

Shine Like Stars in the Sky

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[0 : 00] Good evening. I've got a great quote for you as we begin. Live not one's life as though one had a thousand years, but live each day as if it were the last.

Live not one's life as though one had a thousand years, but live each day as if it were the last. These words were penned in the second century AD, not long after Jesus' time on earth, by a Roman emperor named Marcus Aurelius.

You might have heard of him. And it's sage advice, right? And enduring advice. I mean, you can tell because even today, pop stars teach it very eloquently in their songs, like Bon Jovi.

It's my life, now or never. I don't want to live forever. I just want to live while I'm alive. It's my life. Same sentiment. Or the Veronicas.

Come on, baby. You know we ain't going to live forever. Let me show you all the things that we could do. I'll stop there. But I think you can see the point.

[1 : 09] Marcus Aurelius' sentiment, live every day as if it's your last, is motivational stuff and it's popular. It makes you want to get out of bed. It makes you want to seize the day.

Carpe diem. It makes you want to suck the marrow out of life, which is a really gross image. It's the stuff of Coca-Cola ads and journal covers and office posters.

And it inspires you to hang out with your friends and look beautiful and see the world and live life to the full. Live every day as if it were your last.

But there is a problem with this saying. And it's this. What happens when life isn't that great and there's nothing you can do about it?

What happens when you've had a really awful day or a really awful week or a really awful year or a really awful decade and there's nothing you can do about it? What if life's actually brought a lot of pain your way?

[2 : 14] What if actually life is not exciting, it's kind of boring? It's full of very uninspiring things like homework or housework.

What if every day you've got to turn up to a job that you don't particularly like but got to pay the bills? How do you live every day in that job as if it were your last?

What if on the weekends all your friends seem to be living like it was their last weekend but you, you're stuck at home looking after a sick brother or sister, sick parent, if you're married, a sick spouse?

What if the way your friends decide to live their weekend doesn't fit with your Christian faith and so they exclude you? What happens when you think at the end of a day, man, if this day was my last then I've been really ripped off?

We've been looking at the life of a man called Daniel and his friends in different sections over the last 18 months from this book in the Old Testament called Daniel and we've come to the end tonight.

[3 : 32] And I have to tell you that I reckon if Daniel had believed those words of Marcus Aurelius he would have felt mightily ripped off.

Firstly, his beloved home, his city of Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed by an enemy nation, Babylon. And he wasn't even one of those that kind of deserved God's punishment.

He was a good guy. Then he got taken off into exile to live in a land where no one spoke his language, where his beliefs weren't respected, where he was basically a slave.

Even in the king's palace where he by God's grace ended up, the decisions that he had to make every day could have cost him his life. He lived with stress and uncertainty.

He would have heard about his friends and family suffering or even heard about people having been killed. And he knew that his enemies in the king's court were out to get him.

[4 : 33] And then, of course, the persecution started. His friends were thrown into a fiery furnace. He was thrown into a den of lions. Yes, God did deliver him in the end.

But you've got to realise that is after a night of staring at these lions in the face, hearing them going, you know, as they do, kind of rumbling right from their stomach.

And these aren't kind of cute cartoon lions as we see in the Sunday school books. They were probably pretty mangy and very hungry and no doubt smelly and sharpening their teeth on whatever bones were lying around from their last meal.

If Daniel had thought that day was his last, if it was lion's dinner for him and then nothing, total non-existence, then he would have felt really ripped off.

And then, it kind of gets worse for Daniel because he can't even rest assured that even though it's bad for him, it'll get better for the succeeding generations of Israelites.

[5 : 45] He gets given the job by God of receiving revelations about the future, hundreds and hundreds of years in the future. And what he hears is bad news.

If the people of God in those centuries are going to try and live each day as if it were their last, they're going to get pretty sad pretty quickly. They're going to be caught between warring nations, empire after empire will arise and oppress them.

They'll be tempted and tested to give up the ways of their faith. And finally, a leader named Antiochus Epiphanes in the second century will take their land, take their temple, and do everything that he can do to profane their sacred space.

The worst and most offensive things he can think of. An altar to Zeus, making them sacrifice pigs.

The worst things he can think of he will make them do.

He will kill circumcised Jewish children and hang them around the necks of their mothers and then kill the mothers. That is what we read in the apocryphal book of Maccabees.

