacher; and they must be senseless rocks, and not men--who do not hear and feel their voice!

Among the numberless instances of the divine skill in bringing good out of evil, this is one, that past generations have sickened and died to warn their successors. One here and there also is singled out of our neighborhood or families, and made an example to us who survive, to rouse us out of our stupid sleep, to give us the warning-signal of the approach of the last enemy, DEATH; to constrain us to let go our eager grasp of this vain world, and set us upon looking out and preparing for another world. And may I hope my hearers have come here today determined to make this improvement of this melancholy occasion, and to gain this great advantage from our loss! To this I call you as with a voice from the grave; and therefore, he who has ears to hear, let him hear!

One great reason of men's excessive attachment to the present state, and their stupid neglect of the concerns of eternity, is their forming too high an estimate of the affairs of time--in comparison with those of eternity. While the important realities of the eternal world are out of view, unthought of, and disregarded, as alas! they generally are by the most of mankind, what mighty things in their esteem, are the relations, the joys and sorrows, the possessions and bereavements, the acquisitions and pursuits of this life! What airs of importance do they put on in their esteem! How do they engross their anxious thoughts and cares, and exhaust their strength and spirits!

To be happy, to be rich, to be great and honorable, to enjoy your fill of pleasure in this world, is not this a great matter, the main interest of many of you? Is not this the object of your ambition, your eager desire and laborious pursuit? But to consume away your life in sickness and pain, in poverty and disgrace, in abortive schemes and disappointed pursuits, what a serious calamity, what a huge affliction is this in your esteem?

What is there in the compass of the universe that you are so much afraid of, and so cautiously shunning? Whether large profits or losses in trade are not a mightier matter--ask the busy, anxious merchant. Whether poverty is not a most miserable state--ask the poor that feel it, and the rich that fear it. Whether riches are not a very important happiness--ask their possessors; or rather ask the restless pursuers of them, who expect still greater happiness from them than those that are taught by experience can flatter themselves with. Whether the pleasures of the marital state are not great and desirable, consult the few happy pairs here and there who enjoy them. Whether the loss of an affectionate husband and a tender father is not a most afflictive bereavement, a torturing separation of heart from heart, or rather a tearing of one's heart in pieces--ask the mourning, weeping widow, and fatherless children, when hovering round his dying-bed, or conducting his dear remains to the cold grave.

In short, it is evident from a thousand instances--that the enjoyments, pursuits, and sorrows of this life are mighty matters! Nay, are 'all in all' in the esteem of the generality of mankind. These are the things they most deeply feel, the things about which they are chiefly concerned, and which are the objects of their strongest passions.

But is this a just estimate of things? Are the affairs of this world then indeed so crucial and all-important? Yes--if eternity is only a dream, and heaven and hell but majestic fantasies, or fairy lands; if we were always to live in this world, and had no concern with anything beyond it; if the joys of earth were the highest we could hope for, or its miseries the most terrible we could fear--then indeed we should take this present world for our all, and regard its affairs as the most important that our nature is capable of.

"But this I say, brethren," (and I pronounce it as the echo of an inspired apostle's voice), this I say, "the time is short"; the time of life in which we have anything to do with these affairs is a short, contracted span. Therefore "it remains", that is, this is the inference we should draw from the shortness of time, "those who have wives, be as though they had none; and those who weep, as though they wept not; and those who rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those who buy, as though they possessed not; and those who use this world, as not abusing it," (or using it to excess); "for the fashion of this world", these tender relations, this weeping and rejoicing, this buying, possessing, and using this world "passes away". The phantom will soon vanish, the shadow will soon fly off; and those who have wives or husbands in this transitory life, will in reality be as though they had none; and those who weep now, as though they wept not; and those who now rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and those who now buy, possess and use this world, as though they never had the least property in it. This is the solemn, sobering doctrine I am now to inculcate upon you in the further illustration of the several parts of my text; a doctrine justly alarming to the lovers of this world, and the neglecters of that life which is to come!

