

***For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. (Psa 90:9)***

I am going to address a topic today that has been weighing on me for some time, as I've spent a lot of time personally considering the following verse and the context that surrounds it, trying to come to a firm and actionable answer to the question it poses

*“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2Pe 3:11)*

I think an astute listener would agree with me that over *at least* the last 1-2 years, the ideas, admonitions, exhortations and encouragements expressed in the context of this verse have been increasingly and with a greater urgency discussed from this pulpit. I know they have increasingly taken up a larger portion of the conversations I have in my home and with many of you individually.

What manner of persons we ought to be is a weighty topic, with many facets, elements, behaviors, frames of mind and characteristics that many different passages of Scripture help us to bring to bear and understand. It is not a topic we are born understanding, so it requires work, and it is a topic that changes in importance and perspective as we grow more mature in the faith and gain greater experience. It seems it must grow more urgent and pressing as we understand the nearness of our King's return.

And this is where some of the weight of the topic comes in. I feel as if there have been many words said from this pulpit that provide real help to answer the question that perhaps have not been received. I come to this conclusion through discussions I have had with individuals and discussions I have had with other elders, and through my own observations of behavior. I do not come to this discussion with any form of accusation, nor do I exclude myself and my own household from examination under it. My worst fear is that someone would see my words today as a self-righteous soap box I am on rather than a pleading for all of us to see the necessary attention we must pay toward this question.

There is a tendency – one that I myself fall into and have to regulate against – to hear words from the pulpit and deflect them. There are many reasons for this – the presentation is taxing on your attention due to outside difficulties or just in the moment it is boring; perhaps you find the delivery obnoxious and annoying and lose the battle against the flesh letting attentions wander; maybe the delivery is too obtuse in its approach to seem applicable in a specific and personal way; you might be actively rejecting the application to yourself out of pride or denial; perhaps you see the thing warned against in others but cannot see it in yourself (which ultimately is pride but distinct in that it may not be an intentional rejection of the message); you may be in the throes of some sin that makes hearing a word of exhortation impossible in that

moment; perhaps the connections were just confusing or the delivery may have sought to be so inoffensive to any one person that it missed its mark by being too general, etc,

There are a *multitude* of reasons why a message may not be received. My concern in this moment is that, based on observation and conversation, there is at least a segment of our body that is not hearing and seeing a need to act on the admonition Peter lays out. And be clear, when Peter says “what manner of persons ought ye to be” he isn’t just encouraging you to answer that question in some philosophical way – the clear exhortation is to then change your behaviors to align to the manner of person you ought to be. This isn’t academic or theoretical.

I am encouraging you to take a moment to clear your minds of worries and fears brought on by our lives outside this sanctuary. Shut out the taxing nature of raising our children, grandchildren, our jobs, our financial worries, the fears of men that impede on our tranquility and peace in Christ, our sins and the lusts of our flesh that war against our souls. Take refuge here mentally and spiritually – right now, in this very minute, see yourself as being in a refuge from the fiery darts our adversary fires against us and take solace in the fact that here, in this place at this hour, our Captain meets with us, and therein is safety; a safety that allows us to truly rest, to consider and remember our Sabbath. Consider and come to a place in your own mind and heart that definitively, without doubt, without exception, without uncertainty, without concern allows you to focus on Christ – as an exercise of your faith – right now in this moment.

If you cannot feel that safety and gain that focus in honor of the King, then what does this verse **possibly** mean to you

*“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, **there am I in the midst of them.**” (Mat 18:20)*

My dearest of friends, if this verse does not apply to us **right here, right now, then why are we sitting here?** We should be out finding that place where He is so we can attend to and worship Him there. If this verse does not mean that we must, in this hour specifically set aside all that assails us outside these walls to put 100% of our attention and focus to the words put before us for our consideration, learning, admonition, exhortation, peace, tranquility, comfort and hope, then what does our worship mean?

