

Reflections of Sixty Years

Sunday, December 21st, 1986

Psalm 39:4-5

“LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah.”

I'm going to be speaking to you today, from the Book of Psalms. I have a very different text but a very important text. I'm reading from Psalm 39. Why don't you just pull up a chair and listen carefully to the message today. My subject is: “REFLECTIONS OF SIXTY YEARS.”

In the Book of Psalms, Chapter 39:4-5, David wrote these words; *“Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, Thou hast made my days as a handbreadth; and my age is as nothing before Thee: verily every man at his best state is all together vanity.”*

A few weeks ago I passed a very significant milestone; I celebrated my 60th birthday. When I became 30, 40 and even 50 years of age, I didn't pay much attention to the passing of that particular milestone. But, when I hit 60, to me it was very significant.

Let me say this, I don't mind getting older, not at all. Every age has its particular blessings. I am thankful and I can say this as I grow older; I am thankful that God has been pleased to leave me here on this earth to enjoy certain privileges, privileges of age. I have the privilege of growing old.

The Almighty God could have taken me away from this earth many years ago, a lot earlier in life as he did my son. My son died when he was 21. My grandfather died when he was only 45. God has allowed me the joy of children and the joy of grandchildren and yea, perhaps, even the joy of great-grandchildren.

Also, He has given me the joys of pastoring a church for almost 40 years. I have been associated with the people who love God, love the Gospel and love the Word of God during these 40 years. These are blessings, many, many, blessings. I don't mind growing older because there are many blessings in growing older.

Second: I want you to note this carefully; it is necessary to grow older in order to mature. Maturity comes with age and maturity comes with experience. In order to mature in the faith of Christ Jesus, in order to grow in understanding and to grow in patience and to grow in love, a person has to grow older.

I do know this; I can see no fault in others that I have not seen in myself at one time or another. I can say to almost any man or woman, "You've done nothing that I have not done in either thought or in deed."

As we grow older, we grow more patient, more understanding and more charitable with other people. The reason is because we recognize so many faults in ourselves and so many errors of the past.

Then, I say this, as I grow older, I want to very much grow wiser. I'm talking about growing wiser in the things of God. I want to grow wiser in the grace of God. I think it is a very sad thing when men and women grow older and they know so much about the material world.

There are so many of you listening to me who are as old or are older than I am. You may be experienced farmers, experienced engineers, doctors or school teachers. You have a lot of experience in the material things and secular things.

It is very sad as we grow older if we do not grow in the grace and knowledge of God in Christ Jesus. How sad it is to have white hair and much understanding about the things of this world and not much understanding about the things of God.

In these 60 years that God has allowed me to live on this earth, I have not only learned some things about the mystery of godliness and the Word of God but I have become very confident in these things. I've become quite certain of these things. I have not grown less confident and less certain about the things of God, but yea, more confident and more certain.

Now, we talk about these men of old, men such as David, Abraham, Job, Isaiah, Paul, and these men who lived many years ago, as they grew older they did not waver in their old age in the things of God. You will note from the testimony of these men that they became more confident in the things of God.

They became more certain concerning the things of God and they became more assured concerning the things of God that were revealed in the Scriptures. For example, God seemed to reserve Abraham's greatest trial for his old age. Did you know that he had many trials? The old time Jewish writers use to say that "Abraham endured nine significant and great trials in his life."

The last trial that Abraham endured was the sacrifice of his son, Isaac. Here is a man that is over a hundred years of age; he was 110 years old when he was told by God to take his own son, his only son whom he loved, to the top of Mount Mariah and sacrifice him there as an offering to God.

When Abraham started up the mountain with his son Isaac, Isaac was carrying the wood and carrying the fire. Isaac turned to his father and said, *“Father; here is the wood and here is the fire; where is the Lamb?”*

This old man, in much confidence, assurance and certainty, looked at his son and replied; *“My son, God will provide.”* God has always provided, God will provide now and only God will provide. Now, that is confidence! That is the confidence of age, experience, and a growth in faith. The Scripture says, *“By faith, Abraham offered Isaac in his latter years.”*

Then David, in his last years, said this; *“I have been young and now am old; Yet, I have never seen the righteous forsaken. I have never seen God’s seed begging bread.”* Those are the words of an old, old, man; *“I’ve never seen the righteous forsaken.”* That is the years of experience speaking and that is confidence, assurance, and certainty.