When Paul pronounces anything with an unusual air of solemnity and authority, and after the formality of an introduction to gain attention, it must be a matter of uncommon weight, and worthy of the most serious regard. In this manner he introduces the funeral sentiments in my text. "This I say, brethren!"; this I solemnly pronounce as the mouth of God: this I declare as a great truth but little regarded; and which therefore there is much need I should repeatedly declare; this I say with all the authority of an apostle, a messenger from heaven; and I demand your serious attention to what I am going to say!

And what is it he is introducing with all this solemn formality? Why, it is an ancient, plain, familiar truth universally known and confessed, namely, that the time of our continuance in this world is short! But why so much formality in introducing such a common, plain truth as this? Because, however generally it be known and confessed, it is very rarely regarded; and it requires more than even the most solemn address of an apostle, to turn the attention of a thoughtless world to it!

How many of you, my brethren, are convinced against your wills of this melancholy truth, and yet turn every way to avoid the sobering thought, are always uneasy when it forces itself upon your minds, and do not allow it to have a proper influence upon your temper and practice--but live as if you believed the time of your earthly life were long, and even everlasting! Oh! When will the happy hour come when you will think and act like those who believe that common, incontrovertible truth, that the time of life is short? Then you would no longer think of delays, nor contrive artifices to put off the work of your salvation; then you could not bear the thought of such negligent, or languid, feeble endeavors in a work that must be done--and that in so short a time.

"This I say, my brethren--the time is short!" The time of life is absolutely short: a span, an inch, a hair's breadth. How short the time between the cradle and the grave! How short the journey from infancy to old age, through all the intermediate stages! Let the few among you who bear the marks of old age upon you--in gray hair, wrinkles, weakness, and pains--look back upon your tiresome pilgrimage through life, and does it not appear to you, as though you commenced to live but yesterday? And how little a way can

you trace it back--until you are lost in the forgotten unconscious days of infancy, or in that eternal non-existence in which you lay before your birth! But they are but a very few, who drag on their lives through seventy or eighty years. Old men can hardly find contemporaries; a new generation has started up, and the aged have become almost strangers in their own neighborhoods. By the best calculations that have been made, at least one half of mankind die under seven years old. They are little particles of life, sparks of being just kindled--and then quenched, or rather dismissed from their suffocating confinement in clay--that they may aspire, blaze out, and mingle with their kindred flames in the eternal world, the proper region, the native element of souls.

And how strongly does the shortness of this life--prove the certainty of another life? Would it be worthwhile, should it be consistent with the wisdom and goodness of the Deity, to send so many millions of rational beings into this world--only to live the base life of a vegetable or an animal for a few moments, or days, or years--if there were no other world for these young immortals to transfer to, in which their powers might open, enlarge, and ripen? Certainly men are not such insects of a day! Certainly this present world is not the last stage of human nature! Certainly there is an eternity! There is a heaven and a hell--otherwise we might expostulate with our Maker, as David once did upon that supposition, "Why have You made all men in vain?" (Psalm 89:47).

In that solemn eternity--we must all be in a short time! Yes, my brethren, I may venture to prophesy that, in less than seventy or eighty years, the most, if not all of this assembly, must be in some dwelling of that strange untried world. The merry, unthinking, irreligious multitude in that doleful prison which I must mention, grating as the sound is to their ears--and that is hell! And the pious, penitent, believing few--in the blissful glory of heaven! There we shall reside a long, long time indeed--or rather through a long, endless eternity!

Which leads me to add,

That the time of life is short absolutely in itself, so especially it is short comparatively; that is, in comparison with eternity. In this comparison, even the long life of Methuselah and the antediluvians shrink into a mere point--a nothing! Indeed no duration of time, however long--will bear the comparison! Millions of millions of years! As many years as the sands upon the sea-shore! As many years as the particles of dust in this huge globe of earth! As many years as the particles of matter in the vaster heavenly bodies that roll above us; and even in the whole material universe--all these years do not bear so much proportion to eternity--as a moment, a pulse, or the twinkling of an eye--compared to ten thousand ages! Not so much as a hair's breadth--compared to the distance from the spot where we stand to the farthest star, or the remotest corner of creation.