[7 : 06] That's what he did. Things weren't getting better, weren't going to get better for the generations of the people of God to come after Daniel. And so, it would be easy for them in that day and easy for Daniel looking down the barrel of that future to think, man, if this is what the last day of my life is going to look like, if this is it, why bother?

And we learn particularly from the book of Maccabees but also in the visions that Daniel was given that some of the people of God, some Jewish people did decide, why bother?

They thought, well, if this is all there is, if I've got to live every day as if it were my last, I'm not going to make it one filled with pain. I will acquiesce.

I will do what Antiochus is asking me to do. I will live like a pagan Greek and I will sell out my brothers and sisters because if this day is my last, well, I'm going to enjoy it.

But Daniel doesn't do that. He doesn't turn away. He isn't paralyzed with sadness. He doesn't get angry at the world or angry at God.

[8 : 23] He doesn't turn to pleasure or sin, idolatry, apathy, money, relationships. He doesn't make sure that his days are exciting and fulfilling.

He doesn't give up. And the reason is because Daniel knows that each day is not his last.

And this is what this final revelation in chapter 12 confirms for him in new and greater depth. Each day, no matter how good or how bad, will not be his last.

Despite appearances, God has far more for his people. Daniel chapter 12 verse 1 says this, At that time, Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise.

There shall be a time of anguish such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. Now, this verse just continues the prophecy that we've had in chapter 11.

[9 : 32] And it's concerning, not only, as we learnt last week, but I know a lot of you weren't able to be here last week, concerns not only the Jewish people in the second century, but also it starts to look forward to the time of the end, the time when just before Jesus is going to return, there will be the Antichrist.

And so, not only does chapter 11 describe a bit about the king, Antiochus Epiphanes, but also there starts to be an overlap and then a telescoping out to the one that will come at the end and all those who come in the future who stand against God and against his Messiah Christ.

And an angel has been giving this vision to Daniel and he's been speaking about how behind all this history there is a supernatural reality.

And so here when we have the reference to Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, this is the angel who is warring for the Israelites in the heavenly realms.

He is fighting for them. Not only is there anguish on earth, there is angelic anguish if you like. They are fighting to protect the people of God.

[10:49] There will be even greater anguish, Daniel is now told, a distress that the world has never seen the likes of before. Many people will die.

They will face their metaphorical fiery furnaces and lions' dens and they will not be spared. Daniel and his mates are the aberration in this time.

They will not be spared. Many will die. And it will seem like it is the end of the people of God that they are abandoned. But then the angel says, deliverance will come.

And yes, even for the people who have died, deliverance will come. He goes on, but at that time, your people shall be delivered.

Everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

[12:00] This is a very significant passage in the Old Testament. See, God often reveals his big ideas to his people bit by bit so that they can grasp them and so that when they get them fully, they get them right.

And he's done this with the hope of life after death, particularly through the Old Testament. It's very clear in the New Testament. But in the Old Testament, at times it's a little bit fuzzy what exactly they're hoping for.

They know, the psalmists, you read it, they know that there is a hope. They know that there is more than just the grave. But they're not exactly sure what that's going to look like.

And then in Job he says, I know I will see, after I've died, I will see God in my flesh. He has a hope of a resurrection.

But here, here, and now we have absolutely clearly the reason why Marcus Aurelius' philosophy will never work, here we have the truth stated, your last day won't be your last day.

[13:14] Your last day won't be the last day no matter who you are. Death is not the end. There is, there will be a resurrection and it will be for everyone.

All people who have ever lived will be resurrected to face God alive, conscious and very much aware of their standing before him.

I wonder if you've ever given that much thought. We often talk about the promise of eternal life for those who trust in Christ. Kind of like the future is only relevant for Christians.

It's a great future and it's a wonderful promise, but sometimes we think, oh well, the others, they just, I don't know, peter out or kind of, you know, they just, I don't know, disappear.

We don't think about it. But the Bible says much more than that. It says that everyone, every single person who has ever lived will rise again after death to face God, everyone.

[14:29] In Daniel chapter 12 verse 2, it uses the word many and that could make you think, oh, this is not talking about everyone. But Daniel uses that word many because he's looking at a bunch of Israelites, many of them, and he's also thinking about the kind of quantity.

