

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

HOW MUCH TIME DO I HAVE?

The patient left the doctor's office with a mixture of strange emotions stirring within him. Anger, resentment, fear, hope, disbelief, amazement, surprise, and a feeling of utter helplessness fill his mind. He was weak and sat down on a nearby park bench. He recalled again the doctor's grave expression as he spoke the terrible words that seemed to beat into his brain like the blows of a sledge hammer. "You have only a few months to live."

The doctor's words have been spoken time and again to men and women just like you and me, people who have been happy and busy with the activities of life one day, only to learn the next day that life on earth for them was to end shortly, much sooner than expected!

None of us knows the day or the hour of our demise. With some of us, it may come swiftly and soon. With others, the day of departure from this mortal life may be in the distant future.

But to all of us, sooner or later, death will come! The inspired Book of God says, "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Long ago the patriarch said, "*Man that is born of woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not*" (Job 14:1-2). The inspired writer, James, said, "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (James 4:13-14).

What if you knew that you had but a few months left to live? What would you do? Would your priorities change? Would the way you spend your time be different? What would you leave undone, knowing that you would not have time to accomplish all that you had planned to do in your lifetime? What things would you do that you had neglected to do for "lack of time?" It might be well for all of us to ask ourselves these questions.

One of the most frequent excuses that we hear from people who neglect their spiritual lives and their service to God is "I don't have time." But God has put twenty-four hours in every day, seven days in every week. None of us has more or less of this time than any other. I have all the time there is to be had in any one day, or in any one week. So do you!

Why is it that some people are able to rear a family, make a living, have time for rest and recreation, and still find time to study the Bible daily, and teach others the way of salvation, but others can't seem to find any time to give to the Lord other than "going to church" occasionally—and some don't even do that!

Most of us find time to do the things we really desire to do! Isn't this really the heart of the matter? We don't find time to study the Bible or teach others because there are some other things we would rather do and we put these other things first. Remember that Jesus said, "...seek ye first the kingdom of God..." (Matthew 6:33).

The following time chart shows the usual way the "average" person spends his time. There will be slight deviations from this with most of us, but basically the chart will fit. There are 168 hours in every week.

These 168 hours are used up as follows:

- 40 hours **work**.
- 56 hours **sleep**.
- 7 hours **eating**.

WHAT EFFORT TOWARDS THE END?

Text: _____

I. There was Proper _____

Notes:

II. There was Proper _____

Notes:

III. There was Proper _____

Notes:

IV. There was Proper _____

Notes:

THE TRIP

One day, the father of a very wealthy family took his son on a trip to the country with the express purpose of showing him how poor people live. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a very poor family.

On their return from their trip, the father asked the son, "How was the trip?"

"It was great, Dad."

"Well, did you see how poor people live?" the father asked.

"Oh yeah," said the son.

"So, tell me, what did you learn from the trip?"

The son answered: "I saw that we have one dog and they had four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden and they have the stars as night. Our patio reaches to the front yard and they have the whole horizon. We have a small piece of land to live on and they have fields that go beyond our sight. We have servants who serve us, but they serve others. We have walls around our property to protect us, they have friends to protect them." The boy's father was speechless.

Then his son added, "Thanks Dad for showing me how poor we are." Isn't perspective a wonderful thing? Makes you wonder what would happen if we all gave thanks for everything we have, instead of worrying about what we don't have.

- 7 hours **traveling, dressing, bathing, etc.**
- 10 hours **shopping, gardening, business, etc.**
- 21 hours **watching TV, reading, sports.**

How do we spend the other 27 hours in the week? Are all of the above hours well spent? It is a question that each person must answer for himself, and then he must be prepared to give an account for his answer to the Lord (II Corinthians 5:10).

It has been well said, "If one is too busy to serve God, he is **too** busy!" Despite how busy we feel we are in the activities of this world, there are some things that we won't be too busy for! None of us will be too busy to die! When the Grim Reaper pays us a visit, we will have no choice but to hearken to his call. None of us will be too busy to meet the Lord when He comes again! Both the living and the dead will face the awe inspiring moment! (John 5:28-29; I Thessalonians 4:14-5:11; II Thessalonians 1:7-9). None of us will be too busy to give an account of our lives when He calls us to Judgment! (Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 14:12).

How much time do you give to the Lord? If you knew that your death was to come shortly, would you give the Lord more time than you do now? If so, shouldn't you do it now since none of us has the assurance of tomorrow anyway?

Have you found time to obey the gospel of Christ? Or, have you been too busy with other things? Perhaps, like Felix, you are waiting for "a more convenient season" (Acts 24:25). For many, that "more convenient season" will never come! "...*behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation*" (II Corinthians 6:2). This very day you need to **believe** in Jesus Christ, God's Son, who died for your sins; **repent** of your sins, **confess** your faith in Christ as God's Son, and be **buried with Him in baptism** so that your sins will be washed away by his blood (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Acts 8:37; Acts 2:38).