SO I ask you, implore you to do this work. Clear your minds. Close your eyes if it helps and take a few deep breaths so that we can continue in this day’s honoring of our King as willing vessels, ready to receive and hear the word the Holy Ghost leads us into and thereby be prepared to go forth with a new mindset ready to embrace new actions.

To start that effort, I wish to take the Lord’s Supper. I personally like taking the Lord’s Supper toward the beginning of a session because it helps to center and ground me in my purpose for being here. I hope it serves that purpose for you as well today. I’ll pause for a moment to let you settle your minds.

Now to come to the core of my discussion, I want to point your memory to one of Brother Sam's recent sermons where he had some "off-transcript" remarks, specifically his mention of "midgets standing on the shoulders of giants"; he was referencing that tendency common to all generations to stand on the work of their forebears and let it warp their perspective. Since he made those comments, I have had conversations that make me feel that perhaps the message being expressed was not received and I want to drill into at least one aspect of it with some particular pointedness.

Today's message is about our need to hear the Scripture and each of us individually, with full intent and clarity judging ourselves against its plumb line, working to make necessary adjustments to align with that clear, straight measurement. It is about examining how each one of us from the most to the least experienced can examine ourselves and improve. We don't sit here weekly as a checkbox task. We should all be doing it with an eye to constant change, seeking to please our King.

I will focus my commentary around two verses that connect directly together like interlocking bricks. Their messages are part and parcel of the same sentiment, and should be considered together:

*"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."* (Ecc 9:10)

*"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;"* (Col 3:23)

I believe this may be the most important foundational thing we can meditate on as we consider and frame up what manner of persons we ought to be. I feel at this moment that these verses are too frequently treated as platitudes and not directives.

I want you to consider the fuller context of Solomon's words for a minute, as I think it adds considerable and necessary weight to his already significant admonition:

*"Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."* (Ecc 9:7-10)

See that Solomon is speaking to those who walk in hope of salvation, for what need does the worldling have of his encouragement to eat their bread with joy? It takes less than 2 minutes in any social setting to see how worldlings abuse the things God has given to bring themselves joy (albeit perhaps forced or fake). Here, Solomon reminds

us that there is no need to take the things God has supplied us and feel bad that they have been provided, but to rather enjoy them with humility and moderation. Enjoying whatever prosperity God has provided in your time is not a sin.

We are to walk through this life with always white garments – not the robes of righteousness we will have put upon us to cover our nakedness before God – this is a different use of the idea of white garments. The concept here is that we do not go about with an appearance of mourning over our circumstance as pilgrims. We should not let the dust of the road coat us. We should be presentable to the world as the ever joyful, sober servants of the Living and Most High God, His messengers and Ambassadors who represent the court of this King of Eternity. We must present ourselves as such. Not ostentatiously with the vain gaudiness of the flesh, but the simple white garments of our station, with a sober but not downcast countenance befitting our office.

Solomon points to the ultimate height of joy that should be found in men – their wives – as a way to include all lesser joys that can be had in life. Our wives are a fulfilling counterpart, that “help meet” that is provided by God to help us overcome adversity and blesses us with constant companionship. Companionship that has been crafted by God’s hand to perfectly complete a man (and vice versa). What kind of person couldn’t take complete joy in that? A right-minded person is going to see and take joy especially in the representation of Christ and His church that is present in those which God has put together. And again, included is all “lesser” provisions that should and do give us cause to rejoice and be joyful in our vain, short lives.

But all these joys are fleeting – even in this lovely language Solomon returns to the reminder that it is **vanity**. These things last only as long as the days of our lives, and all flesh is but grass and full of vanity. We cannot fail to keep that in perspective as we fully and completely enjoy what the Lord our God has provided us. These things are not to be worshipped; they are not to be valued above He who has given them or seen as more necessary than the pilgrimage and its duties. They are not to replace in our hearts the glory of God that we seek to witness with our own eyes from before His eternal throne. Take joy in these things, but never create idols.

