

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for  
Sunday, 28 November 2021**

# Children's Talk: Good Things on Normal Days

- We're talking today about eternity.
  - Do you know what that word means?
  - Another word we might use is "forever".
- Do you like it when things last forever?
  - It depends on what it is, doesn't it?
  - Sometimes it's terrible.
    - If we want something to be done but it's taking a long time then we say, "It's taking forever!"
    - Or if we have to wait a long time to get something that we want, then it feels like it takes forever to get there.
      - It can feel like it's taking forever to get to the school holidays, or to get to Christmas, or to get to your birthday, or to get to snack time or screen time in a day.
  - And sometimes it can feel like you've got all this boring time and nothing to do with it and only a few good times.
    - And so we can feel anxious and upset.
  - Other people feel like they never have enough time.
    - They've got all of these things that they have to do and have to get done and so they're always running and doing and they feel like they never have the chance to stop and have some fun.
    - And so they feel anxious and upset about that.
- The Lord talked to people about feeling anxious or worried.
- Here's part of what He said:
  - Matthew 6:31-34 (NKJV, modified)
    - <sup>31</sup> "[D]o not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added to you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own evil.
- Now, maybe, like me, you're lucky enough that you haven't had to worry about having enough to eat, or to drink, or to wear.
  - But I'm guessing that you have had times of worrying about having enough good or fun or interesting things in your life.
    - "Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things."
  - And the Lord has something to help you when you're feeling anxious because you don't have enough good things in your life or when you feel like you don't have enough time.
    - He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added to you."
    - And He says, "Do not be anxious about tomorrow...."
    - And, actually in the same chapter, He taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer and say, "Give us this day our daily bread."

- Let's talk about how these teachings from the Lord can help us.
    - Picture your life like this piece of string.
    - And picture a couple of spots on it for things that you like, like Christmas or your birthday, or going on holiday.
      - There is a lot of time that is not those things.
      - If we think we can only be happy on those days, then we're going to have a pretty hard time.
        - But we can actually pray for the Lord to give us good things on every single other day—that's what it means to ask the Lord to "give us this day our daily bread".
          - We're saying, "Lord, please give me good things to help me get through today.
          - So that November 28<sup>th</sup> (today) can also be a good day, not just December 25<sup>th</sup>.
            - And also next Wednesday afternoon, when you're feeling overwhelmed or feeling bored, you can also ask the Lord to give you some good things to get through the afternoon.
- How might the Lord do that?
  - We might want Him to make every day like Christmas or our birthday but that actually wouldn't be good.
  - Imagine if every day you got new toys, and special food, and had a party.
    - That would be too much.
  - And the Lord says that all of those things aren't actually what's going to make you happy.
    - He said that we should instead, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His justice...."
    - That means that, on a random Wednesday afternoon or after church today or whenever, we should try to focus on what we can do to make things a bit more like heaven.
- You can ask the Lord, "Lord, how can I make things a bit more how you want them to be?"
- There are many different things that could look like.
  - It could be by doing something to help someone else or by doing something for them.
  - It could be by taking some time by yourself.
  - It could be by taking a few minutes to think of things that you're grateful for.
  - It could be by doing the work to think of something that you would enjoy doing and then inviting other people to do it with you.
  - It could be by trying to think about what might be fun for someone else to do and then inviting them to do that with you.
- We don't need to worry about tomorrow—we can just work on doing what the Lord would want us to do right now.
- And then we won't just have a few good days in our year, we will have an eternity of days with lots of good things in them from the Lord.
- *Amen.*

# An Eternal Perspective

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith  
28 November 2021

## Intro

- Psalm 103:15-16 (NKJV, modified)
  - <sup>15</sup> As for man, his days are like grass;  
As a flower of the field, so he flowers.
  - <sup>16</sup> For the wind passes through it, and it is gone,  
And its place remembers it no more.
  
- I used those lines from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm some years ago as part of my words to a couple at their wedding.
  - Maybe that doesn't feel like the right quote to use for a wedding talk but it felt fitting to me.
  - So much about a wedding day is temporary—the flowers, the decorations, the food, even the people, in one sense.
    - I remember my mom once commenting that, as you look back on your wedding photos, and as more and more time passes, more and more of the people who are in the photos and who were there on the day are people who have since passed on into the spiritual world.
  - And even the couple getting married don't stay the same as they are on their wedding day.
    - And so I talked to the couple about this.
  