An unknown poet has summed up the point of our exhortation in the following lines:

"The clock of life is wound but once
And no man has the power
To tell just when the hand will stop—
At late or early hour.

Now is the only time you won!
Live, love, toil with a will;
Place not faith in 'tomorrow'
For the clock may then be still."

-Rodney V. Rutherford

BETWEEN THE BOOKS

Between the books of Malachi and Matthew lie a period of some four hundred years of scriptural silence. However, though the page between the two is blank, there was a legion of activity occurring that completely changed the face of the earth from the time Malachi wrote to the time Christ was born.

In the time of Malachi, the nation of Medo-Persia had already risen to great prominence in the world. They had conquered Babylon some one hundred years earlier, sending the Jews home, but their conquest of the world did not stop there. Cyrus, before his death, had set his eyes on and captured the Greek coastal cities along Asia Minor; and after his death the nation went on to take Egypt under the leadership of Cyrus' son, Cambyses. However, it was after the death of Cambyses that Persia began to wither from within.

Following the rule of Cambyses, a man named Darius usurped the throne, and to avoid division among the people he adopted strict and cruel punishments for any who tried to rebel. This harsh treatment, though effective in scaring the people into submission, never resulted in allegiance to Darius. What did result was contempt on the part of the people and inability to unite the vast Persian empire on the part of Darius. The Greeks and Egyptians both eventually revolted against Persia, loosening her hold on them both. Shortly thereafter Darius died.

From Darius' reign on, Persia was never the same again. Following Darius as king, eleven others sat on the Persian throne, concluding with Darius III who reigned from 335-331 B.C. It was in the same year, however, that Darius III came to power that in faraway Macedonia another young man rose to prominence among his people named Alexander, son of Philip of Macedon, and soon to be ruler of Greece. Alexander was educated under the renowned scholar Aristotle, and by the age of eighteen he already controlled the left arm of the Greek army. It was, however, just three years later that Philip was killed and the kingship fell upon Alexander. Because of Persia's control of certain Grecian city-states, Greece had never had a united government; and Philip's goal had been to form a league of Greek nations to unite all of Greece. Dying before his plan could be accomplished, Alexander made it his priority. In 333 B.C., Alexander led Greek forces to victory over Darius and Persia at Issus, and then two years later Persia fell for good, bringing world power to the Greek empire and earning Alexander the title "the Great."

For twelve to thirteen years, Alexander ruled Greece in a masterful way. The empire expanded and Greek culture permeated the society, especially in Palestine. Of the many rewards of Greek culture was namely a universal language. Greek quickly became the vernacular of daily conversation, and when the church was established that universal language contributed to the ability of the gospel to reach across the inhabited world. Alexander ruled Greece until in 323 B.C. he set sail on a voyage around Arabia and died of a serious fever before returning. He was just thirty-three years of age. His only son was born after he died, and thus no heir was of age to take control immediately. A struggle for power between Alexander's seven generals lasted for seven years, and finally in 315 B.C. four of them solidified power in four regions of Greece: Ptolemy, Lysimachus, Seleucus, and Cassander.

Over the next few decades these groups warred among themselves passing control of Palestine, including Jerusalem, from one to another. It was during the Seleucids' control of Palestine, though, that a king named Antiochus IV Epiphanes went on a rampage in Jerusalem, defiling the temple and slaughtering untold numbers of Jews. Due to the spread of Greek culture, which many believed to be an attack on Judaism, and Antiochus' cruelty, a group of Jews arose to defend their ancestral faith. This group, called the Hasidim, began what is referred to as the Maccabean revolt around 170 B.C. Without going into too much detail, a dispute over the priesthood saw the Maccabean control give way to a group known as the Hasmoneans. Then it was around 40 B.C. when an inward dispute between the Pharisees and their leader and the Sadducees and their leader weakened Jerusalem leading Pompey, the general of the Roman army, to intervene, and seeing an opportunity he besieged Jerusalem, bringing them under Rome's power. Thus begins the New Testament with Palestine controlled by Rome with Herod the Great as governor of Judea, and the one responsible for killing countless babies in an attempt to dispose of the Christ.

With the progression of Babylon giving way to Persia, Persia giving way to Greece, and Greece giving way to Rome, Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the great image and the explanation given by Daniel (Daniel 2) was fulfilled. It would be in the days of the Roman kings that "*the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever*" (Daniel 2:44). The fullness of time was about to come. God's eternal plan was unfolding perfectly. The setting is right and the circumstances are as expected. Now enters, Jesus Christ.

-Andy Brewer