Have you ever read the last words of King David? In 2 Samuel Chapter 23; David was dying and they gathered about his bedside. These were his last words; *“Although it be not so with my house, God has made with me and everlasting Covenant, ordered in all things and sure, and this is my salvation and this is all my desire, although He make it not to grow.”*

What I am saying is this, men of old, instead of wavering in their old age, instead of falling away, instead of departing from the faith, grew stronger in the faith. They grew more confident in the faith of God.

Do you know what Job said? Job said, *“I know my Redeemer liveth: and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh I will see God. I know my Redeemer liveth and in the latter days He will stand on this earth.”*

Paul, the apostle, said; *“I know whom I have believed and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day.”*

John, even on the Isle of Patmos, even when he was an old white-haired man, when he was about to depart and be with God, had this to say; *“Even so come Lord Jesus.”* There was no hesitancy here, no doubt here and no wavering here.

Even in old age he didn't say, “Well Lord, why have you put me in this place? Why am I deserted? Why am I alone? Why am I exiled to this lonely island?” No sir, *“Even so come Lord Jesus.”*

Let me state some things about reflections of 60 years. I have grown older, I hope wiser, more understanding, more charitable, more affectionate and more caring; I certainly hope so. Let me state some things that I have learned and experienced over these 60 years that God has given me. I may not have another year, but at least I have had 60.

These things have always been true; truth never changes. Truth is absolute. These things have to be learned. We have to learn them

personally and we have to learn them individually. The only way to learn anything is to experience it. We say that we believe in certain things. We don't believe anything until we experience it.

I have learned six or seven things that I want to call to your attention. I want you to listen; will you?

First of all: I have learned this and I have experienced it and it has always been true. I have experienced this personally, myself; life is indeed a vapor. James said that a long, long, time ago but I have learned it.

James said in Chapter 4:13; *“Go to now, ye that say, today or tomorrow, we will go into such a city, and we will continue there a year. We will buy and sell and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow.”*

You don't know what tomorrow holds. You don't know what tomorrow will bring forth. You ought to say, “The Lord willing, I will go into the city and remain there a certain length of time.” For He said, *“What is your life?”* What is your physical, natural, life? *“It is even a vapor.”*

Do you know what a vapor is? Suppose you walk out of your house on a cold morning and as you open the door and step outside, you breathe into the air and there is a vapor. The vapor is just there for a moment and then it is gone. Every time you breathe there is a vapor and it vanishes.

That is what He said in this verse; *“What is your life? It is even a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then it is gone.”*

Job said this, *“We are a few days and full of trouble. We come forth as a flower that blooms today and then it falleth away. We flee also as a shadow.”* Do you see how the Word of God describes this fleshly life? This life is a vapor, just a mist. This life is a flower that blooms brilliantly and beautifully for a while, and then it is gone. *“The place thereof knoweth no more.”* It is simply a shadow.

I’m sure you have heard other people talk about how short life is and how brief life is. A fellow in his 20 or 30’s just laughs about that. The younger people will say, “Boy; it seems long to me. It seems like I will never be able to get to a certain age.”

So, when people tell you this, that life is so short, so brief, and the years pass so quickly, believe me; it is true. We are here and then we are gone. These years go by so quickly and so rapidly. It is like a fleeting shadow, a mist, or a flower.

My friends, in the light of this, it is time to seek the Lord. We need to seek Him while we are young, while we have our faculties. It is time to seek the Lord while we can; it is time to seek the Lord. It is time to care about and become interested in the things of God.

“If a man dies, shall he live again?” Certainly he will live again. This life here on the earth, at 60, 70, 80, years of age is only a snowflake compared to a blizzard when you talk about eternity. Life on this earth is like a drop of rain compared to a flood, only the vestibule that ushers us into the great, eternal and the eons of time.

The wise man Solomon, wrote these words, *“Remember now, thy Creator, in the days of thy youth.”* So, I have experienced this; life is indeed a vapor and it goes by so quickly.

Another thing that I have learned and I learned it years ago. Believe me; I know it better now than ever. I know it well and I am sure of it. More than ever before, I know that salvation, deliverance and eternal life is of the Lord. It is a miracle of His grace. It is a new birth and a new creation. It is a work that only God can perform.

