

Dear Friends,

Sooner or later, we face the reality that James describes in this verse.

For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. (James 4:14b KJV)

The longer I live the more I appreciate the fleeting nature of life. Despite being 82, in so many ways, my life seems brief. I think of all the things I'd like to have done which I didn't do. Things I could have done but didn't. And, oh yes, things I did which I wish I didn't. From today's perspective, my little "Vapour" seems so brief and small. Rather than react in discouragement or fear, I find a growing hunger to do whatever I can do, say whatever I can say, to make the journey easier for the godly people who travel with me. To some extent, Peter must have reflected on similar thoughts when he wrote the words of our study passage for this week. So maybe I can't cause a rains storm of blessings and spiritual wisdom. I do have a little "Vapour." I can release what I have and hope it refreshes someone who needs a cool drink right now.

A core principle of this perspective reminds us that we are so small, and that our God is so, so great! Sharing personal "Stuff" might help someone, or it might not. But sharing and reminding them of Jesus and the resurrection, His 'Gospel,' His good news, that can change a believer's whole life trajectory. That was Peter's passion. I hope it is mine as well. How long shall I live? How long shall you live, regardless of your present age? Our individual "Vapour" can vanish in a heartbeat at any time.

What does this mindset teach us? Why include it in the New Testament? No, it is not about hanging black crepe on the walls. It is about digging deeply into our soul and refreshing our minds to what is really good, right, and important, not just to us, but to God. And, by His kind grace, we each, youngest to the oldest, need to sharpen our minds and focus on those truths that stir and mature our faith--and our faith-life. I need that reminder. We all do. As you read and study this week's Gleanings, ponder what changes might transform your life more to serve and to bless the people you most love and respect. If you can make their life better or easier, do it today without delay. You'll never regret it, and you might find yourself thanking the Lord that you used the opportunity you had to help someone. Let's lock arm-in-arm and travel this journey together to the end.

Love in Jesus,
Joe Holder

Life's Most Important Knowledge

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ

hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. (2 Peter 1:12-15 KJV 1900)

If you were a “Senior Citizen” and knew that your years ahead were fewer than your years behind, what would be your chief objective for your remaining time? Increasingly I find myself thinking those thoughts and working to refine my priorities and my remaining time. We can read about Peter’s impulsiveness in the gospels, but do we understand that the wise and devoted servant of Jesus in his two letters is that same man transformed by Jesus to be what he wanted to be in the gospels? Too much of his mindset in the gospels focused on Peter and what he, with good intentions, thought he could (Would) do for Jesus under pressure. The man who wrote the two letters under his name, the same man, reveals that same deep passion for Jesus, but his focus is about ministering to others. Our study passage underscores this devoted passion. Instead of thinking what he will accomplish for himself, he echoed strong concern that his words about Jesus and the gospel would linger in the lives of those he taught long after he died. The me-first Peter was transformed into the Jesus and others-focused mature and faithful Peter. When we resist change, “This the way I am. Just take me or leave me. I don’t intend to change,” we need to study the contrast between Peter in the gospels and Peter in his letters, a transformed man. If we follow Jesus and embody Him and His teachings, we too can—and will-change.

Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Spiritual teachers, even an apostle of Jesus, cannot coerce believers. Our goal is to frame our teaching in such a way that hearers learn, truly learn spiritual truths. Naïve teachers constantly look for novel ideas to shock their hearers into remembering what they teach. And our human appetite for the unusual or our hunger for “Hidden” truth drives our carnality to seek such things. However, believers who truly immerse their minds in Biblical teaching, in devoted and regular study of Scripture, grow stronger in the Lord’s spiritual truths, truths which the Holy Spirit imbedded in our hearts at our new birth experience. What the Spirit affirms in our hearts never contradicts what the same Spirit directed men to write in Scripture. Never. In Peter’s inspired words, we know this Biblical truth, but we need frequent reminders and affirmations of it. Ponder the contrast between this verse and Peter’s emphasis on “remembrance” and Verse 9’s description of the unfruitful believer who “hath forgotten” his salvation.

Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance. We could find no simpler explanation of the gospel’s purpose than these words. Christian tradition reports that, when John, the only apostle to die a natural death, was in his old age and an invalid, members of his home church would come to his home and carry him in his chair to the church’s meetings. When asked if he had anything to say to the church, he supposedly would simply—and profoundly—say, “Little children, love each other.” I’ve read stories and observed a few instances of faithful preachers in their final hours. Even then they were concerned

to encourage their people to understand and pursue the gospel. I've also heard of preachers literally dying in the pulpit in the midst of a sermon. Live or die, the only way a preacher/pastor can convince people of his devotion for Jesus and the gospel is to manifest it in his life and preaching.

Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Back to my question at the beginning of our study, if you knew your time was short, how would you use that remaining time? Peter devoted his final season to encouraging and teaching the believers he knew and loved.

Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. The truth of the gospel in a fruitful (Verses 5-9) believer claims a priority that is "Bigger than life itself." Peter wasn't concerned that his readers would remember and honor him. He strived to prepare them to join him in the pursuit of Jesus and the gospel above all else.

