

Until My Change Comes

by Thomas Watson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living in hope and patience until death, when we will experience a great change, and encourages believers to labor for a holy change and get grace into their souls.

Scripture: Job 14:14, Psalm 89:48, Psalm 104:23, Mark 9:44, 2 Timothy 2:3, 2 Timothy 4:8, Hebrews 2:10, Hebrews 9:27, Revelation 9:6, Revelation 18:22

Topics: "Mortal Life", "Eternal Reward"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches on the importance of understanding the brevity and challenges of life, likening it to a day with its shortness, vicissitudes, labor, and irreversibility, urging believers to not be overly attached to worldly things. He emphasizes that the Christian life is a constant warfare involving hardships, watchfulness, and combat, with Jesus Christ as the Captain and the promise of a glorious reward. Watson also delves into the preordination of each person's life by God, cautioning against delaying repentance and encouraging courage in fulfilling God's will. Lastly, he discusses the certainty and significance of the change that death brings, contrasting the dreadful change for the wicked with the glorious change for the godly, urging all to prepare for this inevitable transition with a holy change and a continual expectation of eternity.

Transcript

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"All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change comes." Job 14:14

This book relates the history of Job's sufferings. He was a tall cedar in grace--yet this cedar grew in a valley of tears. True religion gives no charter of exemption from trouble. Job's trials were so sharp that he began to grow weary of life and was willing to be gone. Job 14:13, "O, that You would hide me in the grave!" This holy man was much afflicted in his meditations of his end. He walked among the tombs and walked into his grave before it was dug, and by frequent thoughts labored to make death familiar to him. "All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes."

The text is a large field. I shall only, as I pass along, pluck some few ears of corn.

In the words there are three general parts observable:

1. A description of life, "all my days."
2. The determination of life, "my appointed time."
3. A holy resolution, "I will wait until my change comes."
1. Here is a DESCRIPTION of life, "all my days."

DOCTRINE. Job does not measure his life by years but by days.

Nay, he calls life 'a day' in verse 6 of this chapter. Man's life very much resembles a day in four respects.

1. Life is like a day for the shortness of it. "Men dream of a long life," said Augustine. Men think of such a thing as an earthly eternity--but it is a short day. Infancy is a daybreak; youth is sunrise; full growth is the sun in its meridian; old age is sunset; sickness is evening, and then comes the night of death! Life is a day, and is it so short? Is it but a day? We rather lose time--than live it!

2. Life is like a day for the vicissitudes that are in it. A day has much alteration and change of weather. The morning that shows bright and clear--may at noon show black clouds and rain. One part of the day is calm and serene; the other part of it is blustering and windy. Such is our life. It is like a day. What change of weather is there in man's life? What sudden alterations fall out? Sometimes health, sometimes sickness, sometimes prosperity, and sometimes adversity. Here is change of wealth. Sometimes we see the white lily of peace; sometimes again the red rose of a bloody war appears. Here is change of weather.

3. Life is a day for labor. The day is the time for working, Psalm 104:23. The sun rises and man goes forth to his work. Death is a sleeping time for the body. Life is a working time. A Christian has no time to lie fallow. Philippians 2:12, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." John 9:4, "Work while it is day." Still there is some work to do--either some sin to mortify or some grace to exercise.

4. And last, if a day is once past, you can never call that day again. So once this day of life is past and gone, you cannot call it back.

USE. The thought that our life is but a day, may serve to cool the intemperate heat of our affection for earthly things. We should not be greatly raised in the enjoyment of them, nor much dejected in the lack of them. These worldly comforts are not to be with us long--only a few days. Nay, it is but a day. Why, then, should we be too much taken up with them? Our life being so transient, made up of a few flying minutes, should much abate our affections for all things under the sun. I read that Abraham bought a burying place, Genesis 49:30. The longest possession we have here on earth is the possession of a burying place. So much for the first particular, a description of life; it is not measured by years but days. Nay, it is shorter; it is but a day.

2. The second thing in the text is the DETERMINATION of a man's life in these words, "my appointed time," or "the days of my appointed time." The Hebrew has a double significance:

1. It signifies the length of our warfare, "the days of my warfare." Hence note this--the Christian's life here on earth is nothing other than warfare. 1 Timothy 1:18, "That you might war a good warfare." It is not an easy life, a life of sloth and pleasure; it is warfare, "all the days of my warfare." A Christian's life is a warfare in three respects--in respect of hardship, watchfulness, and combat.

First, in respect of hardships. A soldier endures much hardship. He does not have his soft bed nor his dainty fare--but goes through many a tedious march. Such is a Christian's life. 2 Timothy 2:3, "You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." "We must not be," as Tertullian said, "silken Christians--but should expect to wrestle with difficulties."

