

Unbelievable, Part 2 – Unavoidable

Alfred was a Swedish chemist who made millions by inventing and manufacturing dynamite. In 1888 Alfred's brother Ludvig died in France. As Alfred read the obituary in a French newspaper, his grief turned to dismay and consternation. What he was reading was not his brother's obituary, but his own! (The newspaper editor had confused the brothers.) "Le Marchand de la Mort est Mort" (The Merchant of Death is Dead) is what the headline proclaimed. Alfred's obituary described a man who "became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before."

From that day on, Alfred was a changed man. Troubled by what the editor had written regarding him, Alfred in a sense wrote his own obituary by purposing in his heart to use his wealth to alter his legacy. When he died eight years later in 1896, Alfred left more than \$9,000,000 to fund awards for those whose work would benefit humanity, not destroy it. Today we know those awards as the Nobel Prizes. Alfred Nobel lucked out. He had the rare opportunity to evaluate his life at its "end" and still have the chance to change his legacy. So before his life was over, Nobel made sure he had invested his wealth in something of lasting value. The vast majority of people will never have that chance.

The time of our death is unknown. The way of our death is unpredictable. But the fact of our death is inescapable. The statistics are unwavering: 100 percent of those who are born will die.

Ecclesiastes 8:8 There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

James 4:14 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.

ETERNITY IS UNAVOIDABLE.

A startling thing has happened among Western Christians. Many of us habitually think and act as if there were no eternity – or as if what we do in this present life has no eternal consequences. Our devotion to the newspaper, television and computer screen and our neglect of the Bible is the ultimate testimony to our interest in the short-range over the long-range. But any life that leaves us unprepared for death is a wasted life!

Being oblivious to eternity leaves us experts in the trivial and novices in the significant. We major in the momentary and minor in the momentous.

Psalms 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Because this life is so brief, we might easily conclude that how we live it is inconsequential, but nothing could be further from the truth. The door of eternity swings on the hinges of our present life. This life lays the foundation upon which eternal life is built. Eternity will hold for us what we have invested there during our life on earth. The Bible makes it clear that the one central business of this life is to prepare for the next!

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Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

Matthew 12:36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

IT IS NOT JUST UNBELIEVERS WHO FACE JUDGEMENT AFTER DEATH – ALL BELIEVERS WILL BE JUDGED FOR THEIR WORKS – AND ALL CHURCHES AS WELL! (Revelation 2-3 – "I know thy works")

2 Corinthians 5:10-11 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.

THERE IS NO SECOND CHANCE FOR SINNERS AFTER DEATH – BUT THERE IS ALSO NO SECOND CHANCE FOR CHRISTIANS!

1 Corinthians 3:12-15 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

THAT'S WHY JESUS ALWAYS HAD TWO KINGDOMS IN MIND. He spoke of only two options that demand only one choice, and He taught there was a “default choice” if no choice was made.

Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

How to determine your treasure (A.W. Tozer):

- What do you value most?
- What would you most hate to lose?
- What do your thoughts turn to most frequently?
- What gives you the greatest pleasure?

Matthew 6:19-21 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Jesus' primary argument against amassing material things isn't that it is morally wrong, but simply that it is a poor investment. Material things just won't stand the test of time! He's saying, “Make a smart investment!”

Matthew 13:44-46 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

The treasures we store up on earth will be left behind when we leave. But the treasures we store up in heaven will be waiting for us when we arrive. You can't take it with you – but you CAN send it on ahead!

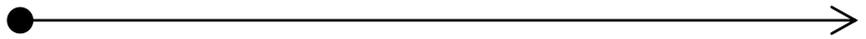
Psalms 90:17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

In the oldest Psalm on record, Moses says (literally in Hebrew), “Make permanent the work of our hands.”

Matthew 6:21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

YOUR HEART FOLLOWS YOUR TREASURE! Not just in eternity, but right now. You can direct your heart by directing your treasure!

