

LIVING IN THREE DIMENSIONS

August 11, 1957

Scripture: Ephesians 4: 11-15

Over a door leading into the hall for aged people is a memorable motto: "To give life to years, not just years to life." It is possible for man to exist: merely marking off the pages of time, or he can know that superlative quality of true living about which Jesus spoke when He said, "I came that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." Abundant life . . . that's it. And if we are to understand the scope of His kind of life, let us look at it today in three dimensions.

LENGTH OF LIFE

Length of life is the first mentioned. Though many have accomplished much in a short time, the great majority of us need many years in which to accomplish some significant feat. Every person ought to have this dimension—to live out at least the allotted three-score-and-10 years. God has promised man that many, not only this amount, but at least this amount. The average span of life in 1900 was 48 years; in 1956 the average life span increased to 69.8. A considerable increase indeed! Yet recently a Russian scientist contended that there is no good reason why man's length of years should not be extended to 150.

Actually, no one ever dies from old age. To do so would mean that all the parts of one's body would have to wear out at the same time. This never happens. Only one or two vital parts wear out; and since life is no stronger than its weakest link, it must give in to death when one weak link is severed. It is not the length of years that causes death but the amount of wear and tear. To equalize this process would be to add to our first dimension—years.

Yes, length in itself may be a virtue—if each year finds you one year older in God and one year farther from the mirage of things. We should want to live long if this be the object of life. If our inner selves were bared right now, my, what an ugly novel many of them would write! Burdened down by debts, anxieties, distractions, cares, and frustrations, many would sooner be out of this whole drama were

it not for loss of face or young ones to care for. Yet, in silent respectability they keep on coming to church, mouthing the prayers, and singing hymns, but deep inside they have already signed off. They would not dare admit it nor frame word to confess it. This is slow suicide.

DISEASE OF NOTHINGNESS

This day knows more than its quota of people who fit into the category of purposelessness. One said of this day, "We are suffering from the disease of nothingness." What a commentary! The disease of *nothingness!* He meant, of course, that millions never know the thrill of losing their lives in some great cause.

Time is needed—this first dimension—to achieve for God those needy areas of mission endeavor.

Through the teens life is one high hurdle after another, but the twenties solidify the gains a bit. The thirties introduce a choice of life, a vocation. The forties bring a sense of sobriety, and some of the emotional froth is easing away. The fifties bring part of the maturity and solidity so essential and so lacking in the earlier decades. Spacing and slower pace make their advents in the sixties; and if, by the grace of God, one is permitted to enter his seventies and eighties, there should be golden judgment, tolerance, and wisdom to bless life. One actually needs eighty years to round out a fully devoted life. Otherwise, he judges life by what happens in his brief span: a terrible mistake indeed.

CEASELESS CURSE

But one must not be mistaken in his notion that the dimension of length is virtue in itself. Just to live long may be a ceaseless curse. The length of a rope no more determines its tensile strength than the size of a canvas determines the value of a painting. On record is the length of years which Methuselah lived: 969 years. Yet the total recorded history of that interminable time is simply this: ". . . and he lived 969 years and died." Nothing more

Oh, obviously the man did something; but at least we have no record, and he is remembered only for one dimension.

Another man lived 30 years (less than 1/27th the time Methusaleh lived), and of all the books written about that One were piled in one place, it would take acres of warehouses to store them. If all the people whose life He has changed were numbered, such calculations would defy effort. He brought such intense fervor and quality to life that time meant little or nothing to Him. Some people actually live more in a week than others do in a month. It is not position but disposition; not prestige but persistence; not fervor but fervor, not accumulation but outlay.

BREADTH OF LIFE

Still, we need another dimension: breadth. Life needs not only to be long enough but also wide enough. One of the ugliest words in our vocabulary is the word "narrow." When applied to channels, the meaning is self-explanatory; when applied to people, one usually means that a person has shut off all ways of looking at a thing except his own way. God seldom if ever can do anything worthwhile through that kind of person. Anytime one person, one denomination, one nation, one school gets the idea that his is a special revelation at the expense of all others, then life flows by on the other side, isolating such into stagnant pools, and eventually dries them up. Most of the recent wars were fought because nations committed this sin.

Just how broad is your understanding right now? How much breadth in your love and attitude? Two years ago I visited that magnificent edifice in Paris, the Louvre. There, among the accumulated wealth of centuries, one fumbles for modifiers while trying to describe the sculpture, paintings, objects d'art. Pretty soon our party was partially merged with another group among which was a man with no taste for art. He had no dimension for all that business, so to him it was drudgery. While standing before Rembrandt's mas-

terpiece, he was eating a hotdog! That is all the breadth he had . . . the stomach took precedence over the mind and soul! When one fails to bring to life the dimension of breadth, then art is nothing short of old gilt frames, pastime for purposeless souls.

Life needs a breadth in its friendship, in its sympathies, in its love. Said a Cherokee Indian chief, "Never pass judgment on another Indian until you have walked for two months in his moccasins." My, what wisdom—greater than Solomon's!

Let there be a breadth in man's understanding! In this arena dwells our hope of solving the race issue, the poverty issue, the hard knots of international tension, the ugly hypocrisy in church.

DEPTH OF LIFE

Let us make the trio of dimensions complete by adding the third: depth. Just as a builder digs through sand down to solid rock as a foundation for a skyscraper, so must life know depth if it stands the sways of gravitational pull. There isn't a building in Tokyo over five or six stories because the ground is mostly sand. It can't support the heavy weight because of the absence of rocks. Just so with life. To try to build a soul merely by scraping off the grass down to the sand is foolishness. God can't build a human soul until that soul comes from the shallow devotions of the world and yields completely to His hands.

How deep is your devotion to God? I mean this August? Have you placed vacation, weather, and the thousand other excuses ahead of your God and His church? If so, go in repentance to your knees and build that dimension of depth which transcends all these earthly things. God was so deeply in love with you that Jesus went all the way to Golgatha on your behalf, living in three dimensions: length, depth and breadth.