If it is all vanity, what’s the point in expressing this joy? That is answered rather eloquently in the verses preceding our context

*“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.” (Ecc 9:5-6)*

There is no joy, nor receipt of any of these good things in the grave. It is all gone. Therefore, it behooves us, **for the glory of God** to take joy in and put our hand to any

and all things that we can find, because in the grave there is no ability to gain these good things God has provided for us in life. In death, there is no wisdom to be gained in their use, no ability to glorify God in partaking of them sensibly. After we pass through that veil there is nothing more we can do with these fleshly, mortal provisions God has made for the living. So while you draw breath, put your hand to the oar and for the glory of God joyfully go in the way thanking him with every breath for that which He has provided you, working and serving Him.

Life is short, so get about the business of glorifying God with everything you do.

I must say that I have struggled mightily with how to say these words so that it is clear and drives people to consider their personal position and situation and do something about it to improve it in the eyes of the Lord. I have considered what would be most helpful and prayed on this for some weeks, and all I can say is I believe plainness of speech is warranted, so I endeavor to speak plainly.

There is a noticeable gap between the generations on the “finding” and the “doing with might” that needs to be addressed. I am speaking generally here of “generations” because there isn’t a delineating line I think I can make clear and obvious around the “spiritually mature” and “spiritually less mature”. The gap that exists is largely – though let me stress this as hard as I can – **not entirely** – between those over and under roughly 40 years of age.

I have to stress this – I am trying to be pointed here and cause you via moral suasion to consider the words, consider the duty, consider the time. There are some under 40 in whom the gap is not as apparent. There are those over 40 where the gap is unfortunately glaringly apparent. By and large, however, the differentiation is generational. There is work done by older generations at a maddening pace, serving the Lord and this body that is simply not equaled in the younger, and I believe it is observationally, objectively so.

This is a problem. It is not a problem because I worry about succession. It is not a problem because it is a personal thing to me and I think of anyone as lazy or uncaring about this issue – far from it. It is a problem because if we are not **all** striving, and some of us are coasting, perhaps even many of us are coasting, we risk the candlestick. If the Lord tarries and these elders all pass away, there’s nothing more we can do for you. So we try to help you see this now, while we can.

That may seem extreme, and you might feel it accusatory; I am not trying to declare a crisis footing here, nor am I calling out names. But I have said many times and say here again today, I do not believe the church at Corinth, or Ephesus or Antioch saw their end in the days when Paul was preaching to them. They did not heed the warnings and have thus fallen by the wayside. I do not wish that for this body. I have an affirmative duty to exhort to a standard-aligning way of life and approach. There

have been a multitude of words maybe too gently encouraging more diligence, more finding and doing. So, I am trying to be gentle but maybe with a pointier stick.

I believe Peter expresses my “why” exceptionally well

*“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.” (2Pe 1:12-15)*

Be clear, I’m trying to stir you up. I tell you plainly though I wish not to offend, I do not care in this moment if I make you uncomfortable. I will not be negligent in putting you always to remembrance that we each have this duty to find things for our hands to do, to do those things with all our might, and to do them unto the Lord, our King.

The key word from Solomon is **“findeth”**. As opposed to, “falleth into thine lap” or “is commanded of thee”. The word is well translated here. This is an intentional action that is taken toward an end, not just a random finding. These verses might cement the idea

*“But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living.” (Job 28:12-13)*

Everyone knows that wisdom and knowledge are not achieved by osmosis. They are achieved by unearthing them, finding them with great effort and diligence, study, work and repetition.

*“If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much;” (Job 31:25)*

The word is translated “gotten” here. True wealth is earned, not inherited. It is gotten through the sweat of the brow and work of the hands. It takes studiousness, strength of will to pursue it, and a desire to produce something that is valuable enough people will pay for it lots of times to generate wealth.

We are all responsible to find that thing or things in service to this body and therefore our Lord that improve the situation. That means, while we are being good husbands and fathers, mothers and wives, obedient children, studious older single people, and serving the ministry to the world, we are finding what to put our hand to that **serves others and the greater good of the body.**

Being diligent in our households is required. Yes. You must put your hand to that, absolutely. Being diligent in attending to the work of the public ministry is mandatory for a New Testament Church and its members. Without question. But I submit to you this is not what Solomon is addressing. Those bare minimums are assumed in the context.

