

A Life Well Lived

Romans 12:11,12

Introduction

Justin Brierly is a Christian broadcaster in the UK. He has recently put out a book [2023] tracing the trajectory of the so-called – ‘New Atheists’ in the 21st century - - and what has happened to the movement.

He refers back to an incident in 2011 – which he refers to as Elevator Gate

The World Atheist Convention was being held in Dublin, Ireland at the O’Callaghan Alexander Hotel - - - with speakers such as Richard Dawkins / PZ Myers and Rebecca Watson – sharing the platform. That evening some of the panelists gathered for drinks at the hotel bar

Rebecca Watson – who was an American blogger – [atheist feminist] was returning to her hotel room around 4 am – when she got on the elevator – followed by a man from the group – whom she didn’t know. He asked her to come back to his room for coffee - - - which Watson said the offer made her very uncomfortable.

Rebecca wrote about it: ‘I was a single woman, in a foreign country, at 4 am – in a hotel elevator - don’t invite me back to your room right after I have finished talking about how it creeps me out and makes me uncomfortable when men sexualize me in that manner.’

Watson went on to share about her elevator experience on her You Tube Channel - and reactions were predictably divided

Richard Dawkins poured gasoline on the controversy

He told Rebecca to quit whining – and compared her plight to that of millions of Muslim women whose husbands are allowed to beat them or stone them to death if they commit adultery

The atheist ‘Me Too’ movement kicked into full swing – as next year – 2012 - David Silverman – president of the American Atheists’ association resigned over accusations of financial and sexual misconduct

Conferences became smaller / various speakers were disinvited / and the movement began to fade

Brierly comments

Justin Brierly: ‘The Elevator-gate’ scandal of 2011 seems to have marked the pivotal moment when the New Atheist Movement began to tear itself apart from the inside. Up to that point, New Atheism had been largely united in agreeing that Religion was bad and science was good. But it turns out that life is more complicated than that. Once the community discovered they held radically

differing views about how life should be lived once religion has been abandoned, things quickly spiraled downwards.' [p. 23]

A blogger – who writes for Atheism and the City summed up the movement – after the Atheist Conference for 2018 was scrapped over disagreements on speakers

"The atheist community has splintered into a million shards in recent years. There are atheist feminists and the atheist anti-feminists, the social justice warrior atheists and the anti-social justice warrior atheists. the pro-PC atheists and the anti-PC atheists. There are pro-Trump atheists and anti-pro-Trump atheists. Atheists are split over gamergate, elevator gate, whether we should organize, or whether we should even call ourselves atheists at all. The divisions go on an on.' [p. 24]

Justin Brierly: 'Today, New Atheism is a largely spent force . . . It has faded from public view as a serious cultural phenomenon. The publishing boom in anti-God literature fizzled out almost as quickly as it began, and the atheist speaking circuit is a shadow of its former self.' [p. 25]

Psalm 14:1 - 'The fool has said in his heart, "there is no God."

All movements that rise up against God – are ultimately destined to fail – and a waste of time

One of the things Brierly pointed out about the splintering of the New Atheists – was the fact that – they could not agree on how life should be lived – once religion is abandoned

While Christendom certainly has its divisions - - - but where the Bible is regarded as the Word of God – and the supreme authority in all matters of faith and in life - - - there is a remarkable consistency / commonality amongst people of faith – not only in one period of time – but across the generations

A.W. Tozer explains this phenomenon

Tozer: 'Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same tuning fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshippers meeting together - each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be were they to become unity conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.'

As we look away to Christ – we are drawn inevitably into fellowship and unity with other believers in Christ – who are looking in the same direction

We have begun the ‘practical’ section of the book of Romans where Paul is instructing us on how to live out our faith

These principles have been adopted and practiced by Christians of all generations – and put on grand display in the lives of the heroes of the faith – and are given here for our imitation

I. Christian Zeal - v. 11

Paul’s next exhortation – he calls us to *diligence* and *fervency*

‘lagging behind’ – the picture is of a runner running out of steam – he doesn’t care about where he comes in the race – he is done – he’s going to coast to the finish line

If you have been a Christian for very long – or even not so long – you know that there are times when you know what you should do – but the motivation or the drive is lacking

I know that I should pray about this – but I just don’t feel . . . I know that I should mend this relationship with so and so . . . I know that I ought to forgive so and so / I ought to read my Bible this morning - I ought to talk to my co-worker about Jesus . . . etc.