One day, the disciples asked the Lord Jesus, *“Who then can be saved?”* He said, *“With men it is impossible.”* Salvation with men is impossible but with God, *“All things are possible.”* So, what I am saying is this, I have learned this; I have experienced this and I know it to be true; *“Salvation is of the Lord.”*

I’ve seen in these 40 years I have been preaching that so many people get religion. I’ve seen them walk aisles. I’ve seen them shake the preacher’s hand. I’ve seen them sign pledge cards. I’ve seen them go to the enquiry room. I’ve seen them make professions, join churches and get baptized. I’ve seen people reform their lives. I’ve even seen them preach and teach, occupy pulpits, pastor and occupy offices in the church.

So many of them turn away and they fall away. They depart from the faith. This makes it clearer and clearer to me every day that *“salvation is of the Lord.”* It is a work of God and it is a miracle of God’s grace. It is a work that only God performs.

A man cannot create within himself a new heart, but God can. A man cannot give himself a new nature, but God can. A man cannot make

himself to be born again, but God can. That is what Jonah is saying in Jonah 2:9; *“Salvation is of the Lord.”*

That is what David wrote in Psalm 3:8, *“Salvation belongeth unto the Lord.”* That is what David wrote again in Psalm 37:39, *“The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord and of Him only.”*

You might say, “Preacher, don’t you put much stock in these crowds of people walking to the front and praying the ‘Sinner’s Prayer?’” Don’t you take much stock in them making decisions, making professions and joining the church? No, I don’t, not at all!

Salvation is a work of grace. It is a personal work. Salvation is performed by God and purposed by God. It is a work in the heart by the Spirit of God; that’s right!

I will tell you this, when I was 24 years of age, I became a pastor in Ashland, Ky. At that time, I learned some things from the Word of God. I learned of God’s great and glorious majesty; who is the Lord? I learned that *“The Lord reigneth in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of this earth and giveth it to whomsoever He will.”*

I learned that the Lord said, *“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious; I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful.”* I’ve learned that there is nothing that God can’t do, except lie; God cannot lie. *“The Judge of the earth shall do right.”* I also learned of His great and glorious majesty.

I learned something else, I learned that the total ruin and the total fall of mankind was in Adam. In Adam, death, sin, judgment and condemnation, passed upon all men. We are born in sin, we are born

alienated from God and we are born separated from God. Paul called it in Ephesians Chapter 2, "*Dead in trespasses and sin.*" We must be quickened by the Spirit of God.

I learned of God's eternal, elective grace, in Christ Jesus. I learned that God Almighty chose a people in Christ. God made Christ their Surety. Before the foundation of the world, He determined to have a people out of "*every tribe, kindred, nation, and tongue under heaven.*"

He will have a people that no man can number, as "*the stars of the sky and the sand of the seashore, out of every nation, out of every tribe and out of every people,*" God chose in Christ a people to be saved.

I learned that Jesus Christ came into this world in human flesh, "*called His name Emmanuel,*" (God with us). He became all things unto us. He took our nature and He took our sins and guilt in His body on the tree. He obeyed the Law in order that we might have a perfect righteousness. He died on the cross that He might justify us before God. He was buried and rose again. He is our Mediator.

I learned that the Holy Spirit effectually calls men to faith in Christ.

Repentance is the gift of God. Faith is the gift of God. Perseverance is the gift of God; "*we are kept by the power of God through faith.*" I learned that all people who know Him, love Him and believe on Him, "*who are called according to His purpose,*" shall persevere.

Do you know what the Word says? "*And, we know, that all things work together for good to them who love God, who are the called, according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow; He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be*

the firstborn among many brethren. And whom He did predestinate, He called, and whom He called, He justified. Whom He justified, He glorified.”

“*What shall we say to these things?*” What shall we say in addition to these things? Nothing can be added. What shall we say against them? Nothing can be said against them. What shall we infer from them?

Paul answered that question, he said; “*If God be for us, who can be against us?*” I have learned that “*salvation is of the Lord.*” It takes a miracle of grace to save a sinner. When God saves him; He keeps him saved. “*What the Lord doeth, it shall be forever.*”

Third: I have learned something else. I have learned this and experienced this; I know it to be true that salvation is in a Person, Jesus Christ. That’s right; salvation is in a Person. Salvation is not a doctrine. Salvation is not memorizing certain Scriptures. Salvation is not a creed unless your creed is Christ.

