

## Wasted? The radical values of Jesus “A wasted life?”

Passages: John 12:31–36  
James 3:13–18

Like me, I'm sure you have all known people who've died from cancer. Like me, you know how nasty this disease can be! And like me, you've probably muttered under your breath; “What a waste of a life—to die like this—to die so young!” Yes, death from cancer (even of someone in his 60's, like Rob Mawer) seems like such a waste.

And yet, take a moment to think about it from one positive angle: Unlike a car accident which takes your life in an instant, cancer often takes you slowly-- the doctors often tell you that you have a certain amount of time left before you die: 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, even a year. **And that makes all the difference!** I mean, when a person knows that they're going to die, it's as if a new sense of urgency comes into their life; they have a new way of measuring time; there's a new value-system that suddenly comes into play. It's as if they've been given a chance to do and say all the things they hadn't done or said thus far in their life. Under the threat of death, the last remaining months or weeks of life are lived with a deep sense of purpose and meaning.

Interestingly, Jesus Christ lived His entire life with this value-system—His entire life was lived with a sense of urgency! Of course, one explanation for this comes from the fact that, just like someone with cancer, **Jesus had the clear knowledge that His lifespan would be severely cut-short.** Jesus knew He was going to die a premature death-- on several occasions, he talked openly about it! That's one reason why Jesus was a man on a mission; a man with only a limited amount of time to accomplish what His Father had set before Him to do. And so, every step Jesus took was measured; every breath He breathed had meaning! He travelled the length and breadth of Israel with deliberate intention and foresight, making the most of each opportunity that His Father laid before Him. His life was lived with a sense of urgency, because His death was always on His mind!

It's an urgency we are all called to cultivate! In Psalm 90, a comment is made about human life...that we are but “**dust**”! It,

then, goes on to ask God that, even if we live for 70 or 80 years, **“teach us, Lord, to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom!”** Every day may be our last!

But, I have a feeling the urgency of Jesus’ life came also from placing His earthly life within a bigger context—**an eternal context!** Jesus obviously regarded his life (indeed, every human life) from **the perspective of eternity!** From that perspective, human life is but a blip on the radar screen—a vapour...a breath of wind. From an eternal perspective, each of us has only a short amount of time to do what we were called to do on this earth...to fulfil our God-given role, while we have time. **That makes for a sense of urgency!**

This is the urgency that we see in **John 9**. Jesus has just met a man who has been blind from birth. But before He heals the man, Jesus explains to His disciples why He is doing this miracle: **“As long as it is day, I must do the work of Him who sent Me. Night is coming when no one can work.”** (Jn. 9:4) Or, to paraphrase: “As long as I’m on this earth, I have work to do. The time when this earth as we know it will end and none of us will be able to continue doing what we were created to do.”

Indeed, what I find so interesting, here, is that Jesus’ eternal perspective caused Him to measure the span of His earthly life in a radical way: **Jesus considered His entire life as if it were but one day long!** (**“As long as it is day, I must do the work of Him who sent Me.”**) In was if He saw His birth as the sunrise of His life... and His death as the sunset. And everything in between these two points was what He called “the daytime”—the time to work! (For...**“Night is coming when no one can work.”**)

It was this one day perspective on life that brought an incredible urgency to everything He did. Indeed, the miracle of restoring the sight of this blind man (in chapter 9) was but one of many tasks Jesus knew He had to achieve over the course of this long, working day. It’s as if the Father had given Him a checklist of things He had to fulfil!

Now, I don’t know about you, but this checklist approach to life is certainly helpful to me! In fact, when I see the list of things I need to accomplish before Sunday comes, it always gives me a great boost of energy! With a deadline looming, adrenaline kicks in that makes me incredibly productive! I can even stay up all night long

working to finish a project! And I imagine it does the same for you! It sparks a sense of urgency in us, focusing our minds on a particular task and giving us the added energy necessary to accomplish things we, otherwise, wouldn't accomplish!

By viewing life through the mental framework of one day (a day with a long list of things to accomplish), Jesus lived life to a deadline! Every waking moment was consumed with the thought that, because the day was quickly moving along, each moment had to be used well! And sometimes, the urgency was so great for Jesus that He even refused to eat! (In John 4, He got so caught up talking with the woman at the well that when His disciples urged him to eat something, He replied: **"My food is to the will of the One who sent Me"**.)

And that leads us to today's passage from John 12. After three years of living this fast-paced, checklist sort of day, Jesus finally begins to see signs that all His work has finally paid off! Sure, the day had been long and the work hard, but, finally, Jesus can see the fruit of His labour! People are coming to faith!

- Look at verse 12–13. **"The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet Him, shouting, Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the King of Israel!"** Clearly, Jesus had used His time on earth well; all of Israel knew about him and was now honouring Him as Israel's Messiah.
- Look at verse 20. **"Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. They came to Philip...with a request. 'Sir', they said, 'we would like to see Jesus'."** Not only were Jews turning to Jesus, but so were the Greeks! All the world was now acknowledging the Lordship of Jesus Christ!