The longer I live and study my Bible the more I marvel at its rich—truly supernatural—content. In this simple teaching of people Peter knew and loved in the gospel, the Holy Spirit packed so much into a few words. For example, what happens at our death? I marvel at the sincere believers who embrace some idea of "Soul sleep," the idea that consciousness ceases at death till the Second Coming and our resurrection. Paul's words in Philippians 1 contradict this idea. Paul longed to "...**depart, and to be with Christ,**" not depart into nothingness. (Philippians 1:23 KJV) In our study passage, the Spirit directed Peter to use a word which appears only one other time in the New Testament. In "...**after my decease,**" "decease" was translated from the Greek root for our English word "Exit." The only other appearance of that word is Luke's narrative of Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 8:31 KJV)

Jesus talked with Moses and Elijah regarding "...**his decease which he should accomplish.**" English words derived from this Greek word are "Exit" or "Exodus." When you "Exit" from a room, you disappear from the sight of people in the room, but you do not cease to exist. You continue to exist in another place. When Jesus died at Calvary, He did not cease to exist for three days and nights. He promised the thief beside Him that "**Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.**" (Luke 23:43 KJV) "Today" with Jesus in "paradise" hardly describes soul sleep or non-existence. Simultaneously, as Peter encouraged his readers to refresh and keep his teachings in their minds, even after his "decease" or "Exit," he taught them powerfully by a single word that,

though he would “Exit” from them in death, he would continue, as Paul described in Philippians 1, “...**to be with Christ**” in Paradise.

When Paul (I believe the inspired human writer/author of Hebrews) wrote that, fulfilling the Old Testament Day of Atonement priestly ritual, Jesus “...**suffered without the gate**,” (Hebrews 13:12b KJV) he further affirmed this truth. On the annual Day of Atonement, the high priest took the sacrificial goat outside the “Camp” of Israel where he killed the goat and collected its blood to offer in the tabernacle, the priest was conscious and active in the camp before taking the goat out of the camp, he was conscious during his killing the goat and collecting its blood, and he was conscious as he went back into the camp and into the tabernacle. Likewise, Jesus, as our high priest, came “outside the gate,” outside heaven to earth, and, as our substitute sacrifice, at the moment of death, took His life to the Father, and offered Himself to the Father in atonement for the sins of His people. He was no less conscious when He went to the Father in His death than He was when speaking to the thief. He had a work to do during that three day interval, and it couldn’t be done in an unconscious state.

When Moses wrote of Abraham’s death, he framed the event in similar form.

Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. (Genesis 25:8 KJV)

“...**gathered to his people**” hardly describes an unconscious state. A frequent speculation among Christians is the idea of future identity. The reference in this verse to “his people,” along with the identity of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, strongly urges that we shall have some sense of personal identity after the resurrection, not be merely identical matches in a box. And “his people” suggests some sense of knowing something of our earthly relationships. How far to take this idea is the mystery which Scripture doesn’t address, and our speculation can’t—and shouldn’t try to—know. During my childhood, churches in the area frequently sang an old traditional-to-our-fellowship hymn, “I am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger.” First and foremost, the focus of the hymn was more about our personal relationships than about the Lord. To underscore this point, the last line in each verse read, “I’m going there to see....” Beginning with the first verse, the words identified going there to see mother, father, brother, sister, even classmates, before finally in the last verse, going there “...to see my Savior.” Once I counted some twenty-four “I” or “my” personal pronouns in the words, but only one final reference to Jesus. This sentiment, at the least, exemplifies confused and errant priorities. First and last, Biblical faith longs and looks in faith to that day to see and to praise the Lord. Ponder the contradictory sentiment between the words to this hymn and John’s inspired words.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. (Revelation 5:9-10 KJV)

The song of praise which John saw and heard as he looked into glory was not about family and classmates, but about Jesus and redemption. We should imitate heaven's song now, including the object of our longing for that glory to come.

I close this study with a brief personal narrative. My ministry throughout my adult life has been in this region. The area has never enjoyed an over-abundance of preachers, so I learned early-on to focus my faith and service on the church I served. Sadly, I observed over these years a number of churches lose their pastor, and cease to exist. I prayed that the Lord would preserve the church I've served now for almost fifty years. We talked, we prayed for the Lord to send someone who might follow me and continue ministering to our church, but seemingly to no avail. Then last year a young man started attending our church who had read and studied extensively, several times disappointed that the Biblical truths he learned from his Bible were not received well by the churches he attended. Over time and research, he learned about our people, studied our history and doctrine, which led him to visit us. As we talked over time, it became increasingly clear that he had found his home. I was blessed to baptize him. Sensing more of his heart, I asked him what he saw for his future with our church, and he confessed to a burning desire to preach. We have been blessed abundantly by his thoughts and gentle, gracious spirit. Recently with my relatively minor, but altogether to be expected at my age, health problems, I've had to miss a few services, and this dear man was there when the church and I needed him. The Lord supplied. My time with him, along with my age, now 82, increasingly convicts me to spend my remaining days, as much as possible, encouraging young gifts in the church, along with the dear people who have traveled with me on this journey. Thus, Peter's "...**as long as I am in this tabernacle**" lesson resonates with me deeply. Let's travel this faith-highway together to the end.

Elder Joe Holder