

175 "My times are in thy hand"

In this past week Her Majesty the Queen has reached her ninetieth birthday, and "Long may she reign" has been sung many times over by her grateful subjects. Yet also this week a well-known comedienne, Victoria Wood, died aged "only" 62, and a pop-star named Prince died aged "only" 57. Often these days any death before the age of at least 80 is regarded as being somehow not quite fair.

The Lord has much to tell us about lifespans in His Word. For a start, in Genesis Chapter 5 we are told the ages of the early patriarchs - Adam died aged 930, Seth at 912, and the longest one of all, Methuselah, died aged 969 years. Such lifespans are greeted with hoots of laughter in some quarters these days, on the wholly false presumption that because we do not live that long these days then clearly no-one could have done so in times past. But that is to fall into the old, very common trap of ignoring the Genesis Flood (Genesis Chapters 6-8), with its massive changes to the earth's atmosphere and climate patterns. After the Flood, the ages of Noah and his descendants quickly tailed off (Genesis 11.10-32).

We come across lifespan again in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.12). Here we are told that the giving of honour to parents will directly affect the longevity of the children of Israel in the land that the Lord their God is giving them; and, for that longevity of the people in general to occur, clearly that same principle must apply first and foremost within each individual family.

Nowadays Christians, under the New Covenant of Grace, are no longer concerned with the physical land of Canaan, but the principle of honour to parents still holds good: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and mother (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6.1-3 / (Colossians 3.20), AV). What a difference it would make in our society today if this commandment was dusted off, taught and practised!

Then, in Isaiah 65, we are told of the new heavens and the new earth which God is to create: " - for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed " (from vv 17-20); that is, an age of one hundred years old, be it for a child or a sinner, will be regarded as a life that has hardly started! So here is a picture of the Lord's beautiful restoration of His creation to pre-Flood conditions.

Above all in terms of our lifespans is the whole notion of "eternal life" itself, freely given to all who will accept Jesus Christ as God's Son and their own Saviour (John 3.16, 35 / Romans 6.23 / etc). With our current, limited understanding of this precious gift, it can help to think of it more as an "Is" and a "Now", rather than as a time-line stretching on and on into infinity.

And for now in the midst of life's hurly-burly, we remember that God as the Creator and Lord of Time not only knows all, but also foreknows all; (see for example Job 24.1 / Daniel 2.21 / Luke 21.24 / Acts 17.26 / and others). We are to be aware of "the signs of the times" (eg Matthew 16.3 / Matthew 24 and parallels) without becoming obsessed with them (Acts 1.7). We are to believe Him and trust Him: "I will bless the Lord at all times (Psalm 34.1); "Trust in him at all times" (Psalm 62.8), for - "the Lord will be a refuge in times of trouble" (Psalm 9.9).

For the Lord knows to the minute how long each of us is to live on this earth - be it to age 57, 62, 90 or 969! - and when viewed in Christ and in eternal terms, we can see that the date of our departure hardly matters. He doesn't tell us beforehand when we shall depart, to avoid our becoming distracted from the daily tasks set before us.

Meanwhile in Christ we hold fast with cheerful hearts, for truly - "My times are in thy hand" (Psalm 31.15).

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