In short, they do not bear the least imaginable proportion at all--for all this length of years, though beyond the power of distinct enumeration to us--will as certainly come to an end--as an hour or a moment. And when it comes to an end, it is entirely and irrecoverably past! But eternity (oh the solemn, tremendous sound!) Eternity will never, never, come to an end! Eternity will never, never, never be past!

And is this eternity, this solemn, all-important eternity, entailed upon US? Upon us, the offspring of the dust? The creatures of yesterday? Upon US--who a little while ago were less than a gnat, less than a mote--a mere nothing? Upon us who are every moment liable to the arrest of death, sinking into the grave, and moldering into dust one after another in a thick succession? Upon us whose thoughts and cares, and pursuits are so confined to time and earth, as if we had nothing to do with anything beyond? Oh! Is this

immense inheritance inalienably ours? Yes, brethren, it is! Reason and revelation prove our title beyond all dispute. Eternity is an inheritance entailed upon us, whether we want it--or not; whether we have made it our interest--or not!

To command ourselves into nothing--is as much above our power as to bring ourselves into being. Sin may make our souls miserable--but it cannot make them mortal. Sin may forfeit a happy eternity, and render our immortality a curse; so that it would be better for us if we never had been born; but sin cannot put an end to our being, as it can to our happiness, nor procure for us any relief of rest--in the hideous gulf of annihilation.

And is a little time, a few months or years, a great matter to us? To us who are heirs of an eternal duration? How insignificant is one moment--in seventy or eighty years! But how much more insignificant is even the longest life upon earth--when compared with eternity! How trifling are all the concerns of time--to those of immortality! What is it to us who are to live forever--whether we now live happy or miserable for an hour? Whether we have wives, or whether we have none; whether we rejoice, or whether we weep; whether we buy, possess, and use this world; or whether we consume away our life in hunger, and nakedness and in need of all things? It will be all the same--in a little, little time! Eternity will level all; and eternity is at the door!

And how shall we spend this eternal duration that is thus entailed upon us? Shall we sleep it away in a stupid insensibility, or in a state of indifference, neither happy nor miserable? No, no! We must spend it in the height of happiness--or in the depth of misery! The happiness and misery of the world to come--will not consist in such childish toys as those that give us pleasure and pain in this infant state of our existence--but in the most substantial realities suitable to an immortal spirit, capable of vast improvements and arrived at its adult age.

As the apostle illustrates it, we are now children, and we speak like children, we understand like children; but then we shall become men, and put away childish things (see I Corinthians 13:11). Then we shall be beyond receiving pleasure or pain, from such trifles as excite us in this present infantile state. This present world is not the place of rewards or punishments, and therefore the great Ruler of the world does not exert His perfections in the distribution of either; but eternity is allotted for that very purpose, and therefore He will then distribute rewards and punishments worthy of Himself, such as will proclaim Him as the omnipotent God in acts of grace and vengeance, just as He has appeared in all His other works. Then He will "show His wrath", and "make His power known on the vessels of wrath who have made themselves fit for destruction!" And He will "show the riches of the glory of His grace upon the vessels of mercy whom He prepared beforehand for glory!" (Romans 9:22-23).

Thus heaven and hell will proclaim God's attributes--will show Him to be the Author of their respective joys and pains, by their agreeable or terrible magnificence and grandeur. Oh eternity! With what majestic wonders are you replenished, where Jehovah acts with His own immediate hand, and displays Himself God-like and unrivaled, in His exploits both of vengeance and of grace!