Salvation is just not a position, a moral position, or a moral principal. Salvation is not just to “turn over a new leaf.” Jesus Christ is just not a motivator. Salvation is a Person. This is what Paul said in Romans 1; “*God has separated me unto the Gospel concerning His Son.*”

You see; the Gospel is concerning a person. In 2 Timothy 1: Paul says, “*I know whom I have believed.*” He did not say, “I know when I believed,” though he did. He did not say “I know what I believe,” though he did. What he said, was; “*I know whom I believe.*” Do you see that?

Christ is our Surety, eternal Surety. God calls Him the “*Surety of an everlasting Covenant.*” What is a Surety? A Surety is a guarantor. A Surety signs a note that when you can’t pay it, he does.

Christ is our Righteousness. “*He who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*”

Christ is our Atonement. Atonement means (at-one-ment). “*Christ reconciled us to God.*” Christ is our Mediator. Do you know what the Word says? It says, “*There is one God, one Mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.*” Christ is our King; “*He reigns over us.*” We covet to do His will.

Christ is our Wisdom and Christ is our life. He is not just a motivator, Paul says; “*He’s my hope. Christ in you; that is the hope of glory. When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory.*”

Yes, I have learned that salvation is a Person. Salvation is a living, vital, union with a Person. Christ said, “I’m the head; you are the body.” There can be no closer relationship than a head to a body. Christ said, “*I’m the true vine and you are the branches.*” There can be no closer relationship than the Vine and the branches.

For all that the branches bear, is born because of the life in the vine. I have learned that; salvation is a Person. Don’t be satisfied with just a profession, a doctrine, or an affiliation with a group of religious people. Salvation is to know Christ and to love Christ. Salvation is, “*Christ in you; that is the hope of glory.*”

Fourth: I have learned this, *“God does provide.”* What was it that Abraham said to Isaac? He said, *“God will provide.”* God will provide what? He is talking about God providing a lamb, himself a lamb, and a lamb for himself as a sacrifice for sin.

God provides for the soul. We can't provide for our souls; God does. The Scripture says, *“Of Him are you in Christ Jesus who is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption.”*

Christ is all I need. All that the Law requires, Christ fulfills. All that justice demanded Christ satisfied. All that God almighty requires of us, Christ honored and perfected. So, He will provide for my soul.

He also will provide all that pertains to my body, and listen to me, and all that pertains to His work, His church and His glory. He will provide; *“God will provide.”* Do we believe that? I believe it. I have experienced it.

I can give you a testimony of 60 years; 40 of them were spent preaching the Gospel. God has always provided. We have never had to beg or have gimmicks, tricks or depend on the flesh. God has always provided. We don't have to depend on carnal men and natural men; God provides.

One time, Abraham delivered Lot and his friends from the hands of the wicked kings. Abraham delivered the king of Sodom, Lot and his friends. When he brought back all of the spoil, the wealth, the jewels, gold, silver and these things, the king Sodom said to Abraham; *“Now, you keep these things and just give us the persons.”*

Do you know what Abraham said? He said, *“I have lifted my hand to God; I will take nothing from you lest you say, we made Abraham rich.”* I say this, those who are truly in Christ, God will provide for you. He will provide for your soul and He will provide for your body.

He will provide for those who are truly in the ministry. God will provide for you and you don't have to lean on the arm of flesh. You don't have to embarrass the Gospel by pleading and begging with men to support it. *“God will provide.”*

Don't you find this entire begging offensive? I find it very offensive when preachers get up and they tell how they are going out of business if someone doesn't send them money. It is offensive when they are selling bricks and selling life-time memberships in clubs. They sell Bibles, use gimmicks and tricks to get people to support the Kingdom of God.

I find this very offensive. I find this as a lack of faith. I find it as a demonstration of unbelief. *“God will provide.”* If God does not provide supernaturally, without you leaning on the arm of the flesh, God is not in it. If God does not provide without you depending on the flesh, you depending on men and without your begging, God is not in it.

Why don't you cancel the business? Why don't you get out of the business? *“God will provide.”* Never, on my television program in 13 years did we ever give anything away to get people's names on a mailing list, beg people to send money, or to put on a telethon.

We have never done anything like that in order to get the flesh to support God's Kingdom. "*God will provide.*" It is offensive and it is contrary to the Word of God and God is not in it.

I will tell you something else; I have learned that "*tribulation worketh patience.*" Yes, it does! The grace of faith, humility and patience grows best in the soils of trouble, suffering and trial. David said, "*It is good for me that I have been afflicted that I might learn God's statutes.*"

Patience is born of tribulation!