There are many things this work you find can be. Probably an infinite number of things. It can be directly related to the public ministry, it can be related to the daily care and feeding of the saints. I am not trying to tell any one person they should be doing some specific thing – **that is for you to find**. I am not asking you to necessarily find some new and unique thing to do. I am asking each of you to sincerely ask yourself “what **have** I found” and if you cannot legitimately answer at least “something”, consider diligently what your hands are **capable** of doing, and get to finding use for them. If you believe you can with honesty, say to the Lord “I have found this thing and I do it” then the next right question to ask yourself is “am I rightly doing it, and can I find another?”

Which leads to “do”. The word means exactly what it seems to. It isn’t more complicated than what you think it means. Don’t sit on the thing you’ve found, go do what it takes to own it, and put everything you have into it – your might. The word might means “capacity” – if you have little real capacity, that’s okay, because it’s still capacity. Put your hand to it at that level. I believe that, simply put, if you aren’t going to **DO** something, then you are not the manner of person fit for the kingdom.

**“Strive** to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.” (Luk 13:24)

This doing isn’t the “chore list from the elders or old people”. It encompasses individual intent, accountability, thoughtfulness and follow through. If you say you’re going to do a thing, don’t slack off, don’t make people think you’re going to take care of it and then leave it hanging. Do it as if the Lord were right in front of you observing what you are doing, **because He is**.

There are three objections I’ve personally heard to this exhortation to address. If there are others I’m happy to talk to you about them.

### **Objection 1: The older people won’t allow me to do what I found to do.**

I readily admit that this can be a problem. There are times I have been guilty of this and we can do better. I have talked to some of you about this very concern, and I submit to you the following points for careful consideration, because your perception here does not absolve you of responsibility:

- Are you finding something or trying to take something? I don’t mean out of selfishness but consider the situation objectively. Are you going to a person who has found a thing and with their energy studiously attends to it and presented

yourself as their replacement? Have you considered the perception of that? Are you walking up to a person who is sacrificing their oil as a free-will offering and *actually asking them* to give that hin of oil to you? What then will that leave them to offer? I submit to you that taking someone else's "find" does not equal a "find" for you.

- Have you considered that your hands perhaps are not actually capable of handling the task without learning its intricacies, and have you asked to learn from them, or considered they know you're not yet capable?
- Have you demonstrated by other means, your ability, willingness and dedication to own and attend to this thing you think should be "handed over" with the same level of diligence the person has applied to it so that they are not left in despair that the thing needing done is not properly cared for?
- Have you considered that you have neither the experience nor the understanding of the thing to do more than "apprentice" to the task, and that this **absolutely can be** finding what your hand can do? In other words, it is not required of you to fully own a task (some tasks are very large and have many sub-tasks) or to invent a new thing to be properly serving the Lord. Becoming an integral part of some larger operational element can be more important sometimes than "finding" something new. Consider Joshua and Moses.

### **Objection 2: I cannot find anything, this is a well oiled machine.**

I see how a person could reach this conclusion. If you're a midget on the shoulders of the giant, the perspective easily gets off. And this objection is about perspective.

Please understand – I am not indicting anyone as being lazy or uncaring of these matters. Your lot is different than mine or the generation before me. But there are things that happen, processes that appear automatic, that are owned by people who with great diligence see to them in service to the body and our King. These things shift and morph as the needs dictate, and these people shift and morph with them, typically pouring more energy into what their hand has found to do than they were days or weeks before. And they do it without you necessarily knowing about it because of your perspective and their willingness to simply serve Christ, not making it about them.