In this present world, our good and evil are blended. Our happiness has some bitter ingredients, and our miseries have some agreeable mitigations. But in the eternal world, good and evil shall be entirely and forever separated! All will be pure, unmingled happiness--or pure, unmingled misery! "Then they will go away to eternal punishment--but the righteous to eternal life!" Matthew 25:46

In the present state--the holiest have not uninterrupted peace within; conscience has frequent cause to make them uneasy; some mote or other falls into its tender eye, and sets it a-weeping! And in the present state--the most wicked also have their arts to keep conscience sometimes easy, and silence its clamors. But then conscience will have its full scope. It will never more pass a censure upon the righteous, and it will never more be a friend, or even an inactive enemy to the wicked for so much as one moment! And oh what a perennial fountain of bliss--or pain will conscience then be!

One's SOCIETY contributes much to our happiness or misery. But what misery can be felt or feared--in the immediate presence and fellowship of the blessed God and Jesus (the friend of man); of angels and saints, and all the glorious inhabitants of heaven!

But, on the other hand, what happiness can be enjoyed or hoped for; and what misery can be escaped--in the horrid society of lost, abandoned devils and damned men--all dreadfully mighty and malignant, and rejoicing only in each other's misery; mutual enemies, and mutual tormentors, bound together inseparably in everlasting chains of darkness! Oh the horror of the thought!

The most terrible images which even the pencil of divine inspiration can draw, such as a lake of fire and brimstone, utter darkness, the blackness of darkness, the never-dying worm, unquenchable everlasting fire, and all the most dreadful figures that can be drawn from all parts of the universe--are not sufficient to represent the punishments of the eternal world!

And, on the other hand, "the eye", which has ranged through so many objects, "has not seen! And "the ear", which has had still more extensive intelligence, "has not heard! Neither has it entered into the heart of man", which is even unbounded in its conceptions, "the things that God has prepared for those who love Him!" The enjoyments of time fall as much short of those of eternity--as time itself falls short of eternity itself.

But what gives infinite importance to these joys and sorrows is--that they are enjoyed or suffered in the eternal world, and they are themselves eternal. Eternal joys! Eternal pains! Joys and pains that will last as long as the King eternal and immortal will live to distribute them! As long as our immortal spirits will live to feel them! Oh what joys and pains are these!

And these eternal joys or pains, my friends--are awaiting every one of us! These pleasures, or these pains--are felt this moment by all our friends and acquaintances who have died before us! And in a little, little while, you and I must feel them!

Alas! What then have we to do with time and earth? Are the pleasures and pains of this world--worthy to be compared with eternal pleasures and pains? "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" The enjoyments and sufferings, the labors and pursuits, the laughter and tears of the present state--are all nothing in comparison. What is the loss of an estate, or of a dear relative--compared to the loss of a blissful immortality?

And if our heavenly inheritance is secure--what does it matter, even if we should be reduced into Job's forlorn situation? What does it matter, even if we are poor, sickly, cancered, racked with pains, and involved in every human misery? Heaven will more than make amends for all!

But if we have no evidences of a title to heaven, the sense of these transitory distresses may be swallowed up in the fear of the horrible miseries of eternity!

Alas! What does it avail--that we play away a few years in mirth and gaiety, in grandeur and pleasure--if when these few years are fled, we lift up our eyes in hell, tormented in eternal flames! Oh what are all these transitory things--to a candidate for eternity! An heir of everlasting happiness--or everlasting misery!

It is from such convicting premises, that Paul draws his INFERENCES in my text: "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away!"

The first branch of the inference refers to the dear and tender relations that we sustain in this life. "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none." And by a symmetry of reason--those who have husbands, parents, children, or friends--as dear as their own souls--be as though they had none. Paul is far from recommending a stoic neglect of these dear relations. That he tenderly felt the sensations, and warmly recommended the mutual duties of such relations, appears in the strongest light in other parts of his writings, where he is addressing himself to husbands and wives, parents and children. But his design here is to represent the insignificance even of these dear relations, considering how short and vanishing they are--and comparing them with the infinite concerns of eternity.