- Here's a bit of what I said to them.
  - Today, we will focus on how things are today.
    - We'll take lots of photographs of how you look today and what happened today.
    - We'll hear some the fun stories about what brought you guys to this point—who you are as individuals today and how great you are as a couple today.
      - And that's great and awesome and so worth celebrating with a big party.
  - And a lot of that is likely to change—who you are as a person, what you are like as a couple.
    - And that can be scary to think about.
      - Because things are good now we can feel like we need to lock them in that way so as to ensure that they'll stay good forever.
      - Or we can want to shut our eyes and plug our ears and just pretend that things are going to stay the same forever.
  - But, on the other hand, it would be awful if things did *not* change.
    - To stay exactly the same—even for a week—would be really unpleasant.
    - Thank the Lord that He set things up so that we're not static—we can change and grow and develop.
    - So instead, open your eyes, soak it in.
      - Know that this current moment is beautiful and real and fleeting.

- And know that there will be lots more beautiful and fleeting moments in the future of your marriage.
  - Within a few years you'll hopefully have the experience of holding and looking at your newborn child together.
  - In 20 years or 50 years you may find yourselves holding hands while one of you is in a hospital bed and in that moment maybe you'll think back on today.
    - And that moment will be hard and beautiful and fleeting too.
    - "As a flower of the field, so he flowers."
- And then I moved on to talking to them about how certain things can last, despite all that change, one of them being their commitment to the promises that they had just made on that day to each other and to the Lord.
- Anyway, as I was reflecting on what to preach about this week that scripture again felt fitting to me.
  - We're coming up on the end of another year—another hard year for a lot of people.
  - And it's a very busy and stressful time of year for a lot of people—"silly season".
  - As I felt myself getting overwhelmed by the busyness of it all I found myself wanting a chance to breathe—to zoom out, to rise above it all for a little while.
  - So we're going to try to do that a little bit today.
    - We're going to try to get a glimpse of the bigger picture—a more eternal perspective.
    - We're going to try to think about our lives and what's going on in them a bit more from the perspective of our everlasting, ever-present, ever-loving God.
- In particular we're going to talk about the value of the perspective that life is fleeting.
  - And then the value of the perspective that life is forever.

## **Life is Fleeting**

- There is something that feels very fitting about the way scripture compares the fleeting nature of human life to the blooming of a flower.
- I love it when flowers bloom.
  - We're just finishing up with the weeks of the year when the jacarandas bloom and I find it breathtaking each year.
    - I can still hardly believe that you can have a whole tree be violet like that.
    - It's breathtaking and then it's gone.
- And people's lives can be breathtakingly beautiful too—whether they're here for two years or ninety-two years.
  - And then they go.
- And when you have someone you love pass away it can make all of human life on this planet seem rather fragile and fleeting.
  - It makes you want to hold the people you love a bit closer and treasure your time with them a bit more.
- And that's one of the values, I find, in reflecting on how fleeting life in the natural world is.
  - It can soften me.

- It can change how I interact with people who annoy me or upset me.
  - Because, especially when things are busy and stressful, it's easy for relatively little things to get on my nerves.
    - One of my kids being rude.
    - Someone driving badly.
  - But, if I can hold onto how fleeting life is, then it makes me more inclined to give my rude kid a hug than a smack.
  - And it can make me feel a bit more understanding for the stupid driver on the road.
    - Who knows what things are going on in their life that means that they're driving badly?
- I'm not saying that remembering that life is fleeting should make us all pushovers who don't hold people accountable for their actions but it can somehow shift how we're holding the interaction.
  - Often I need something to just dislodge me from my default, instinctive reaction to the situation.
  - And remembering that this other person and I are both fragile human beings living short lives on this little rock hurtling through space and remembering that theoretically either one of us could die at any moment, that somehow changes how I hold the interaction with them.
- I like picturing each of our lives as a little piece of string.
  - This string is 1 metre long—100 centimetres for 100 years of life.
    - Here I am at between 30 and 40 centimetres of my life and maybe the person I'm interacting with has only lived for 10 centimetres of their life.
    - Or maybe they're much older than I am and maybe they've only got 10 centimetres or less of their life left.
  - Do I really need to chew them out?
- Remembering the fleeting nature of human life can help to shift our priorities.
- We can see that clearly from another place in scripture that talks about human life being like a flower: Isaiah chapter 40.
  - This is the chapter where we hear this familiar prophecy:
    - Isaiah 40:3-4 (NKJV, modified)
      - <sup>3</sup> The voice of one crying in the wilderness:  
 "Prepare the way of Jehovah;  
 Make straight in the desert  
 A highway for our God.
      - <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be exalted  
 And every mountain and hill brought low;  
 The crooked places shall be made straight  
 And the rough places smooth....
  - In symbolic language that's talking about a big change of priorities that will allow for the Lord to come into our lives.
    - Things that are low priorities being elevated.
    - And things that are high priorities being brought low.