Ultimately, from a spiritually immature and maybe only partially engaged perspective you don't see the whole picture. Your "finding" skills need honing and so does your level of engagement to be able to see. Consider these points:

- You see a well-oiled machine because people are **constantly** oiling it, at a great price to themselves which you don't have perspective to see but you are taking the output of that machine to your benefit – which is fine, the output is part of the point of the work. However, if you will not engage to gain a complete perspective, it shows a potential unwillingness to get your hands dirty or do what you see as



“menial” tasks on your way to learning how to oil the machine yourself. Which means you cannot be trusted to execute (see Objection 1).

- Saying this is a well-oiled machine shows that you clearly understand that the machine NEEDS oiling. So, ask yourself honestly -- are you a taker, consumed with self, or a giver, concerned with others who is going to get dirty with some work? Are you truly interested in applying oil to the well-oiled machine, being part of the workflow to keep it running as it were, or are you simply interested in receiving the outputs and looking interested? That view drives behavior. None of us should be solely takers. Only you can **really** know the answer to these questions, but it becomes obvious over time to others based on your fruits which you are – even if you aren’t honest with yourself and God.

The truth is the midget doesn't need to stand on the shoulders of a giant to get to a warped perspective -- they can just be standing on the shoulders of another midget. This is what happens when the spiritually immature take counsel together against the idea that they need to be finding things for their hands to do (or do them with their actual might) and swallowing their pride to learn how. Or worse they conclude that they’re “doing enough”. Friends, I don’t do enough. There is no “enough”. Our King is worthy of all our time being spent 100% on Him.

If you’re not finding anything to put your hand to, I’m suggesting that you aren’t looking hard enough and you’re taking your position and all the benefits the Lord provides by the sweat of others for granted. Please stop that.

### **Objection 3: I am simply too busy with my house to put energy into anything else.**

This is an objection that is easy to empathize with, especially for those who are early in the days of their house, when children consume literally every ounce of energy you have, and there is always more laundry, and the grass won’t stop growing and there’s another thing to repair and then more preaching is added to the schedule and there’s a crisis at work, and this and that and another thing.

I can fully and completely empathize with this feeling. This feeling is a fleshly failure that has to be overcome. Not every minute of every day can be put toward the service your hand finds to do, that may be true. The Lord who gave you hands that are capable of this thing you’ve found to do also gave you the children and the job and the other million things to address. But the needs of the one don’t cancel out the other.

There are many examples around you of people who fought that fleshly war in their youth, and who continue to fight it every day who you can engage with for inspiration and practical counsel on how to do it. These are not giants in their own

minds, but they did come before you and build an incredible amount of infrastructure that supports you today. Consider these points

- The giants that built the things you benefit from today built them not only in the shadow of new and growing families and all the responsibilities those bring, but in the crucible of crushing persecution that for years involved literally taking their lives into their hands to go onto the streets of this nation and hours every day doing battle in the courts, with law enforcement, governments, businesses, schools and every enemy Satan could throw at them. Every single day. For hours. And they still got your socks clean and mac and cheese made.
- The same God that demands of you to **find** that thing to put your hand to can and will provide you the energy to **do** that thing to **serve** Him. Consider in this context these words of Caleb:

*“As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.”* (Jos 14:11)

And the words of Christ

*“Give us this day our daily bread.”* (Mat 6:11)

Our daily bread strengthens both body and spirit so we may do this work of the Lord to its fullest, in all its facets. How are you applying the strength from the daily bread He provides?

- Genuinely examine what of your time is being given to hobbies and leisure activities, to all interests outside service to God and ask whether you can honestly say you give back to the Lord an equitable share of time. Are you **finding** and **doing** things that glorify God or that satisfy your sense of “deserving relaxation”. Looking busy but being a hamster in a wheel going nowhere isn’t what I’m suggesting. Consider and examine your situation for yourself and come to peace with God on it, and seek His help to serve Him more and more completely as the day draws nigh.

What manner of persons ought we to be, seeing this world around us is hurtling toward its end? The day is coming when it will be too late to have fully considered this question and adjust your way of life to a positive end. The sands in the top of the hourglass are far fewer than those in the bottom, beloved. Consider this question now, while there is still **time**.