These dear relations we shall be able to call our own for so short a time--that it is hardly worthwhile to esteem them ours now. The concerns of eternity are of so much greater significance, that it is very little matter--whether we enjoy these comforts or not. In a few years at most--it will be all the same! The dear ties that now unite the hearts of husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend--will be broken forever. In that world where we must all be in a little, little time--they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are in this respect like the angels. And of how small consequence is it to beings that are to exist forever in the most perfect happiness--or misery; and who must so soon break off all their tender connections with the dear creatures that were united to their hearts in the present transitory state!

Of how small importance is it to such, whether they spend a few years of their existence in all the delights of the marital state and the social life--or are forlorn, bereaved, destitute, widowed, childless, fatherless, friendless! The grave and eternity will level all these little inequalities! The dust of Job has no more sense of his past calamities, than that of Solomon who felt so few; and their immortal parts are equally happy in heaven--if they were equally holy upon earth.

And of how small consequence is it to Judas now, after he has been more than seventeen hundred years in 'his own place'--whether he died single or married, a parent or childless? These relations make no distinction in heaven or hell--unless that, as relations increase, the duties belonging to them are multiplied, and the responsibilities become the heavier--the faithful discharge of which meets with a more glorious reward in heaven; and the neglect of which suffers a severer punishment in hell.

Farther, the apostle, in saying that those who have wives should be as though they had none, intends that we should not excessively set our hearts upon any of our dearest relatives so as to tempt us to neglect the superior concerns of the world to come--or draw off our affections from God. We should always remember who it was that said, "He who loves father, or mother, or wife, or children, more than Me--is not worthy of Me!" (Matthew 10:37).

"He who is married," says Paul, in the context, "cares for the things of the world, how he may please his wife" (I Corinthians 7:33). But we should beware lest this care should run to excess, and render us careless of the interests of our souls, and the concerns of immortality. To moderate excessive care and anxiety about the things of this world--is the design the apostle has immediately in view in my text; for having taught "those that have wives to be as though they had none," etc., he immediately adds, "I want you to be free from the concerns of this life"; and this is the reason why I would have you form such an estimate of all the conditions of life, and count them as on a level. Those who have the agreeable weights of these relations, ought no more to abandon themselves to the over-eager pursuit of this world, or place their happiness in it; they ought no more to neglect the concerns of religion and eternity, than if they did not bear these relations.

The busy head of a numerous family should be as much concerned to secure his everlasting salvation, as a single man. Whatever becomes of him and his belongings in this vanishing world--he must by no means neglect to provide for his existence in the eternal world; and nothing in this world can at all excuse that neglect.

Oh, that these thoughts may deeply affect the hearts of such of us as are agreeably joined in such relations! And may they inspire us with a proper insensibility and indifference towards them--when compared with the affairs of religion and eternity! May this consideration moderate the sorrows of the mourners, on this melancholy occasion; and teach them to esteem the gain or loss of a blissful eternity--as that which should swallow up every other concern!

The next branch of the inference refers to the sorrows of life. "What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on . . . those who mourn, as if they did not." Whatever afflictions may befall us here on earth, they will not last long--but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys--or sorrows of the eternal world! These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer--than the vital breath fills our lungs! We can weep no longer--than until death stops all the fountains of our tears--and that will be in a very little time!

And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here on earth--His own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and He will comfort His mourning people. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain--than of the pains and sickness of our unconscious infancy!

But if all the discipline of our heavenly Father fails to reduce us to our duty, if we still continue rebellious and incorrigible under His rod, and consequently the miseries of this life--convey us to eternal miseries--then the smaller miseries will be swallowed up and lost in the greater--as a drop is swallowed up and lost in the ocean!