What can we do if we find ourselves lagging behind – lacking energy for the things of God?

Christians of all ages have confronted this common challenge

John Wesley: 'O stir yourself up before the Lord. Shake yourself from the dust. Wrestle with God for the mighty blessing. Pour out your soul in prayer! Continue with all perseverance. Watch! Awake out of sleep and keep awake.'

Paul told Timothy

II Timothy 1:6 - 'And for this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.'

The image is that of a fire - - - what happens to a fire over time?

It tends to die down and go out - - - but if you stir it up - - - you find unburnt portions of wood - - - and the flames come to life - - - or you might add another log onto the fire

One of the ways we can stir up our soul – is to remind ourselves what God says about our lives – and how long we have in this world

Psalm 90:10-12 - 'As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years . . . So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.'

Our days here are numbered / fixed in the counsels of heaven

If you were to live 80 years [average life expectancy] - - - that means you were given 29,200 days!

Let's picture it this way – God hands you a big old jar – filled with 29,200 marbles – when you are born

Each day - - - out comes one marble – toss it into the discard pile

This explains why some days – we feel like we are losing our marbles!

We don't know how many days we have – we could be gone tomorrow – hit by a plane, train or automobile

What we do know - - - we have one less day today than we had yesterday!

Wisdom tells us to make the most of what is given to us

MLJ: 'You have already spent sufficient of your time in this world doing those other things, wasting it and throwing it away. Well, he says, don't do that any longer.'

How does someone waste their life? / what is a wasted life?

It is to take their life and the time God has given to them – give it over to sinful living / ignoring God

John Piper shares a story he often heard his father tell young people - - - when preaching the gospel

His father would tell of an elderly man - - - who came to know the Lord in his latter years - - - while he rejoiced at his salvation - - - his eyes were also opened up to the fact that he had squandered nearly the entirety of his life here - - - living a life apart from Christ

As the old man reflected - he broke down into tears saying: 'I've wasted it! I've wasted my life!'

He would go to heaven - - - but he realized he had in fact, wasted so much opportunity to live for Jesus here

The point: you only get one life / this is it - just one - and the lasting measure of that life will be Jesus Christ and our faithfulness to Him

If we knew how much time we had on our clock – we would recognize the preciousness of each minute

When our lives are over - - - what will be the things that will matter?

Things you won't regret at the end of your life:

- Time you spent worshiping God / seeking to grow in your relationship with Him [studying the Bible / prayer / corporate worship / fellowship]
- Time invested in people – your family / your church members / the stranger / carrying out the love commands – [love is bull's eye / in the language of redemption]

I Tim. 1:5 - 'The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.'

When I was a kid – I took guitar lessons for several months – at a music store at the mall

7th grade – paid for it with my own paper route money – 30 minute lessons

The guitar teacher didn't have a real rigorous lesson plan - - - I'd show up – with my guitar – and he would ask - what song do you want to learn how to play?

I said – teach me how to play: 'ridin the storm out by REO Speedwagon - - - and he would - I dropped him after a few months

When we show up for instruction with Jesus - - - and the Bible - - - He doesn't ask us what song we want to play - - - He sets the lesson plan - - - and tells us to do this over and over until you get it right – then do it again: 'love from a pure heart / a good conscience / sincere faith'

We'll spend our whole life trying to master that song

- We won't regret time spent in serving the Lord / and others - using your gifts to contribute to kingdom causes / sharing Christ

Wisdom is living in light of this limited clock that is ticking down over our lives / one day at a time

II. Hope, Perseverance and Prayer - v. 12

We need patient endurance in running this race

R.C. Sproul said that he once picked this verse as his life verse

Romans 12:2 - 'Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.' [kjv]

But – he later changed to another verse because he decided he wasn't very patient in tribulation!

I don't know who told him you have to be good at your life verse!

Mine has always been Matthew 6:33 – 'Seek first His kingdom . . .'

This triad of short exhortations contains the essence of Christian living

Rejoicing in hope

There is a facebook page for musicians and it has one post that says: 'Billy has 7 guitars. He just went into the music store and bought 2 more – now what does he have?' The answer: happiness

Of course – it is a common manner of thinking in our world – that things like wealth or possessions – big house - - - the ability to buy whatever you want - - - that leads to joy / makes life meaningful

One of the problems with that thinking is that money and possessions are unstable things in this world – as shown thru history

Prov. 23:4,5 - 'Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings, like an eagle that flies toward the heavens.'