- And then we hear what the voice in the wilderness is meant to cry out to cause this seismic shift.
  - Isaiah 40:6-8 (NKJV, modified)
    - 6 The voice said, “Cry out!”  
And he said, “What shall I cry?”  
“All flesh is grass,  
And all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
    - 7 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
Because the breath of Jehovah blows upon it;  
Surely the people are grass.
    - 8 The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the Word of our God shall rise up to eternity.”
  
- Acknowledging that we are like grass that withers and flowers that fade is part of what can prepare the way of the Lord into our lives.
- Then we can see that the Lord our God is the only one with any real staying power.
  - He’s the only one who can be relied upon from generation to generation.
  - It is His Word that will last to eternity.
  
- And after it describes what it takes to *prepare* the way of the Lord, then it talk about what the Lord will be like when He comes and He will come with strength but also gentleness.
  - Isaiah 40:10-11 (NKJV, modified)
    - 10 Behold, the Lord Jehovih shall come with a strong hand,  
And His arm shall rule for Him;  
Behold, His reward is with Him,  
And His work before Him.
    - 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd;  
He will gather the lambs with His arm,  
And carry them in His bosom,  
And gently lead those who are with young.
  
- Maybe we can try to better imitate our Creator and approach whatever situations we’re dealing with at the end of this year with strength but also gentleness.
- And I think it’s also important to think of the Lord approaching us with strength and with gentleness.
  - He knows just how fragile and fallible we are.
  - We can acknowledge to Him how we’ve messed up this year—whether it’s been in big ways or small ways, whether it’s been stuff that other people know about or just us.
  
- The Lord will understand.
  - In confirmation of that I want to re-read the part that I read earlier from the 103<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, but with the context of what comes before and after the part that I already read.
    - It just speaks so beautifully about the Lord’s understanding and mercy.

- Psalm 103:13-18 (NKJV, modified)
  - 13 As a father has compassion on his children,  
So Jehovah has compassion on those who fear Him.
  - 14 For He knows our formation;  
He remembers that we are dust.
  - 15 As for man, his days are like grass;  
As a flower of the field, so he flowers.
  - 16 For the wind passes through it, and it is gone,  
And its place remembers it no more.
  - 17 But the mercy of Jehovah is from eternity and even to eternity  
On those who fear Him,  
And His justice to children's children,
  - 18 To those who keep His covenant,  
And to those who remember His commandments to do them.

- The Lord understands us, He has mercy on us, and He is here to help us figure out what to do next.
  - For me, as a parent, it was significant to notice that it doesn't just say that the Lord will care for the children—it doesn't just say that "He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom...."
  - It also says that He will "gently lead those who are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).
    - If you're like me, and you've got some young ones that you're looking after, the Lord will gently lead you.
      - He won't just criticise you for all the things that you're doing wrong or all the ways that you're messing up your kids.
      - He will gently lead you to care for them better.
      - And I would guess that He will still gently lead you even if the young ones that you work with are mostly grown adults.
- There are a lot of useful ideas connected to the the acknowledgment of how fleeting our lives in this world are.
- There is also a lot of value in remembering that life also goes on forever.