Some desperate sinners have hardened themselves in sin with this cold comfort, "That since they must be miserable hereafter, they will at least take their fill of pleasure here--and take a merry journey to hell." But alas! What a sorry mitigation will this be! How entirely will all this life of pleasure--be forgotten at the first pang of infernal anguish! Oh! What poor relief to a soul lost forever--to reflect that this eternity of pain followed upon, and was procured by--a few months or years of sordid guilty pleasure! Was that a relief or an aggravation which Abraham mentions to the rich glutton, when he puts him in mind, "Remember that in your lifetime you received your good things"? (Luke 16:25). You had then--all the share of good which you ever shall enjoy; you had your portion in that world where you chose to have it--and therefore are left to

the consequences of your own choice, and look for no other portion. Oh! Who can bear to be thus reminded and upbraided--in the midst of remediless misery!

Upon the whole, whatever afflictions or bereavements we suffer in this world--let us moderate our sorrows and keep them within proper bounds. Let them not work up and ferment into murmurings and complainings against God--who gives and takes away, as He desires. Let them not sink us into a sullen dislike of the mercies still left in our possession. How unreasonable and ungrateful, that God's retaking one of His mercies--should tempt us to despise all the rest! Take a view of the rich inventory of blessings still remaining, and you will find them much more numerous and important than those you have lost!

Do not mistake me, as if I recommended or expected an utter insensibility under the calamities of life. I allow nature its moderate tears--but let them not rise to floods of inconsolable sorrows! I allow you to feel your afflictions like men and Christians--but then you must bear them like men and Christians too. May God grant that we may all exemplify this attitude when we are put to the trial.

The third branch of the inference refers to the joys and pleasures of life. "The time is short. From now on . . . let those who rejoice--be as though they did not rejoice." That is, the joys of this life, from whatever earthly cause they spring--are so short and transitory, that they are as of no account to a being who is to exist forever; to exist forever in joys or pains of an infinitely higher and more important kind! To such a being it is an indifference whether he laughs or weeps, whether he is joyful or sad--for only a few fleeting moments. These vanishing, uncertain joys should not engross our hearts as our chief happiness; nor cause us to neglect and forfeit the divine and everlasting joys above the skies.

The pleasure we receive from any created enjoyment, should not ensnare us to make it our idol. We must not forget--that we must part with it; or to fret, and murmur, and repine, when the parting hour comes! When we are rejoicing in the abundance of earthly blessings--we should be as careful and laborious in securing the favor of God and everlasting happiness--as if we rejoiced not. If our eternal All is secure--it is enough! Heaven will not at all be heightened or diminished by the reflection that we lived a joyful or a sad life in our earthly pilgrimage.

But if we spend our immortality in eternal misery--what sorry comfort will it be that we laughed, and played, and frolicked away our few years upon earth! Years that were given us for a serious purpose--as a space for repentance and preparation for eternity! Therefore, "let those who rejoice--be as though they did not rejoice"; that is, be nobly indifferent to all the little amusements and pleasures of so short an earthly life.

And let "those who buy something--as if it were not theirs to keep." This is the fourth particular in the inference from the shortness of time, and it refers to the trade and business of life. It refers not only to the busy merchant, whose life is a vicissitude of buying and selling--but also to the farmer, the tradesman, and indeed to every person among us; for we are all carrying on a commerce, more or less, for the purposes of this life. You all buy, and sell, and exchange, in some form or other; and the things of this world are perpetually passing from hand to hand. Sometimes you have good bargains, and make large acquisitions. But do not set your hearts upon them; but in the midst of all your possessions, live as if they were not yours to keep.

Alas! Of what small account are all the things you call your own upon earth--to you who are to stay here so short a time; to you who must so soon bid an eternal farewell to them all, and go as naked out of the world as you came into it; to you who must spend an everlasting duration far beyond the reach of all these enjoyments! It is not worth your while to even call them your own--since you must so soon resign them to

other hands.