He's thinking about there's lots and lots. It's not just going to be a select few. This is a big multitude that he is thinking of. And then, of course, when we get to the New Testament, it spells out that this is for everyone even more clearly.

So the Apostle Paul says in Acts chapter 24, when he's before Felix, I have a hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.

That means everyone. There isn't anyone who doesn't fit into one of those categories. Jesus, in John's Gospel, in chapter 5, says, do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear the voice of the Son of Man, Jesus, and will come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

salvation. Yes, Christians will be resurrected to meet Jesus, but so will everyone else. The question is not whether you will meet him, but will you meet him as judge, or will you meet him as saviour?

[16:12] Will you receive his right and just condemnation for your sin, for your life that has displeased a holy God, or will you receive his gift of unearned forgiveness and true eternal life?

Now, for Marcus Aurelius, or for the Veronicas, or for Bon Jovi, at least in their songs, this means bad news. For all the jokes that we have that started, you know, St. Peter's at the pearly gates and I arrive, and, you know, actually, the truth is that that is going to be a terrifying place, to be fully conscious of the reality of a holy God, and to be standing there only on your own merits, because

you've lived only for yourself, as today is your day, the last day, with every action, thought, feeling, that you've ever had fully known.

That's a terrifying place to be, it's not a funny place to be. You ever had one of those dreams where you go to school or work, or in my case, church, naked?

Well, that's kind of funny, but that's actually nothing compared to the feeling of shame that will overwhelm those who face God without their name in the book of life on the last day.

And nothing compared to the feeling of fear when you're faced with the reality of eternal separation from God, condemnation, punishment, being without God and all that is good for all eternity.

[18:18] But there is wonderful news. In John's Gospel, chapter 11, Jesus calls himself two things. He says, I am the resurrection, yep, everyone will be raised and they'll meet me, but I am also the life.

You don't have to experience the resurrection day as a place of fear and shame. It can be a place of life. If you believe in Jesus and trust in his saving death on your behalf, then you can know right now that your name is in the book, the book of life mentioned in chapter 7, in Daniel, in Revelation, that place where the names of all those who have been made right with God through Christ are written.

And you can know that now. You can know that there's everlasting life for you in heaven. And this is great news because everlasting life is not just life like we know it now.

It's not just a continuation of this. I mean, most people would say, oh, no thanks. no, I'm not interested. And it's not just angels playing harps and eating light Philadelphia cream cheese or something.

It's not that. I think of it like, you know, when you're really, really, really hungry, that happens to me all the time, but when you're really, really, really hungry and then you get to sit down and eat your most favourite dinner, that feeling of, oh, just satisfaction.

[19:55] or when you're really, really tired and you finally get to kind of, you know, close the curtains in your room and lie down under your really soft doona and you're just like, oh, that is what heaven is going to be like.

That is what everlasting life is going to be like, the fulfilment of every single part of our being. That, oh, satisfaction.

That, oh, yes, I can rest. This is what I was created for. I now have a relationship, a true relationship with my father creator.

I can now worship him without any flaws, without any failings. There's no distraction, no sin in my relationship with God.

The only crying I'm ever going to do again is the weeping with joy and gratitude that I will do when I see the true weight of the sin that Jesus took from me.

[21:05] When I see the true cost of my name being written in the book of life. Paul says we will be raised imperishable in glory and in power.

And doesn't that sound very much like verse 3 in Daniel chapter 12. We will be shining like stars in the sky, shining in the glory of God, with the glory of God, made like Jesus.

those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. Marcus Aurelius thought he was so wise that all these pithy little sayings that he made up he decided to write down and you can get them in a book.

I guess he wanted to be able to read them anytime he liked and maybe give out free signed copies to his mates. They're called the meditations. You can get them from any library. But now in this verse, in verse 3, and actually throughout the book of Daniel, God tells us that true wisdom is not in pithy sayings, it's not even in being a great strategic general.

It consists in one thing, knowing God. The book of Proverbs says it like this, the fear of the Lord, reverential knowing of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

[22:49] You might sometimes think you're not the sharpest tool in the shed, you might not feel like you're top of the class, but if you know God and know that he is in control and know that there is a life to come after this one and you can share it with Jesus Christ if you put your faith in him, you are wise.