Second, a Christian's life is a warfare in respect of watchfulness. We must stand sentinel and be ever upon our guard. The soldier gets up into the watchtower and sends out his scouts lest the enemy should surprise him. It was Christ's watchword in Mark 13:37, "I say unto you all, Watch!" A subtle deceitful heart needs a watchful eye. Watch lest sin decoys you. Watch lest Satan falls upon you when you are asleep on your guard. When you have been praying against sin--then you must watch against temptation.

Third, a Christian's life is a warfare for combat. All of us come into the world, as into a battlefield. We stand just as the Jews did in Nehemiah 4:17, "Everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and in the other hand held a weapon." Just such is our military posture, working and fighting in order to get this holy victory. We must get our spiritual armor ready--the breastplate of holiness which can never be shot through; and having gotten this armor and the shield of faith in our hands, we must now do battle with our spiritual enemies. 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight of faith." Yes, and we must maintain a combat with the flesh, and with our enemy, Satan.

To encourage us in this warfare, consider these two things:

We have a good captain--Jesus Christ. He is called the captain of our salvation, Hebrews 2:10. Christ not only leads us in our march and gives us skill to fight--but He gives us strength also. A captain may give his soldiers armor--but he cannot give them strength to fight--but Christ does. Isaiah 41:10, "I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you!"

To encourage us in this warfare against sin and Satan, having overcome our ghastly enemy--we shall have a glorious recompense of reward. "Henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness," 2 Timothy 4:8. A crown is not fit for everyone; a crown is not fit for every head--but only for princes, kings, and people of renown. After our combat with sin and Satan, God will call us out of the battlefield where the bullets of temptation flew so fast--and will give us a victorious crown. Then there will be no more battle--but there shall be music--not the drum and the cannon--but the violin and the harp! Revelation 14:2.

USE. Is life a warfare? How unworthy and blamable, are those who have no spiritual artillery, nor battle against their spiritual enemies? They spend their time dressing themselves but do not put on their holy armor. They spend their days in mirth, as if their lives were rather for dancing, than for battle.

I have read of a king who would have no man's name written upon his tomb-stone, but only he who died manly in war. God writes no man's name in the Book of Life but such as die in this holy war, who die in battle fighting this good fight of faith.

2. Let us consider this word in the text in the other meaning, "the days of my appointed time." Hence observe:

DOCTRINE. God has preordained the time and length of every man's life.

Job 14:5, "Man's days are determined; You have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed." God, who numbers our hairs--numbers our days. He has entered down in His decree how long our lives shall last; and we shall not live one minute beyond the prefixed time. Therefore, do not say,

"If such an accident had not happened--my friend would not have died so soon."

OBJECTION. But is it not said in Ecclesiastes 7:17, Do not be over-wicked, and do not be a fool--why die before your time?"

ANSWER. There is a general time of life and there is a limited time of life. There is a general time, with regard to the course of nature, and there is a limited time with regard to God's decree, how long such a person shall live. Now a man who dies young or dies a violent death, dies before his time with regard to the course of nature; but he does not die before the time that God has limited and appointed.

USE. This should admonish us all to beware of adjourning and putting off our repentance. Our days are certain to God--but they are uncertain to us. The Lord alone, knows how long our hour-glass will be running. For all we know, there are but a few sands more to run. Life may expire in an instant. When we breath out--we never know whether we will ever take a breath in again. It is true, Hezekiah had a lease sealed him of fifteen years--but we have no such lease. We may die at any time. Our length of life is known to God--but not to us. Take heed, therefore, of procrastinating and delaying. Death may be sent to any of you this night. God may say, "Give an account of your stewardship!"

Is the time of our life appointed and the number of our days set? Why then, this should teach us courage for God. Be not fearful of doing your duty--to own His cause in an idolatrous generation, to vindicate God's truth wherein His glory is concerned. The text says that our time is appointed. Men can take away our liberty when they will--but they shall not touch a hair of our heads until God's time has come. This made our blessed Savior so zealous for His Father's honor, so sharp in His reproof against sin. Why was Christ so courageous? John 8:20, He knew that hour was not yet come. Christ knew full well that all His enemies could not take away His life until the time was come which His Father had appointed. This should make us courageous.

3. The third thing in the text is Job's holy resolution. "I will wait until my change comes." That is, I will wait until death comes. Hence note:

DOCTRINE. Death, whenever it comes, makes a great change.

First, this change that death will make is a certain change; there is no avoiding it. Psalm 89:48, "No one can live forever; all will die. No one can escape the power of the grave!" Hebrews 9:27, "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after that to face judgment." It is neither strength, nor courage, nor any worldly grandeur--which can exempt from death. Death's sword cuts asunder the royal scepter. The godly must die as well as others. Though death does not destroy the treasure of grace--yet death breaks the vessel that this treasure is in. Pliny speaks of a golden vine that is not subject to storms. The body of a saint, when glorified, shall be like that golden vine; but now it is a withering vine and is soon blasted by death. We are not so sure to lie down in our beds--as we are to lie down in our graves.