## **And Life is Forever**

- When we think of a person's life we tend to think of their life in this natural world.
  - Because that's what we can see easily.
  - Anything beyond death we can't see, under normal circumstances.
- But, with the help of the Lord's Word, we can have more and more revealed to us about life on the other side of death.
  - And we can learn that a person's life does not actually end with the death of their natural body but actually goes on to eternity.
    - Life goes on.
      - The lives of all those people that we love who have died go on and will continue to go on to eternity.
      - And the lives of people that we love who have not died yet will also go on to eternity whenever it is that they die.
      - And each of our lives, whenever it is that we die, will also go on to eternity.



- When our only frame of reference is what's going on right now, we are so limited in our perspective.
  - If we can manage to zoom out to think in a longer timeframe that's useful.
    - "Will this matter in 5 years?"
    - "Will I even remember this in 10 years?"
  - But think about how much it changes things if you really believe that life after death goes on to eternity!
    - We need to know about life after death and it should affect our thinking.
    - There are lots of teachings about the importance and significance of knowing about life after death in the teachings of the New Church (for example, *Secrets of Heaven* §§8635-8637), but I'm just going to share one strand with you.
  
- It's a section in the book *Divine Providence* with this heading: "Divine Providence Focuses on Eternal Matters, and Focuses on Temporal Matters Only As They Coincide with Eternal Ones" (*Divine Providence* §214).
  - It defines temporal and eternal matters like this:
    - *Divine Providence* §215
      - By "temporal matters" I mean things that either fade in time or simply cease when our life on earth is over. By "eternal matters" I mean things that do not fade or come to an end in time or at the end of our life on earth.
  
  - It goes on to say that temporal matters all basically have to do with money and getting ahead or achieving positions of prestige or power on earth.
  - And then it says that riches and honours can be blessings or they can be curses for people.
    - They are curses for people who set their hearts on them, who just focus on the money and the honour and the power for their own sake.
    - And riches and positions of power are blessings for people who don't set their heart on those things but instead see them as an opportunity to be useful and serve others.
      - For this second group of people, the temporal things of the world provide the opportunity to work on something eternal.
  - And then we get this statement:
    - *Divine Providence* §217:7
      - Everything that perishes and comes to nothing is inwardly in itself nothing. Outwardly, indeed, it is something; in fact, it appears as a great deal, and to some people as everything, as long as it lasts. But not inwardly in itself. It is like a casing with nothing inside. Or it is like an actor on stage in royal robes when the play is over.
  
  - Let's imagine that, over the course of your life in the natural world, you earn millions and millions of Rand and you also rise to positions of respect and influence and clout.
  - But eventually you're going to die and you can't take that stuff with you.
    - It's like you've been playing the part of a king in a play but at some point the play ends.

- Maybe you played the part of a king very convincingly during the play but, when the play is over, you're just yourself and you need to take the costume off and cross over to the next phase of life.
  - And the next phase of life is incomprehensibly longer than the first phase.
  - And the question is, how well did you use your life in the natural world in preparation for your life in the spiritual world?
- We all have roles that we take on in this world—father, mother, pastor, lawyer, teacher, businessman, friend.
  - And the real question is not what roles do we find ourselves in but rather who are we becoming as we spend time in these roles?
  - What we will take with us into the next life is ourselves.

## Conclusion

- Maybe we've managed to zoom out a bit today and get a bit of a more eternal perspective on our lives.
- Soon you're going to need to zoom back in to deal with all the things that you need to deal with in your work life and personal life.
- But, as you do that, I hope that you can hold onto something of this perspective and have it shift things within you a bit as you navigate the craziness of this season.
- The goal, as the book *Divine Providence* puts it, is "to think at the same time in terms of eternity when thinking from the viewpoint of one's present circumstance".
  - And then it goes on to say "...when we both think and live this way, then... divine providence, focuses on the state of our eternal life in heaven at every step of our journey, and is leading us to it" (*Divine Providence* §59).
- The frailty of human life in the natural world can seem pretty hard and pretty sad at some times.
- And the eternity of human life after death can feel pretty overwhelming and incomprehensible for our little brains.
- But I find that it can also seem beautiful and transcendent when I remember that all of the frailty of our human lives is supported by the strength, eternal constancy, and love of the Lord.
  - We are like grass that withers and flowers that fade but "the Word of our God shall rise up to eternity" and "the mercy of Jehovah is from eternity and even to eternity on those who fear Him".
- Amen.