The melancholy occasion of this day may convince you, that success in trade, and plentiful estate, procured and kept by honest industry and good management, is neither a security against death, nor a comfort in it! Alas! What service can these houses and lands, and numerous servants--perform to the cold clay that molders in yonder grave, or to the immortal spirit that is fled, we know not where? Therefore buy everything--sensible that you can buy nothing upon a sure and lasting title. You can buy nothing today--that you can certainly call 'yours' tomorrow. Buy--but do not sell your hearts--for the earthly trifles you buy! Do not let them tempt you to act as if this world were your final home, or to neglect to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven; treasures which you can call your own when this world is laid in ashes, and which you can enjoy and live upon, in the eternal heavenly state--when these bodies have nothing but a coffin, a shroud, and a few feet of earth!

Finally, let "those who use the things of the world--as if not engrossed in them." This is the fifth branch of the inference from the shortness of time; and it seems to have a particular reference to such as have had such success in their pursuit of the world, that they have now retired from business, and appear to themselves to have nothing to do but enjoy the world, for which they so long toiled.

Or it may refer to those who are heirs of plentiful estates, and therefore are not concerned to acquire the world--but to use and enjoy it.

To such I say, "Use the things of the world--as if not engrossed in them!" That is, use it, enjoy it, take moderate pleasure in it--but do not abuse it by prostituting it to sinful purposes, making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, indulging yourselves in debauchery and extravagance, placing your confidence in it!

Do not be like the rich fool, who said to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy! Eat, drink and be merry!" Oh! presumptuous fool! "This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?" (Luke 12:19-20).

Do not use this world to excess (so the word may be translated), by placing your hearts excessively upon it as your favorite portion and principal happiness, and by allowing it to draw off your thoughts and affections from the superior blessedness of the world to come.

Use the world--but let it not tempt you to excess in eating, drinking, dressing, housing, or in any article of the parade of riches. True religion by no means commands a sordid, niggardly, churlish manner of living; it allows you to enjoy the blessings of life--but then it forbids all excess, and requires you to keep within the bounds of moderation in your enjoyments. Thus, "Use the things of the world--as if not engrossed in them!"

The apostle's inference is not only drawn from strong premises--but also enforced with a very weighty reason: "For this world in its present form is passing away." The whole scheme and system of worldly affairs--all this marrying and rejoicing, and weeping, and buying, and enjoying--is passing away! It is passing away this very moment! It not only WILL pass away--but even now, it IS passing away!

The 'stream of time', with all the trifles that float on it, and all the eager pursuers of these bubbles--is in motion, in swift, incessant motion to empty itself and all that sail upon it--into the shoreless ocean of eternity, where all will be absorbed and lost forever!

And shall we excessively doat upon things that are perpetually flying from us, and in a little time will be no more our property than the riches of the world before the flood? O, how long will you follow after vanity! "Why do you spend your money on what is not food, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55:2).

"For this world in its present form is passing away!" Some say that this sentence contains a fine striking allusion to the stage of a theater, and that it might be rendered, "the 'scene' of this world is passing away."

"You know," says a fine writer upon this text, "that upon the stage the actors assume imaginary characters, and appear in costumes. One acts the courage and triumph of the hero; another appears with a crown and a scepter, and struts about with all the solemnity and majesty of a prince; a third puts on the fawning smile of a courtier, or the haughtiness of a successful favorite; and the fourth is represented in the dress of a scholar or a politician. For an hour or two they act their several parts on the stage, and amuse the spectators; but the scenes are constantly shifting; and when the play is concluded, the pretended characters are laid aside, and the imaginary kings and emperors are immediately divested of their pretended authority and ensigns of royalty, and appear in their true characters.

"Just so, this world is a great stage that presents as variable scenes and actors: princes, politicians, and warriors, the rich, the learned, and the wise; and, on the other hand, the poor, weak, and despised part of mankind possess their several places on the theater. Some lurk absolutely in a corner, seldom come from behind the scenes, or creep along unnoticed. Others make a splendid show and a loud noise, are adorned with the honors of a crown, or possessed of large estates and great powers; they fill the world with the fame of their names and actions; conquer in the battle-field; or are nobly employed in the ruling of a nation.