ILLUSTRATION: What would you think if a passenger next to you on an airplane flight started hanging curtains over the window, taped photographs to the seat in front of him, and started painting the walls? You would think, “It's not that long of a trip – once we get to the destination, none of this will matter.” Even a long plane flight is short compared to the span of your entire life.



Our life is in two phases, a dot and a line. Our present life on earth is the dot. It begins, it ends, and it is brief. However, from the dot a line extends that goes on forever. That line is ETERNITY. The short-sighted person lives for the dot, but the person with perspective lives for the line.

The Christian who accumulates land and houses and bank accounts but doesn't invest in eternity isn't depicted by Jesus as unrighteous, greedy or selfish (even though he is all those). Rather, he is depicted as short-sighted, blind, and profoundly foolish.

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; **(NOTICE THE COMPARISONS!)**

Romans 8:18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

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Every heartbeat brings us one moment closer to eternity. Every day, the person whose treasure is on earth is headed AWAY from his treasure. But every day, the person whose treasure is in heaven is headed TOWARD his treasure.

Hebrews 11:13-16 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Pilgrims are unattached. They are travelers, not settlers. They evaluate everything by their mission because unnecessary things slow down their journey or even force them to stop. They know that excessive things will eventually distract and burden them.

C.S. Lewis: "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither."

John Wesley: "I judge all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity."

Martin Luther said that on his calendar there were only two days – TODAY and THAT DAY.

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OPTIONAL ILLUSTRATION (ROB BELL):

In the first century, generally a young woman would be married in her early teens, often at thirteen or fourteen. It would become known that she was now "of age," and her father would entertain offers from the fathers of young men who were interested in marrying her. If the fathers agreed on the terms of the marriage, there would be a celebration to honor the couple and announce their engagement. At this celebration, the groom would offer the young girl a cup of wine to drink.

But she doesn't have to drink it. She can reject the cup. She can say no to his offer of marriage. Even though everything has already been arranged, she can still say no. It's up to her. Can you imagine the pressure on the young man? Here is everybody you love the most, friends and parents and relatives, gathered in a room, watching to see if she will accept the cup. If she says yes, the groom gives a sort of prepared speech about their future together. Because if she takes the cup and drinks from it, that only means that they are engaged. They aren't married yet. Something still has to happen. Or to be more precise, something has to be built.

If she says yes, then the groom goes home and begins building an addition onto his family's home. This is where he and his bride will start their new family together. And so he works and works and works, building a place that they can call home. And here's the interesting part: he doesn't know when he's going to finish. Because he doesn't have the final say on whether it's ready. That's his father's decision. And so his father periodically inspects his work, looking to see if the quality of what the son is building properly honors his future bride. The father has considerations as well. If he has many sons, and they've all built additions, then his house is getting quite large. There are many rooms in it. This was called an "insula," a large multi-family dwelling. If the father had built his addition onto his father's house, then by now - several generations later - this is a large dwelling with rooms for a lot of people.

The future bride is at home, learning how to run a household. She also doesn't know when the work will be done, so she's preparing herself for a date that's coming, she just doesn't know when. And then the day comes. The father inspects and tells the son that it's time. So the son gets his friends, and they set out for her house to get her. But how will he know what room is hers? He'll know because she has filled her lamp with oil each night and set it in the window, so that when he comes he'll know which room is hers (Matthew 25:1-13). And so he goes to get her, and they gather their friends and family, and there's a giant procession back to his house where the party starts.

And so, when she takes the glass of wine at their engagement party and drinks from it, the groom says to her: "My father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. you know the way to the place where I am going."

Does his speech sound familiar? This is what Jesus says to his disciples in John 14:2-3. When Jesus wants to assure his followers that they're going to be okay, that their future is secure, that they shouldn't let their hearts be troubled, he uses the wedding metaphor. They would have known exactly what he was talking about. They would have heard the groom's speech growing up, the ones who were married would have given it to their brides, and they all would have taken part in numerous wedding celebrations. To describe heaven, Jesus uses an event they had all experienced and basically says, "It's like that."

John 14:2-3 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.