Wealth is part of our uncertain world – it makes itself wings

This world is temporary / fleeting – this life shall soon pass – our hope is grounded in that which is eternal – that which is to come – that which we have because of Jesus

I Peter 1:13 - '. . . fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.'

Our Hope = our expectation of glory when Christ returns

I John 3:2, 3 - 'Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.'

Not only that – but we rejoice in the fact that God is using everything together for good in our lives – in the here and now

Every single event / even the random / seemingly inconsequential – God takes it and uses it in what he is creating in our lives

Romans 8:28 - 'And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.'

The eyes of faith see how God weaves things together and works in our lives – little coincidences / quirks of fate

Even through our blunders - - - God is on the throne - - - and works it all for good

That's what we wrestle with

Clarence Macartney: 'The misfortunes and adversities of life, so called, assume a different color when we look at them through this glass [Romans 8:28]. It is sad to hear people trying to live over their lives again and saying to themselves: "If I had chosen a different profession," "If I had taken a different turning of the road," "If I had married another person." All of this is weak and unchristian. The web of destiny we have woven, in a sense, with our hands, and yet God has had His part in it. It is God's part in it, and not ours, that gives us faith and hope.'

We don't have hope because we're smarter than others - - - or have never made a poor decision or screwed up our lives like other people

We have hope because God is on the throne – and has His hand on our lives - - - and is working all for good – and that gives us joy!

We are called to patience in tribulation

The heroes of the faith excel here

Job: 'The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away – blessed be the name of the Lord'

James 5:11 - 'You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.'

We are strangers and pilgrims here in this world

When C.S. Lewis wrote 'Mere Christianity' - - - he was giving an apologetic for the Christian faith - - - but he also wanted to encourage the war-time citizens of Great Britain in the fight against Germany – when people were dying every day from German bombs / etc.

Kathleen Norris shares in her forward:

Kathleen Norris: 'Lewis seeks in *Mere Christianity* to help us see the religion with fresh eyes, as a radical faith whose adherents might be likened to an underground group gathering in a war zone, a place where evil seems to have the upper hand, to hear messages of hope from the other side.'

How can we persevere in trial and tribulation?

We know that life can be pretty difficult in this world at times

We need to hear the messages of hope from home / from our heavenly kingdom

C.S. Lewis: "Enemy-occupied territory - that is what this world is. Christianity is the story of how the rightful King has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage. When you go to church you are really listening in to the secret wireless from our friends: that is why the enemy is so anxious to prevent us from going."

Satan wants to keep us from church / from God's Word – lest we actually become hopeful

Thomas Watson: 'Leave not off reading in the Bible till you find your hearts warmed . . . Go not from the Word till you can say as those disciples, "Did not our hearts burn within us?" (Luke 24:32)'

We are to be devoted to prayer

We might think of Hannah who took her desire for a child to the Lord - - - or Hezekiah facing the threat of the Assyrian army – deportation

Prayer is our hotline to heaven

Rabbi Harold Kushner and his wife once suffered the loss of one of their children. In the aftermath - they decided to attend a meeting titled: 'Compassionate Friends', which was basically a grief share group for people who had lost a child or loved one.

Kushner said that in such settings you basically find two kinds of people. The first group are people who are so angry at God that they have decided never to set foot in a church or synagogue ever again.

The second group, and just as numerous, are people who say they never could've made it through the difficult time without God and the people who supported them. For them, their faith and trust in God [being able to pray to Him] was a ballast providing the stability and perspective needed to weather the storms life could throw at them

Oswald Chambers: 'Prayer is the vital breath of the Christian; not the thing that makes him alive but the evidence that he is alive.'

Conclusion

We come to the Lord's table this morning

In the Lord's Table we remember the Lord Jesus who gave His life that we might live

Jesus told the disciples - - - I will not drink the fruit of the vine with you again until I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom

He knew the hour – He spent his last hours serving the disciples - - - He washed their feet / instructing them for the days ahead

He reminded them – 'In My Father's house – are many dwelling places – I go to prepare a place for you.'

John 13:1 - '. . . Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.'

Jesus lived a perfect life – He loved them to the end