"Well, in a little time the scene is shifted, and all these vain phantoms disappear! The 'king of terrors' clears the stage of the busy actors, strips them of all their fictitious ornaments, and ends the vain farce of life! And now, all being brought down to the same level by DEATH, they go down to the grave in their original nakedness, their carcasses are jumbled together--and they pass away as a tale that is told!

"In the Greek or Roman theaters, to which the apostle alludes, the actors frequently, if not always, came upon the stage in a disguise, with a mask--a false face, which was adapted to the different persons or characters they designed to assume; so that no actor was seen with his real face--but all put on borrowed visages. And in allusion to this, the text might be rendered, 'The masquerade of the world passes away,' pointing out the fraud and disguises which mankind put on, and the flattering forms in which they generally appear--which will all pass away, when DEATH shall pull off their mask; and they go down to the eternal world naked and exposed, and appear at the supreme tribunal in their true characters, and can no more be varnished over with fraudulent coloring!" [Dunlop's Sermons, Vol. I, pages 212-215].

Others apprehend that the apostle here alludes to some grand procession or parade, in which pageants or emblematic figures pass along the crowded streets. The staring crowd await their appearance with eager eyes, and place themselves in the most convenient posture of observation: they gape at the passing show, they follow it with a wondering gaze--and now it is past, and now it begins to look dim to the sight, and now it disappears. Just such is this transitory world! Thus it begins to attract the eager gaze of mankind; thus it marches by in swift procession from our eyes to meet the eyes of others--and thus it soon vanishes and disappears!

And shall we always be stupidly staring upon this empty parade--and forget that world of substantial realities to which we are hastening? No! Let us live and act as aspirants of that eternal world, and as having nothing to do with this passing world--but only as a school, a state of discipline, to educate and prepare us for eternity!

Oh! That I could successfully impress this exhortation upon all your hearts! Oh! That I could prevail upon you all this day to break off your over-fond attachment to this fleeting earth--and to make preparation for immortality! Could I bring this point home to you--it would be a greater advantage than all the dead could receive from any funeral eulogies from me. I speak for the advantage of the living upon such occasions, and not to celebrate the virtues of those who have already passed earth's trial--and received their sentence from the supreme Judge. And I am well satisfied the mourning relatives of our deceased friend, who best knew and esteemed his worth, would rather be offended than pleased--if I should prostitute the present hour to so base a purpose.

Indeed, many a character less worthy of praise, often makes a shining figure in funeral sermons. Many who have not been such tender husbands, such affectionate fathers, such kind masters, such sincere, upright friends, so honest and punctual in trade, such zealous lovers of true religion and godly men--have had their putrefying remains perfumed with public praise from a place so solemn as the pulpit! But you can witness for me, it is not my usual manner to run to this extreme. My business is with you--who are as yet alive to hear me. To you I call, as with the voice of your deceased friend and neighbor: "Prepare! Prepare for eternity!"

Oh! If the souls that you once knew, while clothed in flesh, should take my place, would not this be their united voice, "Prepare, prepare for eternity, you frail short-lived mortals! You close neighbors of death and eternity! You borderers upon heaven and hell--make ready, loosen your hearts from earth, and all that it contains! Weigh anchor, and prepare to launch away into the boundless ocean of eternity--which is now within your sight, and roars within your hearing!"

This I say, brethren, with great confidence, "The time is short! From now on, those who have wives--should live as if they had none; those who mourn--as if they did not; those who rejoice--as though they did not rejoice; those who buy something--as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world--as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form," in all its schemes of affairs, in all its vain parade, all the futile farce of life, "is passing away!" And away let it pass--if we may at last obtain a better country; that is, a heavenly one! Which may God grant, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/samuel-davies/lifes-shortness-and-vanity/>

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