

A Story That Is Told

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The Psalmist said, “We spend our days as a tale that is told” (Psalm 90:9). It’s a fitting description of life, isn’t it? We do indeed spend our days as a tale that is told. There are several things about that that I like. Let me explain.

First, let it be noted that life is a spending of time. We spend our days, he says. All of us are born into time. Time is what we’re all about. Time is all we have. Without time we’re nothing. We don’t actually know how much time we have to spend, we just know that we have some. In fact, we only know about the here and now. We can do little about the past—it’s forever gone ; we can resolve for the future. But the here and now is all we have. “Spend” is the operative word here. To spend means “to expend.” In fact, “spend” is taken from the Latin *expendre*, to expend. So we expend our time, however much we have. That being so, it follows that we should do what we’re going to do today, “for the night cometh when no man can work,” when we’ve spent all our time.

Secondly, please note that the expenditure of time is a personal choice. How we spend our time is our choice. We spend it. We can do whatever we want with it. Now there are always some consequences attached to that choice, but the choice is ours nonetheless. For instance, if we want to squander our time, we can make that choice. And conversely, if we want to apply ourselves to some worthwhile project, we can. In fact, worthwhile is comprised of worth and while, worth having to do with value and while having to do with time. A worthwhile project is one worth the spending of the time it takes to do it. Lots of considerations figure into how we spend our time, but in the finality of things, how I spend my time is up to me.

Thirdly, please notice that we spend our time as a tale. A tale is a story that is told. Each of us is writing his own story. That’s not exactly where we get the word history, but the connotation is easy to remember that way. Every man has his story. History is a narrative of events, a chronological (do you see “time” in that?) record of what has happened. It is a story that covers a certain amount of time. It may be the story of a people, a project, or a person, but it is the same in each case; it’s all about how time was spent.

In our own personal lives, we are writing our own history. A man will be judged by the story he has written. I won’t be judged by yours (although your story may have an effect on mine, or mine on yours), but I will be judged on my own story, the one I have written. “We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom. 14:10). And “...everyone of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12). So we need to be careful how we write. We need to see to it that our story is a good one.

Finally, notice that we spend our days as a tale that is told. When the tale is told, it's over. You can't go back and erase part of it or change some line you don't like or blot out some chapter that is offensive or repugnant. (Aren't we grateful that, while we can't erase anything, God can; that's what forgiveness is all about and why it's so important.) When you've written your tale—told your story—it's over. "Be ye therefore steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, inasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58X) is good advice, then, isn't it? To labor to write well just makes good sense.

Now let me extract several statements from this little piece that seem to me to be especially significant in view of the new year that is upon us.

We spend our days.

How we spend our time is our choice.

A man will be judged by that story he has written.

When you've written your tale, told your story, it's over

So we need to be careful how we write.

What will your story be, will your story have a happy ending?