The picture given to us in John 12 is clearly one of Jesus nearing the finish line of this long, working day. As the sunset of His life approaches, it becomes obvious that He has, in fact, achieved what His Father had sent Him to achieve! At last (to quote from Isaiah), **"the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!"** Finally, those who were lost in darkness have been turned back towards the light of God!

What's more, **Jesus knew that the day of His mission was nearing its end.** In response to this growing good news, Jesus speaks about one final task that He must do before the day is over; one final job on His list that He must accomplish in, what He calls, **the last hour** of the day!

Verse 23-- **"The hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified."**

Jesus gets even more urgent in verses 31-32. Instead of being the last **hour**, it is **now!**

**"Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all me to myself."**

Do you see? It was not a curse for Jesus to know that the end of His life was coming closer. **It was a blessing!** For there was an acute awareness that every moment had to count; that every hour was to be used wisely; to live life to the very end in the fulfilment of the destiny that God had planned for Him.

And so, as the last hour approached, there was only one thing on Jesus' mind; one thing he had to do before the day came to an end. He knew He had to die on the cross for the sins of the world. Why was this necessary? Because...only by His death would the fullness of God's light be shone; only by His death would the intensity of God's love and forgiveness be revealed; only by His death would Satan, the prince of this world, be proved to be a liar and, thus, driven out; only by His death would the hearts of lost men and women be drawn back to the Father. **"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself."**

But here's the where we come to the confusing part of our passage. You see, according to Jesus, even though He knew He would complete the tasks that His Father had given to Him...and even though he knew that, while he was in the world, He was the light of the world... **He also knew that, when His death finally did come, all the effects of His life's work (of bringing God's light to the world) would immediately disappear!** In verse 35, Jesus warns His disciples: **"You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you."** As the daylight hours of Jesus' life on earth were quickly coming to an end, Jesus was warning His followers to get prepared for the return of darkness.

Have you ever been out bush at dusk? As the sun goes down, it seems slow at first...but all of sudden, it's pitch black! And that's how it was when the light of the Jesus died on the cross. All at once, at His crucifixion, darkness returned in a frightening way: the sky turned black and the earth trembled! The earth was enveloped by darkness once more.

So, does this mean that all the urgency of Jesus' life was a waste? Does it mean that all the light that Jesus shone in this world was a waste? Does it mean that everything that Jesus did on this earth had suddenly come to naught at His crucifixion?

Not at all! Although Jesus called Himself the light of the world... and although He spoke of His death as **the beginning of darkness** for the world...in the same breath, Jesus also spoke about **the dawning of a new day** for the earth—a **new sunrise** would come that would again illuminate this darkened world!

Listen carefully to verse 36. As Jesus gives final instructions to His disciples, He tells them:

<sup>36</sup> **Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.**"

Although Jesus was going to die, and although the physical presence of His 'light' would finally be extinguished from the earth..., He made it clear to His disciples that **they could continue His work on earth!** How? By being so filled with **His light** that, **they**, in turn, would radiate that light out to the world. By entrusting themselves to His Spirit, **they** would (collectively, as a church) become "little lights"... "sons of light"... called to initiate a brand new day of light on earth that would never again go out!

Now, I don't know if you see what's going on here, but, in a real sense, **Jesus was putting all His eggs in one basket!** I mean, from this point on, He is literally calling on His followers...His church... to take up the urgency of His task; to live as "children of the light", bringing His light to a darkened world!

In a real way, **His day on earth may be over, but our day has just begun!**

What this means is that Jesus had no plan B for the salvation of the world! Although the world desperately needed His light, He had entrusted that light to us! We now carry it for Him! And because there is no hope...no salvation...no light apart from Jesus... it is the church that must, by truly walking as "children of

the light”, reveal the light of Jesus to the world. That’s why **we are called to live with the same urgency as Jesus did!**

**But is it possible?** Well, Jesus said we could do it! In John 14, He makes this incredible statement to His disciples: **“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father!”** Do you see? Jesus believed that His church would actually be a greater light in the world than He was by the power of His Spirit!

Let me use the Advent wreath as an illustration: On the first Sunday of Advent, we light the first candle. It burns by itself and casts only a small light. On the second Sunday, we light the first and second candles and, together, they shine brighter. Similarly, on the third Sunday, three candles burn brighter than one. Finally, on the fourth Sunday, we light four candles and the light is even brighter!

This is a metaphor for the way Jesus expects His church to light up the entire world...to do greater things than he could ever do alone! As children of the light, we are now the light of the world... a host of candles burning in the darkness. But, of course, if this is to truly happen, each one of us must choose to live life in a new way...asking the Holy Spirit to give us **a new sense of urgency** about the Gospel! We must not longer be consumed with the trivial or become complacent about our lives! Rather, we must see our lives from an eternal perspective where **every action** and **every word** of our short life has the potential to spread the light of Christ!

With this in mind, friends, there is only one question that remains: Do we have the same value–system as Jesus? Do we truly believe that every moment counts, and that there is only **one day** before us...a day of work... that will soon come to an end? Will we live it in the urgency of Jesus, empowered by His Spirit? Will we live as children of the light? **Or** will our lives be wasted in the hum–drum of complacency, with no thought of the urgency of the moment? Will we allow the darkness to overtake us?

**<sup>36</sup> Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.”**

Let’s pray.