You are the wisest of the wise. People can make us feel pretty silly sometimes for believing in Jesus and more than that for believing in life after death, which we haven't got kind of tangible evidence that we can show each other.

But if you're wise, if you know God, you can have courage to push through that. And in fact, as verse 3 says, the wise will have so much courage to push through that, they will lead many to righteousness.

They will be able to share their knowledge of God, their knowledge of his grace and goodness with others so that they might come to know him too. Now, the rest of the passage is kind of a very natural question.

It's quite strange, but it's a very natural question even though it's between angels on the banks of a river and a guy in linen and strange numbers.

[24 : 26] It's actually a very natural question for us. That's what it boils down to. When? When's this going to happen? I'm very pleased, God, that there will be a resurrection.

I'm looking forward to it in hope. But when? The angels ask each other that and Daniel wants to know too. But the answer that he has given is not an answer to that question when.

Does tell them one thing in the end of verse 7. It says it will be when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end.

God's deliverance is always when human resources have run out. Isn't that the case in our lives? When we finally realise that we can do no more of ourselves, we see God's hand, we see his deliverance.

and that's what it will be like at the end of time when Jesus returns, we will think we can do no more, but he will not let us down.

[25 : 42] He will not let us fall. He has angels warring for us in the heavenly realms. And so the angels tell Daniel these times, so he says a time, two times and half a times, probably three and a half years and then these numbers of days.

But for Daniel, it doesn't mean much. And he can't understand why they would say three and a half years, he can't understand why there are some strange numbers. And actually, him being mystified and us being mystified is because those numbers are symbolic.

We can't match those up to any particular time in history. we can try. But as we've seen throughout the book of Daniel and in the book of Revelation, these numbers are to say what?

They're to say that God knows the time. He's written it in his diary. It's not in pencil, it's in pen. It is going to happen.

Your deliverance will happen. These numbers show you that three and a half, half of seven, it's not the full end time there.

[27 : 00] And then these other numbers, perhaps the time between Antiochus and maybe when he would be ended, or we're thinking a time between then and the desolation of the temple again in AD 70, or a symbol of the time between Jesus' coming and his coming again.

But we know from these that there is a message to Daniel. He says, go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end.

And that's not to mean people can't read them. Sealed means no one's to add to these. This is the completion of the revelation to you, and they will make a lot of sense at the end of time.

Things will go on as they've always done. None of the wicked shall understand. They'll continue to act wickedly. But it's not the time period that counts, but your theological perspective.

The wise shall understand. They shall have a world view. They shall have knowledge that it will all come to an end, and that there is a resurrection for the righteous and the unrighteous.

[28 : 21] and it is that that will get them through. Some of you might know that over the last couple of years, I've been having a bit of trouble in my family.

My parents divorced last year, and you don't expect that to happen when you're almost 30. You don't expect it to happen any time.

And some of you may have experienced that yourselves, and you know that it's just awful. You're caught in between, you know, just everything, a complete shattering of what you thought that your life was about.

And in the midst of that, I also discovered that I'm kind of not superwoman, and I can't do everything that I want to do, and my body has its limits, and so does my brain.

And I tell you what, there could have been times, and there probably were, if I'm honest, when I said to God, God, this is not what I signed up for.

[29 : 26] This is not what I signed up for. If this is my last day, I'm being ripped off. But you know what has got me through, and what continues, just grows in me every day?

is that God has a resurrection for me. God has a resurrection for everyone, and I want them to live with God forever.

And St. Paul says these words, which are better than I could say them. So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure. Because we look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen.

For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. God has a resurrection. There will be a resurrection to everlasting life for those whose name is written in the book of life because of their trust in Jesus, because of his work on their behalf.

[30 : 53] And that is what makes me say, okay, God, I keep serving you, I keep loving you. He knows this is not my last day.

And I got to preach on 1 Corinthians 15 last year, maybe the year before, and Paul summarizes what the hope of the resurrection does for us in these words.

He says, therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

Friends, whatever you are going through, whatever you will go through, your labour in the Lord is not in vain because this is not your last day.

This is not your last day. The Lord Jesus has an eternity of days for you with him. So don't live each day as if it could be your last.

[32 : 09] Live each day as if it were the start of your eternity with Jesus. Live each day as if it were the time for you to make him your Lord.

Live each day in the hope of eternal life. Knowing that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Amen.