Second, the change that death makes is a visible change. How strangely is the body altered at death. One scarcely knows their friends, they are so disfigured by death! The eyes are hollow, the jaws are fallen; death carries away all the goodly spoil of beauty. It changes a living body into a foul carcass, Psalm 39:11, "You make his beauty to consume like a moth." Take a body of the finest spinning, the lily and the purple, white and ruddy. Once death like a moth gets into it, it consumes all the luster and glory of it. Death puts the body into a very frightful state, that nothing can desire it, but worms!

Third, the change that death makes is often a very sudden change. Death steals upon some unawares. I have read of one who was suddenly choked with the seed of a grape. What quick dispatch do several distempers make! Death oftentimes strikes and gives no warning.

Fourth, and last, the change that death makes is an unalterable change. As the tree falls, so it lies to eternity. Death is a change that puts us into an unchangeable condition.

Application. See what a different change death makes to the righteous and to the wicked. Both are changed at death--but there is a vast difference.

1. Death makes a dreadful change to the wicked! To them--death is a trap door to let them down to hell. There are some wicked who live here in gallantry and splendor, who are clothed in purple and fare deliciously every day; oh--but when death comes they will find an alteration! Death will throw the wicked down from the top of the pinnacle of their honor! I allude to Revelation 18:22, "The voice of the harper shall be heard no more in you."

There is a river in America that runs in the day--but at night it is dried up. So these pleasures that now run in the lifetime in a flowing stream shall all, at the night of death, be dried up. Nor will the ungodly only lose their sugared things. But here is their misery--their souls must be steeped in the flames of hell, Mark 9:44, where the worm never dies! Such a fire is kindled in God's anger--that no tears can quench it, nor can any time finish it.

We read of the servant under the Law that, if he had a hard master--yet at the end of seven years there was a jubilee, a year of release when the servant might go from him. But in hell's torments there is no year of jubilee, Revelation 9:6. Men shall seek death and shall not find it. If a spark of God's anger falling into a man's conscience is so full of torture in this life, oh, then, how terrible will it be to have the fire of God's wrath to lie in forever! Thus you see death will be a sad change to the unrighteous. Therefore, surely the very thoughts of death must be terrible to a wicked man.

2. Death will be a glorious change to all the godly. They shall have their fetters of sin knocked off, and shall drink of the rivers of pleasure. Oh, blessed change! From a weary pilgrimage--to a blessed paradise; from labor--to eternal rest. In short, death to a child of God is a friend. Death is a pale horse to carry a believer home to his Father's house! Death gives a full possession of glory. A believer now has a right to heaven; but at death he takes possession of heaven!

Death pulls down this old building, this house of clay, and prepares for the soul a better house--a house not made with hands. Oh, blessed change to the righteous! And this may be a comfort in the death of Christian friends. Whenever they are changed by death they are sure to change for the better; they go instantly into a blessed eternity!

Use of Exhortation.

Does death make such a change, a certain change, a visible change and, sometimes, an unalterable change? Let us all labor to be fitted for this great change. It is a very sad thing--to have the grave ready for us and us not ready for the grave. When death surprises the unprepared soul, what a condition will he be in! He will say as those, "Oh, death! I beg you, let me be excused one day more, one hour more, to prepare myself." But death will neither be bribed nor courted.

Unprepared souls will curse the day of their death. Oh, then, be fitted for this last end! And for the purpose, labor for a holy change. Get grace into your souls. Death cannot hurt grace. Grace can never be shot through. Grace is as needful for the soul as oil is for the lamp. Christians, get holy hearts. Be as Christ's bride, get yourselves ready. Dress yourselves every day by the glass of God's Word. See your spots in a looking-glass, and, when you have seen them, wash them off by repenting tears. Adorn the hidden man of your hearts with love, meekness, and holiness, and put on the Lord Jesus, which is your clothing of wrought gold. By having this holy change wrought, you will be fitted for your last and great change.

To conclude all--live in a continual expectation of this great change. So did Job in the text, "I will wait until my change comes." First, live in hope until this change comes. Second, be patient until this change comes.

First, live in hope until this change comes. The word in the text is "I will wait." In the Hebrew it is "I will hope until my change comes." The farmer, having sown his seed, hopes for a crop. Having sown the seed of true repentance, he now hopes for a full crop of glory at death.

Second, and last, be patient until this change comes. "I will wait," said Job. In the Greek it is "I will be patient until my change comes."

Indeed, the troubles that the righteous suffer here, and that great preferment they shall have in heaven, may be ready to cause impatience to stay here any longer. But take heed of this. We must not be our own carvers. God knows the best season when He will bring His children home. Therefore we must wait but a while. Then we shall enjoy our wish, and that is to have Christ's sweet embraces, and to lie in the bosom of divine love!

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